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CAPITAL CITY FORWARD

the bridge

Homelessness

November 4–17, 2026

Montpelier's Unhoused Receive a Round of Notices to Move

By Tracy Brannstrom

MONTPELIER — Complaints from residents and property owners prompted Montpelier officials to order at least seven camps on public land cleared last month, citing violations of the city's encampment policy. Those involved in addressing homelessness locally described the orders as part of a larger cycle of displacement, with people repeatedly told to move but left with few alternatives.

City staff members had left multiple notices at campsites beginning Oct. 1, alerting campers they would need to relocate, followed by a final notice

see **Encampments,** *page 11*

Election Results

Results from Election Day, Nov. 3, have been published on The Bridge's website, **thebridgevt.org.** Because of restrictions to our print schedule beyond our control, we were unable to provide coverage of Election Day in print for this issue.

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What a Treat

Cassandra Estrada, door person at Charlie-O's, hands out candy to a tiny Winnie-the-Pooh on Halloween. Trick-or-treaters crowded State and Main streets in Montpelier on All Hallow's Eve, accepting treats from shop owners and others, while part of State Street was closed to vehicle traffic to make way for dinosaurs, zombies, and bears. Photo by Cassandra Hemenway.

Vermont's 2025 Per Capita Homelessness Rate Third Highest In The Nation, Feds Say

Number of Homeless Up 227% Since 2007

By Phil Dodd

Every January, community organizations around the country conduct a "point-in-time" survey of the number of unhoused people in the region. The most recent data available, from 2025, ranked Vermont the third highest state in the nation on a per capita basis, according to the federal Housing and Urban Development's 2025 Annual Report to Congress on homelessness.

Vermont had 52 homeless people per 10,000 population, according to the report. New York topped the list with 73 unhoused per 10,000 population, with Oregon second at 64. The two other northern New England states — Maine and New Hampshire — both reported 17 per 10,000, substantially lower than Vermont.

In addition, Vermont leads the nation in the increase in the number of homeless from 2007 to 2025, with a 227.1% surge. New York was second at 132.5%. Meanwhile, 24 states have seen the number of those experiencing homelessness decline since 2007, according to the HUD report.

If the counts are accurate, they raise the question of why the homeless count is so high in cold-weather Vermont, and why the number of unhoused people has risen so much in the past two decades.

"Isn't that the million-dollar question?" asked Jay Voorhees, pastor at the Trinity Methodist Church in Montpelier, which, through the nonprofit ecumenical Community Table, serves free breakfasts and

see **Third Highest,** *page 12*

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

News

Community News in Brief

Montpelier Man Charged After Allegedly Abandoning Baby in Stroller

MONTPELIER — A 29-year-old Montpelier man is facing multiple felony and misdemeanor charges after allegedly abandoning an infant in a stroller downtown and threatening police officers with a knife, according to a Nov. 3 Montpelier Police Department press release.

Police received multiple calls around 5 p.m. Nov. 2 about an apparently intoxicated man pushing a baby in a stroller near Main and State streets; before officers arrived, the man allegedly abandoned the infant and fled with a knife, leaving witnesses to bring the child to the police station.

Officers later located the man on Barre Street, identified him as Seth Hepburn, 29, of Montpelier, and took him into custody. During the booking process, he allegedly produced a concealed fixed-blade knife and threatened officers at close range. Police said they used de-escalation techniques and no one was injured.

Hepburn faces three counts of felony aggravated assault, one count of felony abandonment or exposure of a baby, misdemeanor reckless endangerment, and misdemeanor cruelty to a child.

A judge ordered him held on $1,000 bail with conditions of release, and he was transported to the Northeast Regional Correctional Facility in St. Johnsbury pending arraignment Nov. 3 in Washington County Superior Court.

—Tracy Brannstrom

Charges Dropped in Underage Drinking Case

EAST MONTPELIER — Sophie Bowater, 55, recently called The Bridge to say charges brought against her on Aug. 9 for "enabling minors to drink alcohol" were dropped at her arraignment Sept. 10. Bowater said the Vermont State Police contacted her after midnight on Aug. 9, and told her to go get her son from an underage drinking party in East Montpelier.

She said she drove to the location, which was down a long driveway on County Road, and found her son asleep. Her son, 18, was not charged with anything, so The Bridge will not name him. Bowater said he did not want to leave with her, so she left him there. Following this, she was charged with enabling minors to drink alcohol. Bowater told The Bridge that since he is 18, he is not a minor, but rather an adult. She also said there were only a few other people there, and she did not see any signs of alcohol. She said she hired a lawyer and the charges were dropped.

Vermont state law Title 7, section 658, states that knowingly enabling consumption of alcohol by people under the age of 21 can result in fines not less than $500 nor more than $2,000 or imprisonment not more than two years or both.

— Carla Occaso

Police Chief Interviews Start This Week

MONTPELIER — Four finalists are being considered for Montpelier's next police chief, three of them from Vermont, City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury said in an email to The Bridge. Interviews were scheduled over two days in the week of Nov. 2, with the city hoping to make an offer soon afterward. The search began after former Chief Eric Nordenson announced his departure last spring.

—Tracy Brannstrom

Stuff the Shelves

BERLIN — The Green Mountain Community Food Shelf is holding a "Stuff Our Shelves Food and Funds Drive" on Saturday, Nov. 7, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. inside the Central Vermont Marketplace (formerly called the Berlin Mall).

The organization will set up at the Walmart entrance, accepting donations of nonperishable food items, hygiene items, paper products, and checks or cash.

"We are a nonprofit fully run by volunteers. Any food or funds donated will go directly into the community to help individuals and families in need," the organization stated in an email to The Bridge. Although the Green Mountain Community Food Shelf is in Duxbury, it is open to anyone in Vermont, the email noted.

Find the Green Mountain Community Food Shelf on Facebook, email gmcfoodshelf@gmail.com, or call or text 802-234-3944. The Green Mountain Community Food Shelf is open Thursdays from 9 a.m. to noon and Sundays from noon to 2 p.m. at 4987 Vermont Route 100 in Duxbury.

— press release

Montpelier Alive is Semifinalist for 2027 Great American Main Street Award

MONTPELIER — Montpelier Alive has been named one of eight semifinalists nationwide for the 2027 Great American Main Street Award, Main Street America's recognition of communities demonstrating excellence in preservation-based downtown revitalization.

Semifinalists are evaluated on community transformation, historic preservation, innovative programming, partnerships, community engagement, and efforts to ensure downtown districts are welcoming places for everyone.

For Montpelier Alive, the recognition is a celebration of much more than one organization. It reflects years of work by downtown businesses, property owners, residents, volunteers, nonprofit organizations, the city of Montpelier, and countless community partners who continue to invest their time, energy, and ideas in the heart of Vermont's capital city.

"Our community has faced extraordinary challenges, and time and again, we've seen the power of collaboration, determination, and a shared commitment to our downtown," said Katie Trautz, executive director of Montpelier Alive. "To be recognized on a national stage is something we can all take pride in, and a reminder that Montpelier's resilience is rooted in the people who continue to show up for this community and believe in its future."

Trautz also said the recognition is especially meaningful following the devastating July 2023 flood, which impacted approximately 92% of Montpelier's downtown district and caused an estimated $100 million in damage. In the days, months, and years that followed, the community has come together to clean up, reopen businesses, provide financial assistance, welcome new businesses, and rebuild a downtown that remains unmistakably Montpelier.

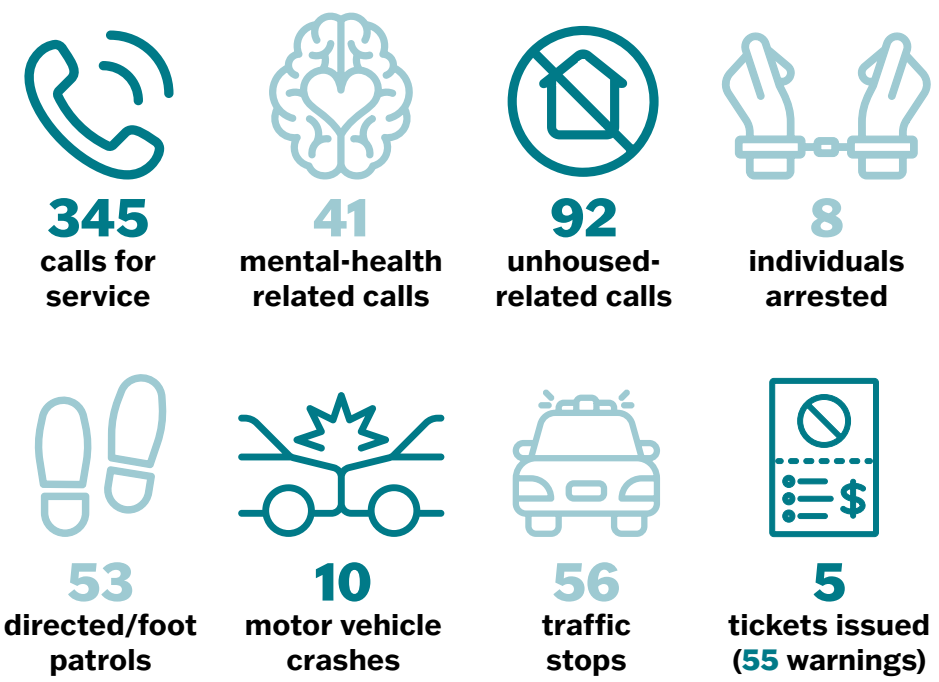
But the story of downtown Montpelier is about more than recovery. It can be found in independently owned shops and restaurants, historic buildings, public art, live music, community celebrations, new businesses, longtime traditions, and the people who continue to show up for their downtown.

Three communities will be named award recipients in May 2027.

—press release

Oct. 15–28 Montpelier Police Department Statistics

via the City Manager's reports



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HEARD ON THE STREET

Mad River Donuts Moves to Montpelier

MONTPELIER — Kyle White, owner of Mad River Donuts, moved his shop to Montpelier in October. In an Oct. 17 Facebook posting, White wrote he opened the shop in Waitsfield in 2024 but has now leased space at 45 State Street in the former Chico's Tacos location. He began serving doughnuts and coffee there beginning Oct. 18.

Plainfield Discusses Adding Cats to a Town Ordinance

PLAINFIELD — Whether to add cats to the animal control ordinance or the public health ordinance was on a recent selectboard agenda. Feral cats breeding in town have caused concern, according to minutes from the Oct. 26 meeting. The board discussed whether to amend its animal control ordinance or rely on the public health hazard ordinance to address issues with feral cats. Members will review existing ordinances and follow up with the health officer to determine the best path forward. The current animal ordinance names "cattle, sheep, goats, equines, deer, American bison, swine, poultry, pheasant, Chukar partridge, Coturnix quail, psittacine birds, ferrets, camelids, ratites (ostriches, rheas, and emus), and water buffalo," but not cats, per town documents online.

Northfield to Revise Traffic Ordinance

NORTHFIELD — Northfield Town Manager Mary Smith circulated a draft revision of the town's traffic ordinance among selectboard members during their meeting Oct. 13. The revisions came from Northfield Police Chief Eric Nordenson and will be discussed at the Nov. 10 meeting. Board member Merry Shernock said one additional change would be to lower the speed limit in Northfield Falls in order to cut down speeding there, minutes state. Board member Lydia Petty said Vermont Route 12 is a state highway, so the municipality cannot reduce the speed limit below 35 miles per hour on its own. Smith asked board members to review the suggested changes and provide any other suggestions they might have. Nordenson will attend the meeting Nov. 10 to discuss his own suggestions. Board member Thomas Davis said there should be "significant public input" on such changes.

Barre Town Takes Aim at Dangerous Intersection

BARRE TOWN —- Barre Town's selectboard discussed how to make a notorious intersection safer. That intersection, Vermont Route 63 and Miller Road, has been the site of 73 collisions resulting in injuries between April 2010 and February 2026. This amounts to about four collisions per year, with five occurring at that site this year, minutes state. A fatal collision occurred on Aug. 3. Measures such as adding turn lanes, improving signage, and narrowing the Miller Road portion of the intersection have helped a little bit, but those changes are not enough, per the minutes. Director of Public Works Josh Martineau said the intersection "needs to be reconfigured and suggested options such as an on/off ramp, bridge, or tunnel." The board agreed to send a letter to the Vermont Agency of Transportation to help improve the situation.

—compiled by Carla Occaso

Then & Now

Historic image by Gregory Gerdel; modern photo and text by Paul Carnahan

During the summer of 1983, six Montpelier High School students under the direction of art teacher Barbara Austin painted an "architectonic" mural on a blank wall at the back of the Capitol Stationers building at 27–29 Main Street. It incorporated real windows with illustrations of other windows while creating the illusion of a row of storefronts facing the newly created parking lot on the south side of Montpelier City Hall. The mural, designed by local architect Jay Ancel and muralist Dennis Larson, used trompe l'oeil to show Capitol Stationers flanked by two other stores, Buswell's bookstore and Lincoln Lillie, businesses that had become part of Capitol Stationers. Bill Bigglestone, the store's founder, was shown walking by his store! This historic photo from 2020 shows a refreshed version of the mural in which Walgreen's, a later occupant of the building, replaced one of the historic stationers. During the summer of 2026 the mural was covered by siding to make the building more energy-efficient.

NATURE WATCH

Art and words by Nona Estrin

Despite the warm weather, white-throated sparrows and juncos are pouring south and stopping in our yard for mixed seed and fresh water. I have been keeping an eye out for fox sparrows, but I haven't seen any yet this year. However, the little downy woodpecker has been coming in close again to check if we've put out the suet!

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Letters to the Editor

Love Prevails

To the Editor:

At Another Way, we welcome people who fall through the cracks and meet them with kindness and respect. We stay present to sometimes intense humanity, day in and day out. We work to receive whoever comes across our doorway with generosity of spirit, and grace. We are a sanctuary; a place of grounding and healing; a place where people can land, rest, and recover.

We work hard to be a safe space, emotionally and physically. We offer coffee, respect, and a supportive hand. We provide laundry vouchers, mail services, showers, winter coats, hot meals, art groups, and healing circles. We are open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. 365 days a year.

People fall through the cracks because of broken systems. Mental health struggles, poverty, trauma, homelessness, and isolation do not arrive one at a time. But the services meant to help often deal with them separately, or fall short.

People can be left trying to fit their lives into systems that have not made room for them. Some have been hurt by their experiences with psychiatric care. Others have simply stopped believing that anyone will listen. We work to be there, and to care, and to listen.

I am in my seventh year of working at Another Way, and it is incredibly satisfying. It feels good to work in a place where everything you do makes a difference. People are incredibly grateful for the support we provide, and I am amazed at the amount of community support for our folks. Another Way: love prevails.

Ken Russell, executive director, Another Way in Montpelier

Thanks for the Who's Who

To the Editor:

Bravo! Thank you for publishing the guide to candidates in the Oct. 21 issue ("Who's on the Ballot," p. 13).

It has been my number one complaint for decades that there never seems to be a clear and concise source of basic information on who is running for the various offices and, more importantly, their affiliations with the political parties.

I know that voting along party lines is not considered the ideal and do not necessarily follow that practice, having on occasion voted across party lines. But I am Jeffersonian in the belief that parties are inevitable and probably useful in a way, and I find it very helpful to know who is a Progressive, a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent.

That information is often missing from campaign brochures or campaign signs along the road. It almost seems as though candidates consider their affiliation a dark and dirty secret (and maybe in some cases it is!). I think such information allows voters to look at the list of candidates and begin winnowing down the choices, make some initial decisions, and then do more research on candidate positions on specific issues, especially local issues.

I hope The Bridge will continue to publish this information in this format before elections in the future.

Larry Floersch, Berlin

The Blanket is Only Warm if We Wash It

To the Editor:

A donated blanket can express kindness. A clean, usable blanket distributed with respect expresses something more: care for the person who will sleep beneath it.

The Bridge recently reported that Montpelier's Blanket Share is returning this winter. Laundry on Elm is collecting and laundering donated blankets before Another Way makes them available to people who need warmth.

That middle step deserves attention. It is easy to drop off what we no longer use and assume our good intentions finish the task. Someone still has to prepare the item, organize distribution, and protect the dignity of the neighbor receiving it.

My Christian faith challenges me to see service as responsibility rather than performance. The Good Samaritan did not merely feel compassion; he arranged practical care.

I live in Colorado, not Montpelier, and have not participated in Blanket Share. Still, I hope the people of central Vermont will support this thoughtful collaboration and follow the organizers' donation guidance.

Winter kindness works best when it is dependable, clean, and given without judgment.

Douglas Vandergraph, Fort Collins, Colorado

Letters to the editor represent the opinions of the authors and do not reflect the opinions of The Bridge. Submit your letter by email to editor@montpelierbridge.com. Preference is given to submissions by those who live in central Vermont, should not exceed 300 words in length, and may be edited for brevity and accuracy.

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News

Montpelier Council Seeks Agreement With Residents Over East State Street Survey

By Tracy Brannstrom

MONTPELIER — The city council has directed staff members to negotiate a compromise with East State Street property owners who are challenging a land survey that places the municipal right-of-way through portions of their homes, foundations, and yards.

At its Oct. 28 meeting, councilors considered a process that would begin with a memorandum of agreement in which property owners commit to negotiations and give up their right to formally appeal the land survey, which otherwise could further delay a road reconstruction project already years behind schedule.

Negotiations would aim to narrow the right-of-way — "to whatever that negotiated sweet spot is for everyone," Mayor Marc Gwinn said, clarify the city's uses of the right-of-way, and identify legal steps to address concerns about property titles.

City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury said the city wants all affected property owners to agree to participate before negotiations begin, to avoid a situation in which an owner could challenge the survey in court after the city has already begun negotiating with others.

If property owners agree to the process, the city would begin the negotiation process in November, she said.

"Both sides are going to have to come to the middle," Councilor Sal Alfano said about property owners and the city.

Councilor Paul Costello said the hope is to find a right-of-way boundary that preserves room for potential future improvements, such as a bike lane or tree planting.

Public Works Director Kurt Motyka said the goal is to resolve the right-of-way dispute in order to avoid further delaying the East State Street reconstruction project, which includes replacing water and sewer lines, sidewalks, and pavement. Voters approved the project in 2022, and the city secured a $5 million U.S. Department of Agriculture grant, which required the road be surveyed. Motyka said the project can go out to bid, but the USDA won't release funding if the right-of-way is under dispute through a formal appeal.

Property owners have challenged the survey's accuracy several times, saying they had no records showing the city considered parts of their properties to be within its right-of-way. The city reviewed their concerns but ultimately filed the survey in the land records on Oct. 6.

Several property owners expressed reservations about the proposed negotiation process at the Oct. 28 meeting.

Josh Mulholland, of 110 East State Street, said the surveyed right-of-way extends about a foot into his house; he understood it to end at the foundation when he bought the property, he said. He questioned whether enough property owners would agree to the proposed process.

"You probably don't have sufficient agreement among property owners to advance the memorandum of understanding as you may wish," he told councilors.

Montpelier resident Chris Owen read a letter on behalf of East State Street property owner John Anderson, who wants an agreement resolving the right-of-way dispute rather than a memorandum of agreement that would limit his right to appeal. Anderson wrote in the letter that he would appeal if the city does not reach an agreement on those terms by late January.

Other property owners raised concerns about the current survey's potential consequences for their homes and property values.

Maria Arsenlis, who owns 74 East State Street, said three attorneys had told her the home would be unsellable with the surveyed right-of-way running through its living room.

"You can imagine how it would feel to have your home declared unsellable by an action of your own city," she told the council.

Damien Leonard, a First Avenue resident, spoke as a concerned neighbor and an attorney with experience navigating boundary disputes. "With clouded title[s], houses lose value," he said.

Patrick Coyle said he bought his home at 89 East State Street four years ago after a title search found no conflicts with the deed and showed clear property boundaries. But the city's survey now shows the right-of-way running through half of his mudroom.

"This can cause financial ruin for your constituents," he said. Coyle also criticized the city for its lack of communication with property owners, saying he learned about the survey from neighbors.

Some residents also faulted city staff members for long delays in responding to their questions and concerns about the survey.

"This is a group that's lost trust in this city," Councilor Jim Sheridan said.

Gwinn also addressed the breakdown in trust, telling property owners that it "takes a lifetime to build and can be broken very easily. One of the things that's going to be critical to this process is that we find a way to establish and regain and re-earn each other's trust, particularly from us to you," he said.

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Arts

A Preview of Montpelier Chamber Orchestra's Fall Concert

As reported by a tree-hugger and failed musician

By Bryan Pfeiffer

Paul Gambill conducts the Montpelier Chamber Orchestra in a rehearsal for its fall concert on Nov. 15 at Lost Nation Theater in Montpelier City Hall. Photo by Bryan Pfeiffer.

MONTPELIER — Before I urge you to attend Montpelier Chamber Orchestra's fall concert on Nov. 15, you should know my qualifications as a critic of classical music.

I played the viola roughly in the fifth grade (and by roughly I don't mean approximately). I'm enrolled in "Introduction to Classical Music" offered online by Yale University, where my grade now hovers somewhere between failing and incomplete. And the local music critic Jim Lowe happens to be my neighbor.

So when it comes to Mozart and Brahms, I'm probably a lot like you: I know those guys are good but wonder whether to go hear their music. But I now know that you dare not miss two of their works performed at Lost Nation Theater by an orchestra featuring your talented friends and neighbors.

For the past three weeks, I've been attending MCO rehearsals for its upcoming concert titled "Legends of the Fall." Although I don't exactly know an allegro from an andante, as a field biologist I do know a thing or two about beauty and meaning in the natural world. So here is a preview of the concert from someone who's tuned to the music of wildlife and wild places.

With Paul Gambill back as conductor, MCO will perform Johannes Brahms' "Serenade No. 1 in D Major" and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik." Trust me: You already know the Mozart — it's a classic of classical music. And although the Brahms is no lullaby, it will soothe and transport you without making you the least bit sleepy. Each piece brings to stick season an echo of springtime.

Brahms' "Serenade No. 1 in D Major" has the charm of a serenade and the alchemy of a symphony. To my mind, it begins with a sunrise, expressed in a reassuring French horn and an airy clarinet, and then wastes no time becoming a spirited day in nature. The orchestra grabs us by our senses, shakes us, and reminds us why we're alive. To my ear, the Brahms is a falcon chasing songbirds over Hubbard Park, butterflies dancing across the meadow at North Branch Nature Center, and a doe and fawn ambling through Sabin's Pasture at sunset.

And that's only the first movement. The Brahms serenade features six movements, rather than a symphony's customary three or four. I won't interpret the other five for you, other than to say that the third (my fave) is variously contemplative, wistful, and buoyant — it flows with the serenity and energy of the North Branch River (without flooding, please). And although the fifth movement is exuberant, remember to hold your applause until the sixth is complete. You'll know it when you hear it.

Next, as I've pointed out, "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" is a familiar hit and well-known to string musicians. If Gambill were to hand his baton to me so that I might wave it ignorantly at MCO's strings, they would have the skill to perform the Mozart with confidence and elegance. This classic is like spring songbird migration or this year's fall foliage: never a dull moment.

And yet even "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" benefits from a conductor's resolute guidance. Gambill worked his musicians in rehearsals every Monday night for weeks. As he pushed them to synchronize their eighth notes, to "shake the rafters," or to refine a forte, I myself could hear this performance emerge. Mozart and Brahms would have been pleased.

I'll remind you how unusual it is for a community of Montpelier's size to have its own orchestra. They are retirees and state employees, teachers and parents, people you see at the supermarket or the doctor's office. Some play elsewhere professionally; all play with talent and dedication. After all, if you have any notion how hard it is to produce a respectable note by drawing a bow across a string or by blowing into wood or brass, or how beating a timpani adds drama to a serenade, and above all how 34 musicians can perform as one, then you would honor that notion, and yourself, by attending this concert.

Whether or not you do, I suggest you listen to the Brahms several times between now and Nov. 15. Listen not in the ways of the attention economy — rushed and distracted. Instead, stop what you're doing, get comfortable, close your eyes, and listen. You may not hear falcons or butterflies. Maybe you'll hear sorrow or joy or some other facet of the human condition. Or maybe you'll simply hear lovely music.

Whatever the case, I suspect you'll be moved. And when you hear MCO perform the Brahms and Mozart live in Montpelier, you'll surely remember that the most beautiful things human beings have ever created do not come by way of the news cycle or the algorithm or our gadgets. Humanity's greatest achievements are our communities and sense of justice, our art and literature — and our music.

That these good people and their conductor make beautiful music together is nothing less than an expression of humanity, a tribute to virtuosity, and a gift to our community.

I'll see you at the concert.

MCO's "Legends of the Fall" will be one performance only, at 2 p.m. on Nov. 15 at Lost Nation Theater. Buy tickets online at lostnationtheater.org.

Bryan Pfeiffer is a field biologist who writes about the natural world at Chasing Nature, chasingnature.substack.com.

Disclosure: Paul Gambill is managing director at The Bridge.

Community

A Halloween Tradition Keeps Barre Woman's Memory Alive, One Pumpkin at a Time

By Gina Tron

BARRE — What began as an idea shared during a Sunday afternoon outing has grown into a community tradition honoring Kay Santamore, who spent decades giving back to Barre.

Santamore wanted to see Barre come together around pumpkins, much like Ellie's Farm Market-Gift Shop in West Berlin used to do. She shared that idea with friends during a summer Sunday afternoon trip to play mini golf in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, in 2024. She passed away shortly after.

"That was on her bucket list, so we just decided we're going to do it," Ruth Weeks told The Bridge.

Three years later, Karvings for Kay has grown into a neighborhood tradition, with hundreds of pumpkins decorating the properties of neighbors Weeks and Sarah Hebert.

For Weeks, who had been friends with Santamore for 40 years, and Hebert, who knew her for approximately 23 years, the event is about more than Halloween decorations. It's a way to remember someone who made a lasting impression on the community.

Santamore worked for The World newspaper for more than 40 years, traveling throughout Barre to visit local businesses and solicit advertisements. But her contributions to the community went well beyond her job.

"If any of the stores needed help, she would take off her coat and help them if they needed it," Weeks said.

Weeks recalled Santamore volunteering at the Barre Opera House, helping prepare winter jackets for the Salvation Army's Santa Claus program, and wrapping Christmas gifts for local businesses.

A display of pumpkins carved in honor of Kay Santamore. Photo by Gina Tron.

"She was always doing something for the community," Weeks said.

Hebert described Santamore as someone who was also constantly looking to learn something new and get involved.

"She was always trying to expand her knowledge," Hebert said. "She was always ready to jump in and help."

That spirit of involvement is something the organizers see reflected in the growing turnout for Karvings for Kay.

The first year, the group collected 116 pumpkins. The following year, that number grew to 226. This year, the display reached 350, surpassing the organizers' goal of 300.

"It's just way above and beyond," Hebert said of this year's response.

The display is entirely volunteer-run, with a core group of about seven people handling everything from decorations and lighting to arranging the pumpkins across the neighboring properties. Students from Spaulding High School have also helped carry pumpkins up the hill, while local residents and businesses contributed supplies and donated pumpkins.

The pumpkins eventually find another purpose, too. After the event, they are picked up by local farmers, a fitting final chapter for an event honoring someone who loved animals.

"We continue her legacy of her community that she gave back to, all the way to even when the pumpkins get picked up," Hebert said.

The display has also become an opportunity for people who never knew Santamore to learn about her. Weeks said visitors frequently ask who Kay was, prompting her to share stories about the woman behind the tradition.

Hebert said one of the most touching parts has been hearing stories from people the organizers didn't realize knew Santamore, including a mail carrier who recognized her.

"It's just really heartwarming when we can learn another side of her that we didn't know," Hebert said.

For the organizers, that response speaks to the connections Santamore built throughout her life.

"I think the biggest takeaway is that we can become a community again, like back in the day," Hebert said. "You can actually enjoy yourself in your neighborhood."

That sense of community is exactly what Weeks and Hebert hope to preserve as they continue the tradition. The organizers also host a Halloween-night celebration on the joint properties, with a different theme each year along with games, prizes, candy, and food.

Santamore loved Halloween, and her friends believe she would have been right alongside them.

"If she were here, she'd be right out here with us doing the pumpkins," Weeks said. "She'd just be beaming down on us."

The organizers plan to continue Karvings for Kay for as long as they are able.

"She was an amazing, loved woman, and we want to keep her memory going to reach everyone's lives, because that's what she did when she was here on Earth, and she'll continue to do after," Hebert said.

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— Jonathon Weber, Local Motion

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Education

YES! Youth Environmental Summit Covers Sustainability, Strawberries, and Thingamabobs

By Mary Cole Mello

Middle- and high-school students generate ideas and action steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their communities at the Oct. 16 Youth Environmental Summit in Montpelier. Photo by Elodie Reed.

MONTPELIER — Mieke Riddlebarger presented the rules of the Thingamabob Game to a group of middle and high schoolers at the Oct. 16 Youth Environmental Summit (YES!) at the Greenway Institute campus in Montpelier.

"You are managers of a company that produces thingamabobs. You are in competition with other thingamabob companies," Riddlebarger said. "As with any capitalist company, you need to grow and make a profit. Failure to return a sufficient profit means you'll lose your job."

Students worked in teams of two to run an imaginary company. Each company began the game with $1,000, and each thingamabob costs $1 to produce and sells for $2.

"So if you produce 100 thingamabobs, you will spend $100 but you'll get $200 back and end up with a total of $1,100," explains Riddlebarger.

Teams with the most profit would get rewarded with candy bars. In the game, the production of 1,000 thingamabobs would add an estimated two parts per million carbon dioxide to the Earth's atmosphere; but if the total sum of thingamabobs raised the Earth's carbon dioxide levels above a trigger number, the result would be an environmental disaster and no one would get a candy bar regardless of their profit.

The UVM 4-H Extension and Generac Power Products sponsored the event, which drew around 72 students from all over the state.

State Sen. Anne Watson, in her keynote speech, reminded the audience that they influence others, and no matter what profession they might choose, they should understand environmental science.

One workshop gave participants a chance to extract the DNA from strawberries.

Another workshop, "AI: Digital Choices," was presented by a senior high school student from St. Johnsbury Academy. Participants were able to visualize the amount of water needed by AI systems using models made from recycled objects, become involved in hands-on activities, and take part in discussions about AI.

Other workshops were "From Seed to Supper," "Watershed Decisions," "Documenting Bird Migration with Your Nature Journal," and "Endangered Bats of Vermont." The summit offered a chance to learn about Norwich University's water quality monitoring project, and Main Street Middle School (MSMS) students led a workshop on how to apply sustainability to everyday life.

What lures kids to spend a whole Friday on the alarming topic of the threats to our Earth and climate? Mai Huynh Parke, an eighth grader at MSMS, said older kids had been role models for her. "Seeing them take action (joining the Sustainability Committee) made me think I could do this too."

Main Street Middle School student Eliza Blakeman said being a member of the Sustainability Committee was part of her leadership training. "I hope people will learn about our committee and get ideas," she said.

While the summit included kids from schools all over the state, homeschoolers such as Elizabeth Stinson also participated. "My parents are very concerned about the environment," she said. "[The summit] sounded related to my life."

When summit organizer Liz Kenton was asked how she would judge the success of this year's event, she said she hoped to see students networking and continuing to talk about the issues even after the event ended.

Indeed, in a wrap-up session groups of kids brainstormed 50 things they could do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their own communities. Participants gathered at tables and on the floor to pool ideas. Voices rose as they recorded their thoughts on paper: Planting trees, carpooling, using electric vehicles, going to the library, going to the farmers markets, eating less meat, turning down the heat, learning about nature, meeting and helping neighbors, buying less plastic, taking shorter showers, and getting goats instead of lawn mowers were just some of the contributions.

Later, Riddlebarger, when asked how the Thingamob Game had gone, noted that no one in the game went home with a candy bar.

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Education

Montpelier Roxbury Students Outperform State Average, Data Show

By Jenni Belotserkovsky

MONTPELIER — Montpelier Roxbury students performed above the state average in English language arts, science, and math, according to data the school board reviewed at the Oct. 21 meeting. In science, the district's students are an average of 22 points above the state average, in English language arts nearly 19 points, and in math more than 12 points.

Nick Conner, director of student engagement and data, said there was still work to do. In particular, Conner said there are significant proficiency gaps with students with individualized education programs, with English learners and "economically disadvantaged" students recording the next largest disparities. However, the trend indicated a slow closure of the performance gap.

Vermont's Agency of Education requires that all students in third through sixth grades take the annual academic assessment with the Vermont Comprehensive Assessment Program. Students on individualized education programs have an equivalent alternative assessment. These tests fulfill federal accountability requirements.

The Montpelier Roxbury Public Schools district uses these test outcomes to compare statewide proficiencies. The data help the school identify students who may need additional support, track progress, and establish learning goals.

At the meeting, student school board member Astrid Kim raised the question of why the state only administers these tests through ninth grade. Mike Berry, director of curriculum and technology, admitted that he couldn't answer the question.

Berry said the board had conversations with the Agency of Education about the three-year gap in state-mandated science testing between grades 5 and 8. He called the gap in data "not very helpful."

The Agency of Education is currently requesting a lot of data around early literacy, said Conner, but what the state is going to do with all that information is not clear. The state requires all districts to submit early literacy assessments.

Despite being second statewide in ELA, Rachel Whalen, Union Elementary School principal, wants to improve outcomes, said Conner. The district doesn't rely on data to work towards improvement goals. One of the reasons for that is that it takes a long time to obtain data.

Superintendent Libby Bonesteel said this is the first time, by federal mandate, the state ranked schools in different categories in this way, "and it was the first time I had ever been able to see that and I was damn proud of us."

Jenni Belotserkovsky is a Community Reporting Fellow receiving training through the Journalism New England Career Lab to do civic reporting that provides people in towns across New England with the information they need to be engaged in their community.

Evidence of Vermont's Education System Success

Ranked #1 in the nation...

on **overall SAT scores** among states with a similar participation rate (30%–70% participation)

Source: worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/sat-scores-by-state

for **youth participation in sports**

Source: projectplay.org/state-of-play-2024-introduction

for **lowest juvenile arrest rate** (~1.5/1,000 youth) and **lowest youth incarceration rate** (8/100,000 vs. 87 nationally).

Source: simmrinlawgroup.com/research/teen-crime-across-america

Ranked #2 in the nation...

on **AP exam pass rates** on 2025

Source: apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/school-report-of-ap-exams-grades-11-12-2024-2025.pdf

for **overall child well-being** — behind only New Hampshire and ahead of Massachusetts

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2025 KIDS COUNT Data Book

Research compiled by Matt Henchen, civics educator at Harwood Union High School

Ranked #3 in the nation...

for **family & community well-being** — a measure that includes children's connection to families and communities

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation/KIDS COUNT Family & Community data

for **children's health.**

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation/Vermont profile

on folks with a **bachelor's degree or higher.**

Source: usschoolindex.org/educational-attainment-by-state

From the Editor's Desk

A National Crisis Hits Home

If you live in central Vermont, you don't need to see the data to understand that our state has seen a massive spike in homelessness in recent years. The topic has become a regular agenda item at Montpelier City Council meetings, fodder for discussions on Front Porch Forum, and a new policing category in our small community.

For every story in this issue that delves into data, public safety, committees, and the like, there are hundreds of people at the heart of it: People who must carry everything they own wherever they go or risk theft of the items that keep them from freezing to death at night; people dealing with injuries, illnesses, and disabilities who must walk to meals and services; people who scramble to find a phone and access to email and jump through hoops to reach basic services like food, shelter, and medical care.

The people at the heart of our homelessness crisis matter. That's why The Bridge has devoted an entire issue to this topic. And the people who have lost access to beloved public spaces or have experienced or witnessed harm from some of the individuals who live outdoors matter too. It's a difficult balance to report on both topics.

In the months leading up to publication of this special issue, I got a close-up view of the slow-rolling train wreck that often precedes homelessness. A family member has teetered on the edge of becoming homeless, even as I've been talking to and writing about those already there. Witnessing this reminds me that it may only take a working person one sickness or serious injury to suddenly lose their income. Without a robust social safety net, what often follows is a cascade of losses: health insurance and medical care; the ability to pay for housing, car repairs, quality food; transportation; prompt dental care, and more.

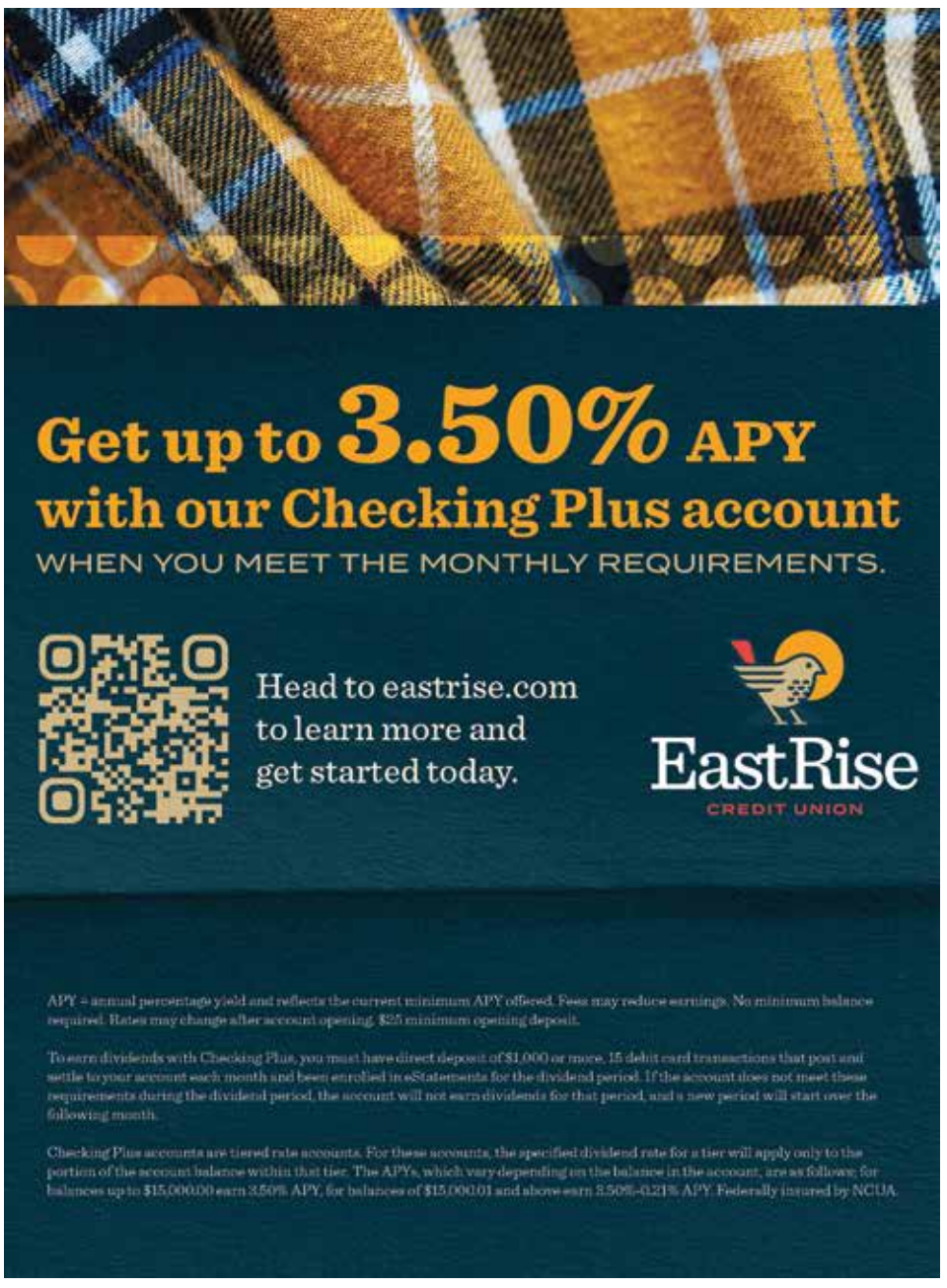
CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

Homelessness is a national problem. It's not just local, although it can feel like that. It's not just statewide, although we must demand that our state leaders take action on this issue. Across the nation, we are seeing a soaring number of people who can no longer afford basic survival. Our community is so focused on the urgency of the situation in our front yard that we rarely have the time to zoom out and consider the federal responsibility here.

I write this on the day of perhaps the most important election in our national history. I don't know if, when you read this, our collective trajectory will be better or worse. I do know that we need to hold federal leaders accountable for leaving our neighbors out in the cold, even as we pitch in to help in very real, practical ways.

I hope the reporting on these pages fosters productive conversation and understanding, and that it strengthens our community response to a preventable crisis and a shameful era in the history of the United States.

—Cassandra Hemenway, Editor in Chief



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Encampments

continued from page 1

on Oct. 21 informing campers that a cleanup crew would return the following day. When staff members returned, they found two people sleeping in a tent at one of the sites, and police arrested them on outstanding warrants, according to City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury.

Notices were issued to seven camps in total; five on Stone Cutters Way — at Turntable Park and along the bike path near Hunger Mountain Co-op — plus plus two at Blanchard Park, a violation of Montpelier's encampment policy where camps were within 50 feet of private property or interfering with park use. Matthew Jelacic, the city's development specialist, said two of the sites appeared to have been abandoned.

Jelacic helped post notices at camps on Oct 21. He said the same people are often told to move repeatedly, despite a lack of longer-term housing options. He described the situation as "a perpetual crisis."

Simon Jennings, a staff member at Another Way, echoed that sentiment. "It's just, kind of this cycle. There's no solution to it. It's just, you have to move, and then you move somewhere else, and then it's the same thing."

Jennings said Another Way distributed trash bags to help campers pack their belongings and bring them onto the organization's property, which backs onto Stone Cutters Way. He said he helped one person who couldn't pack because of health issues and described the clearances as upsetting and traumatic for campers.

"Staff would not describe the scene as chaotic," McNicholas Kury said. "They [the campers] were allowed ample time to collect their belongings and sort any items they would like the city to dispose of."

Since January, the city ordered an estimated 29 camps — a tent or group of tents — to relocate from public land, eight of which required cleanup after people did not leave, according to McNicholas Kury. The city does not track how many people were displaced. She oversees the process herself, visiting camps to assess sites and issue relocation notices, typically in response to complaints from residents and property owners.

On Stone Cutters Way, property owners, people who use the public area, and several city departments complained about camps along the street, she said. Montpelier Police Department incident logs show at least 21 incidents there in October, including patrols prompted by "community concerns."

McNicholas Kury said police officers accompany city staff members on some camp visits but remain in the background, providing support if safety concerns arise or a trespass notice is needed. "We're not criminalizing homelessness," she said.

The city's encampment policy generally directs the staff to leave camps on city-owned land alone, but calls for intervention when a site is deemed a "high-sensitivity area" because of potential health, safety, or environmental risks. Criteria include camps within 50 feet of private property, unless the adjoining owner consents; obstructions to sidewalks, bike lanes, or emergency access; fire hazards; and interference with parks or environmentally sensitive areas.

Above, Simon Jennings, staff member at Another Way. Photo by Hojun Choi. Right, The city's storage container for items collected from campsites it has shut down contains one bag that has been there since July 2, when it shut down a camp at the Blanchard Park playground. Photo by Cassandra Hemenway.

Under the city's policy, usable belongings collected during camp cleanups are stored for at least 30 days in a locked container on the city's Country Club Road property. The container currently holds just one bag, containing a tarp, sleeping bag, and shirt collected from the Blanchard Park playground on July 2. To retrieve their belongings, people must coordinate with an outreach worker from local shelter provider Good Samaritan Haven.

The city's response also includes efforts to connect campers with services. When people are present, McNicholas Kury said, she provides referrals to local resources and may refer cases to the county's Situation Table, where service providers coordinate responses to people facing complex challenges.

The notices posted to camps include a one-page "Survival Guide" from Washington County Mental Health Services, listing phone numbers for crisis lines, police departments, state agencies, and community service providers. It offers self-care advice, including to eat well, drink plenty of water, exercise regularly, and "take time to do nothing; just relax."

But access to services, including even short-term shelter, remains limited.

Changes to the state's emergency motel voucher program in September have created new barriers for people seeking shelter, according to discussion at an Oct. 19 meeting of Montpelier's homelessness committee, where members described difficulties completing applications by phone, particularly for people without phones or with limited help navigating the process.

Meanwhile, local providers are also working to meet winter shelter needs. The city is developing its own emergency options, including 12 beds in the city hall basement, and exploring other possibilities such as construction trailers.

For those who cannot find shelter indoors, Montpelier has no designated public space where camping is permitted. City officials and the city council discussed establishing a public campground last July but abandoned the plan after a local organizer withdrew, saying efforts to reach an agreement with the city had stalled.

Access to storage where unhoused people can keep their belongings, such as tents and other gear, also remains a challenge. The city staff considered renovating lockers behind the recreation center on Barre Street, but found that items inside were wet, indicating the lockers weren't weatherproof. The city then explored covered, waterproof lockers, but quotes were too expensive, Jelacic said.

"We face some really tough barriers out there," said Homelessness Committee Chair Zach Hughes at the Oct. 19 meeting, where members cited an estimate from Another Way Executive Director Ken Russell that 75 people could be living outside in Montpelier this winter.

Third Highest

continued from page 1

lunches to anyone in need of food.

For this article, The Bridge talked to Voorhees and several other people who either work with the unhoused or for city governments. Their theories of why the homeless count is relatively high here included the state's tight housing market and very high health insurance costs, which makes survival a struggle.

Other factors — such as wealth inequality, or federal cuts to Section 8 housing, food stamps, Obamacare, and Medicaid — are also at play, but apply to all states, not just Vermont.

Another theory suggested by some, but rejected by others, is that Vermont's services for the homeless are more generous and its tolerance for drug use higher than in other states, either attracting people here or keeping them here. Inadequate mental health services could also be a reason for the state's high homelessness rate, some say.

Housing

"There's not a lot of housing for low-income folks," Voorhees said. He noted that some forms of housing that used to serve low-income individuals, such as rooming and boarding houses, have been phased out by zoning.

Ken Russell, executive director of Another Way in Montpelier — which serves psychiatric survivors and offers food and other resources — blames Vermont's development regulations. "The way land has been regulated in Vermont, I don't think the capacity to house people has kept up," he said.

After the 2007 real estate bust, many developers and construction workers left the business in Vermont, and today construction jobs here are not rising as fast as in the rest of the nation. Meanwhile, construction costs have increased from the pandemic and federal tariffs.

Barre Mayor Thom Lauzon, a real estate developer and accountant, said rising development costs have discouraged him from building a planned apartment building in Montpelier.

At today's construction prices, "a new two-bedroom apartment is going to end up costing $3,800 per month," he said, while selling the apartment as a condo would bring a price of $500,000.

Even when apartments are available, they aren't necessarily accessible to someone unhoused. If the person has no job, or has just started one, they may not be able to pay first and last month's rent and security deposit. Landlords tend to be picky about finances, since evicting tenants is not easy under Vermont law.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

Transitional shelters, such as the Good Samaritan Haven "Welcome Center" on Route 302 in Berlin, seek to help people get on their feet while they wait for their own housing, but the wait can be long.

Luke Rackers, co-executive director of Good Samaritan, said his team will "often have people ready for that step and they just have to wait until something becomes available," he said.

Rackers said the state needs more creative solutions. "We could go back to single room occupancy-style housing and also have more permanent supportive housing and more programmatic housing," he said.

As an example, he pointed to the dorm rooms with shared kitchens and bathrooms for rent at the Greenway Institute in Montpelier for $600 a month. But even renting those can be challenging for someone who is unhoused.

Montpelier Mayor Marc Gwinn said he tried to help a homeless man who had some income to get a room at Greenway, but was unsuccessful. "I thought it would be great for this person, but they have a very strict formula that they need to stick to," he said.

"If you have no credit, if you've got no employment history or if the rent exceeds one third of your monthly income, they will not rent to you," he said. "And I get that, because it's a risk for them."

Mental Health

Studies, including one conducted in Washington County in 2022, have shown that a significant portion of the homeless have mental health issues. Rackers and others say the state should devote more resources in this area, but instead there have been cuts.

In August, the state of Vermont eliminated four beds at the Vermont Psychiatric Hospital in Berlin, reducing capacity to 21 beds and cutting three staff positions there. Earlier, in January, the Central Vermont Medical Center announced a cost-saving move, closing its psychiatric unit.

"I can say we were disappointed to see the decrease in psychiatric beds," Rackers said. "It's just one more contributor to the problem. We do need that service."

Voorhees says having more outreach workers could help those with mental health issues, but says Vermont law limits what they can do.

"One of the other problems Vermont has is that our mental health laws are such that mental health workers or social workers can only relate to people who will engage with the process," he said. "If they're not ready or willing to engage, the workers have to kind of walk away."

Drugs

Substance use disorder also affects some of those who are unhoused. Additional state resources for treating addiction are needed, advocates say.

Vermont — especially Burlington — has developed a reputation for tolerating open drug use that some say is not helping the homelessness situation. In August, The Atlantic magazine ran a story entitled "The Cities That Said Yes to Drugs."

It profiled cities such as Vancouver, Seattle, and Burlington that have endorsed "harm reduction" strategies such as establishing supervised sites where users can inject drugs. Burlington is in the process of trying to set one up, even as those other cities are backing away from some harm reduction policies, according to the article.

The Atlantic author Michael Powell asked Burlington Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak if an injection center would bring more addicts and dealers to Burlington. The article states: "She acknowledged the possibility, but framed it as a necessary risk. She repeated the harm-reduction maxim: 'It helps people where they are at.'"

Voorhees would like to see a greater state investment in recovery resources. Specifically, Vermont does not have enough long-term addiction treatment services, he said.

"I see people that get sent to rehab, but then they're sent back right to where they were 17 days later," he said. "That does not bring forth transformation in people's lives to try to really get them off drugs

continued on page 13

If you shop at Shaw's supermarket in Montpelier, you may be familiar with April McMahon, 56. McMahon and her partner are regulars in the parking lot at its exit onto Main Street. More often than not, her partner stands near the exit with a cardboard sign saying anything helps, but one afternoon in late October, it was just McMahon, in her wheelchair, with the sign. Her partner had a court date that day, she said.

Every morning, the two pack up their belongings — all of them — and haul them around for the entire day, one of the reasons they stay in that one spot.

The pair sleep outdoors most nights, without a tent, McMahon told The Bridge. About two years ago, they were staying at the "Burlington Pods," a low-barrier shelter also known as the Elmwood Community Shelter run by the Champlain Housing Trust. But in December 2024, that changed when McMahon was hit by a pickup truck trying to cross Route 7 (the Shelburne Road) in South Burlington. April said she was thrown 38 feet into the air. The accident made headlines across Vermont, and, McMahon said, put her into a coma for 14 days.

The accident "pulverized a bone in my knee and my foot was broken," McMahon said, and it left her unable to take care of herself. That ended her time at the Pods, she said.

Now, she and her partner have been in and out of the motel program and have already used up their allotted 70 days. They are currently waiting for Dec. 1, when state-funded motel rooms become more available again.

McMahon said she and her partner have tried to get an apartment and have put their name on some lists, but without a recent rental history, they haven't yet been accepted.

She was married at one time, she said, and has family, "but they all live in different states and have their own lives."

McMahon said her immediate needs are "food every day and staying warm," and she needs warmer clothes, a sleeping bag, and a tent.

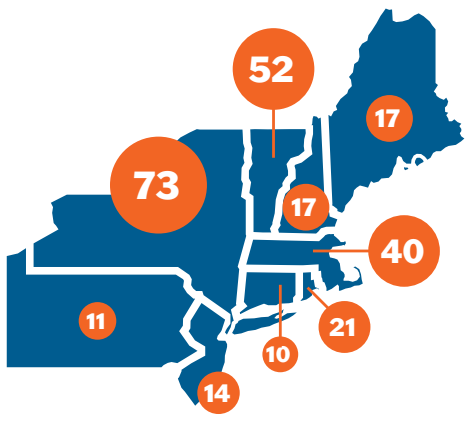
Asked what her greatest wish is, McMahon said, "To be housed."

— photo and story by Cassandra Hemenway

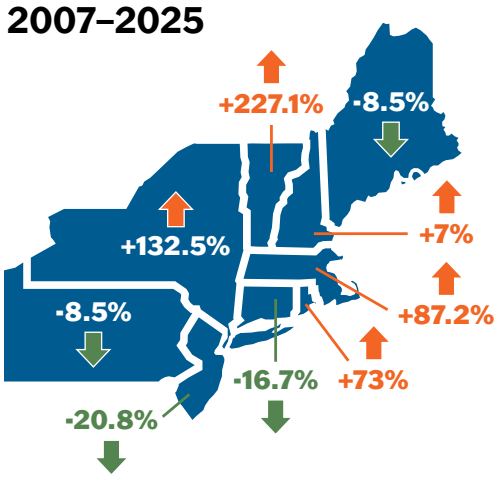
Homelessness by the Numbers

Number of Unhoused People in Northeastern States

Per 10,000 Population, 2025



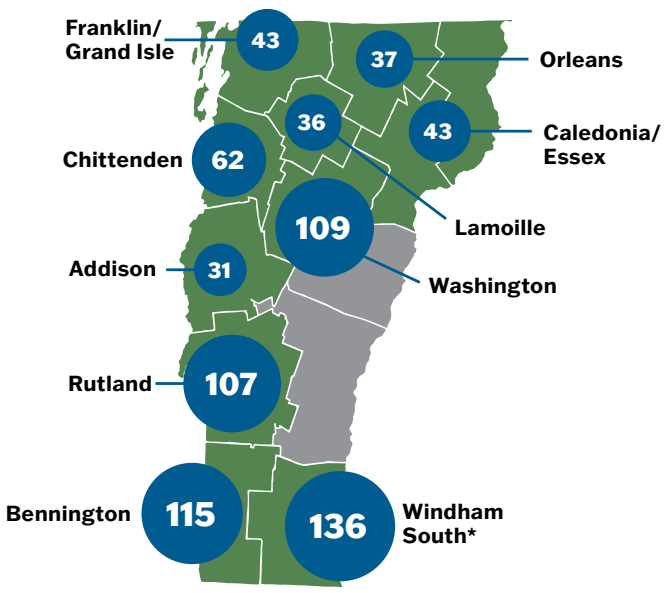
Change in Number of Unhoused People, 2007–2025



Data is from the 2025 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Annual Report to Congress (huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2025-AHAR-Part-1.pdf). Homeless counts are based on "point in time estimates" from late January 2025. The counts include people staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, safe havens, or unsheltered locations such as staying in cars, on the street, or in encampments.

Number of Unhoused People by Vermont County

Per 10,000 Population, 2025



Data is based on June 2025 Coordinated Entry data (people actively connected to Vermont's homelessness system) divided by 2020 Census populations (dobettervermont.com/understanding-act-143/). *Windham South covers most of Windham County, including Brattleboro; it excludes Rockingham (Bellows Falls), Londonderry, Grafton, and Windham

According to a State of Homelessness report published by the Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, nearly

4,600 Vermonters

were unhoused in 2025. Of those,

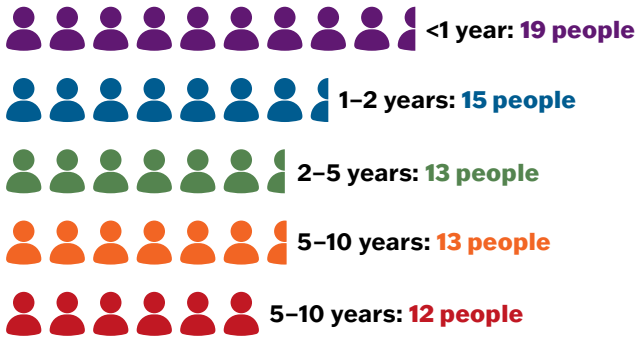
23% were children

50% reported a **serious mental illness**

28% were on **Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance**

Top Causes of Homelessness in Washington County, 2022

Length of Time Unhoused in Washington County, 2022



These figures are based on interviews of 73 homeless individuals conducted in 2022 for the Washington County Continuum of Care Homelessness Research Project (montpelier-vt.org/DocumentCenter/View/10689/Washington-County-CoC-Homelessness-Research-Project). As an incentive, those interviewed were offered a $100 gift certificate funded by the Montpelier Homelessness Task Force.

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and into a more stable lifestyle. It takes time. It takes money. And it's difficult."

Social Services

Another theory advanced by some for the state's high homelessness rate is that Vermont's relatively generous social services and a reputation as a progressive and generous state may attract unhoused individuals from other states.

Vermont does better than most states at sheltering the unhoused, at least in the winter. According to HUD's 2025 point-in-time survey, 8% of the homeless in Vermont were unsheltered during January, second lowest in the nation to Massachusetts.. Compare that to neighboring New Hampshire, where, according to the HUD report, 27% of homeless individuals there were unsheltered in January 2025. Nationally, 32% were unsheltered.

Barre Mayor Lauzon thinks differences in services among states may be increasing the homeless numbers in Vermont. "I'm not one to say that generosity and caring should have geographic limits," he said. "But if you're the most generous state and someone is in New Hampshire and they can simply hitchhike or catch a ride to Vermont where they'll immediately get assistance with no waiting period, well, if I was in that situation and I were that desperate, that's probably what I would do."

Former Montpelier Police Chief Eric Nordenson maintained that the Montpelier police were seeing an increase in the number of homeless individuals from out of state, but homeless advocates disagree with that assessment.

Another Way's Ken Russell says that the vast majority of homeless in the state are from Vermont or used to live in Vermont and have returned, and said that he doesn't see that many people from out of state. Russell cited a state study from a few years ago that found only 4% of those entering the motel program came directly from out of state.

Whatever the reasons for Vermont's high homelessness ranking, by all accounts the number of homeless in the state is on the rise, leading to concerns about what will happen this winter with a new legislatively mandated limit on the number of hotel and motel rooms that can be used for emergency housing.

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Reductions and Barriers to Motel Program May Leave Central Vermonters Out in the Cold

By Heather Koontz

A person about to enter the Montpelier Emergency Cold Weather Shelter in January 2026. Photo by John Lazenby.

In recent years, private hotels and motels have provided the largest source of shelter for unhoused Vermonters. But with the passage of bill H.938, access to such lodging is proving more difficult.

Bill H.938 (or Act 143) was signed by Gov. Phil Scott this June and overhauled Vermont's former emergency housing approach. In short, the act aims to decrease the use of hotels and motels for unhoused people and rely instead on paths to more permanent housing — shelters, treatment facilities, and other options — in an attempt to make homelessness a brief and nonrecurring experience.

While the law does not eliminate motel placements, it does cap the number of available rooms statewide at 700 per night from April through November and 1,000 per night from December through March. The maximum length of stay has also been reduced to 70 days from 80 in a 12-month period, excluding winter months.

In addition, the law introduces a screening process in place of the United Way's 211 helpline. Now, people seeking shelter will need to contact the Vermont Department for Children and Families to complete a detailed questionnaire during regular business hours. This new assessment considers immediate health and safety risks and scores applicants on several factors. Those with the highest scores are offered hotel/motel placement if it is available.

New Regs Add Barriers

Supporters of the law praise its intention to focus on permanent solutions, while opponents say it creates additional barriers for vulnerable populations and puts at-risk individuals in greater danger.

In Washington County, these concerns are echoed by agencies at the frontlines of the homelessness crisis.

"Recent changes to the motel/hotel program will have an immense impact in our communities," said Luke Rackers, co-executive director of Good Samaritan Haven. "We estimate 50 to 80 people in the motels will be newly unsheltered due to the new law."

CAPITAL CITY
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Homelessness

At a Montpelier City Council meeting in July, Rev. Beth Ann Maier of Christ Episcopal Church said the number of people experiencing homelessness is expected to double from last year. Part of this increase is a result of the state's reduction in emergency housing vouchers. According to Maier, that statewide reduction — from about 1,800 households last year to 1,000 this year — may impact upwards of 80 households in central Vermont.

Advocates have also voiced concerns about the timing of these new rules, as there is not yet an adequate amount of shelter and low-income housing to make up for the reduction in hotel and motel spaces.

"Our stance is that any changes to the system, especially as the new law is intended to be an improvement to the homelessness continuum, should have a plan for one-to-one replacement of beds instead of starting by unsheltering people," Rackers said. "While it shouldn't be the only solution and isn't the best solution for everyone, the motels play a key role, particularly during this time of crisis."

Winter Increases Vulnerability

According to a State of Homelessness report published by the Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, nearly 4,600 Vermonters were unhoused in 2025. Of those, 23% were children, 50% reported a serious mental illness, and 28% were on Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance.

This number, already a significant increase over pre-COVID levels, is expected to grow. As hotel and motel access becomes more restrictive and the winter months draw near, many Vermonters face extreme unknowns.

Last year, Montpelier City Councilors approved the use of the city hall basement as an emergency winter shelter when temperatures drop below 10 degrees, run by the newly formed nonprofit Montpelier Emergency Cold Weather Shelter. In a report to the Montpelier City Council on Apr. 29, Rev. Beth Ann Maier said the shelter, which relied heavily on volunteers, was open 44 nights; beds were used 346 times, and it served 72 individuals.

Montpelier City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury confirmed that space will be available again this year (now with a second emergency exit).

"The city is following through on the improvements to the basement hall space requested by volunteers to make it a safer experience," McNicholas Kury said. "[It] will serve under the same conditions that it did last year, as an overflow shelter on nights where temperatures drop below 10 degrees."

In addition to the 12 beds at city hall, the Unitarian Church has been approved as an emergency winter shelter for 15 people and the Barre Congregational Church will run a 12-bed shelter on extremely cold nights. These are in addition to the four 24/7 shelters run by Good Samaritan Haven.

Although these shelters are critical resources for central Vermonters, the amount of open beds barely scratches the surface of the estimated 80-plus individuals in need this winter — and only when the temperature is below 10 degrees.

At a recent council meeting, Councilor Jim Sheridan raised concerns about this temperature cut-off.

"I think it is a little low. I think it should be 20," Sheridan said. "I've lived in Vermont all my life and I think anything below 20 starts to feel cold."

Rackers also advocated for shelters to operate at higher temperature thresholds.

"Having low barrier shelter is important, as people can experience hypothermia and other adverse health effects below 50 degrees and definitely below 40 degrees," Rackers said. "Our street outreach team changes its approach to the life-saving supplies we help provide once temperatures reach that threshold, and then, of course, extreme cold is another approach entirely."

Regardless of the temperature, Good Samaritan Haven operates a 31-bed Welcome Center in Berlin, 17-bed Seminary Street House in Barre, a 13-bed recovery-oriented shelter in Barre Town, and 18-bed Turret House in Montpelier. And for those facing life-or-death situations, local police stations are always available as a place of emergency shelter.

Safety Concerns Have Risen Along With Increase in Montpelier's Unhoused Population

By Phil Dodd

MONTPELIER — Downtown safety is an issue that has been brought before the Montpelier City Council several times in the last couple of years, with some residents saying they don't feel safe and connecting the issue to the increased number of unhoused people living in Montpelier.

Partly in response, the council recently discussed adding a new safety-related "pillar" to its strategic plan. In draft form, the new pillar is being called "Community Safety and Wellbeing," though the council is planning to revisit that wording.

Montpelier City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury said she suggested adding this section to the strategic plan in "recognition of the significant amount of time staff is working on the intersection of public health and public safety regularly, and the significant amount of attention being brought to Council on the topic and their desire to be responsive to it."

Two years ago, in November 2024, the council heard from members of the public about men hanging out on the bike path who residents said had sexually harassed, threatened, and chased adults and children who were trying to walk to school or go for a jog.

At the time, there was speculation that the men doing the harassing were homeless; but it was not confirmed.

On Nov. 13, 2024, resident Rebecca Copans told councilors that "a friend was walking with his nine year-old daughter when someone propositioned her," she said. "What is happening in our town?" Around the same time, Montpelier High School coaches advised students to stay off the bike path and walk through town instead, according to the school's athletic director, Matt Link.

While the bike path, particularly near the Transit Center, has become somewhat less of a hangout since then, complaints have arisen recently about downtown.

This summer, several women posted on Front Porch Forum that encounters downtown with people believed to be unhoused made them feel harassed and unsafe. The women said they were changing where they walk, shop, and move around the city, in some cases limiting where they go.

Downtown merchants have expressed concerns that their businesses are affected by these reactions. Ken Russell, executive director of Another Way acknowledged "there's some rough stuff downtown that is not conducive to commerce."

In the period from Sept. 7 to Sept. 27 this year, the Montpelier Police Department made 15 arrests, eight of them involving individuals listed as unhoused or transient. The arrests of the unhoused were for crimes including simple assault, disorderly conduct, violation of conditions of release, unlawful mischief, unlawful trespass, and suspicion of driving under the influence.

And unhoused individuals themselves can be the victims of these crimes. In a two-week stretch in August, police broke up nine fights involving those experiencing homelessness, some of which resulted in serious injuries, according to city officials.

At the Montpelier City Council's Aug. 26 meeting, councilors discussed what the city can do to increase safety with an understaffed police department and limited resources.

The subject also came up during the council's Oct. 8 discussion of its strategic plan, where it tentatively decided to add that "Community Safety and Wellbeing" pillar, a draft phrase that will likely be further refined, according to Montpelier Mayor Marc Gwinn.

Gwinn said he does not like the term "community safety" because in his mind it ties homelessness to crime. "There is overlap, but it's because homelessness and substance abuse and mental illness create these public behaviors that create a perception of an unsafe environment," he told The Bridge.

"Whether people are unsafe or not, their perception is their reality," Gwinn added. "And so, if you feel unsafe, you feel unsafe, and that's going to dictate your behaviors. You're going to go out less, you're going to not spend money downtown, you're going to move somewhere else, or whatever."

Gwinn, who said he feels safe downtown himself partly because he knows some of those who are unhoused, expects the council to develop a new term at a future meeting. "It's not just about safety of people who fear the unhoused," he said. "It's also about the safety of the unhoused. It's also about wellness. It's about community."

Trinity Methodist Church Pastor Jay Voorhees, who regularly works with the unhoused, thinks more accountability

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PROFILE:
Skyler

Skyler Litchfield studied golf course management because he thought it was a sure thing. The 39-year-old Waterbury native graduated from Harwood Union High School in 2005 before attending SUNY Delhi in New York.

"My dreams originally were to work on a golf course in the summertime and ski, snowboard, and dogsled in the wintertime," he told me on a cold October afternoon as we sat outside Red Hen Bakery.

By graduation time, Litchfield said, he was missing a few credits. The university let him walk with his class, but he did not receive a diploma. He never made up the credits and, without a degree, didn't qualify for the jobs for which he applied. His years at SUNY put him nearly $60,000 in debt, he said, and New York State has been garnishing his tax returns to pay it off ever since.

He worked at Sugarbush Resort for seven years, he said, where housing came with the job. When he lost the job after being written up for tardiness one too many times, he also lost the roof over his head. For a while he lived in his car, and in a tiny house on his mother's property, which he said is now occupied by his sister. Unable to make payments, he lost the car and has lived outside ever since.

When we spoke, Litchfield had been camping for months with two other men for protection from thieves, he said. Litchfield would stash his stuff each morning and walk downtown for free breakfast and lunch at Montpelier's Trinity Methodist Church. Sometimes he panhandled enough to buy dinner.

Last August, he was hit by a drunk driver on the I-89 Waterbury on-ramp and suffered a serious leg injury. About two months ago, still recovering from that accident, a car driving by him near Cody Chevrolet on Montpelier's River Street lost a tire. It rolled right into Litchfield, striking him in that same leg, he said.

"If I wasn't on the side of the road, I wouldn't have been hit numerous times," he said, noting that the whole reason he has to walk along busy roads stems from his homelessness and lack of transportation. In fact, he routinely walked back to his campsite throughout each day, putting a lot of miles on his injured leg.

"Half my time is spent either here," he said from Red Hen, "or going to check on my stuff to make sure that nobody's messed with it."

Litchfield seemed worried about the few dollars he'd panhandled that day. Asked what he needed right then, he said a bank account, which he said is safer than cash. Digital cash and a P.O. Box also make it easier for people without housing or transportation to buy supplies online, he added.

Litchfield's dream is to find a job where he works outside and lives in a cabin. Since we talked, he's found a shelter bed. He'll get through this winter, at least, with a roof over his head.

— photo and story by Cassandra Hemenway

A Safe Place to Take Up Space

From a 24-hour hotline to a transitional home in Plainfield, Elevate Youth Services builds a web of support around young people in Washington County

By Rachel Pierce; photos by John Lazenby

CENTRAL VERMONT — For young people who have spent much of their lives without stable housing, having a bedroom with drawers can feel like a luxury. When Quinn (a pseudonym for a resident who asked to remain anonymous) moved into their room in one of Elevate's HOP Houses this fall, they spent the first few hours hanging art and lining the shelves with trinkets and stuffed animals.

"I was like, okay, this is my new home. I have to make it feel like home," Quinn said. "My whole life, I've never had the right furniture or a place to put all of my things." It's the kind of settling-in Neive Doyle, director of homeless youth programs, hopes to see in every resident.

"I want them to unpack the boxes," Doyle said. "I want them to roll out the rug."

Quinn's room is one cozy corner of a much larger operation: Elevate Youth Services, the only nonprofit in Washington County focused solely on teenagers and young adults. Its website describes Elevate as "a community of care" offering a "continuum of programs and services." Locally, that means counseling for individuals and families, substance use treatment, drop-in teen centers, and several kinds of housing: apartments for young people building independent-living skills; two-year vouchers to help them afford a place of their own; and the HOP Houses. Elevate also administers a number of statewide programs, including the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs.

Elevate Youth's Neive Doyle, right, assistant director of homeless youth programs, thumb wrestles with a resident outside the group's housing on the former Goddard College Campus in Plainfield.

An Umbrella Agency

Regardless of how young people arrive at Elevate — a parent's call, a school counselor's referral, the 24-hour line, or just walking into the office — everyone gets a case manager and a personalized plan of care. While the initial focus is on immediate needs, a plan of care may expand to encompass much more.

Executive Director Favor Ellis said many young people who have lived with trauma, homelessness, or mental illness haven't had the chance to learn basics such as doing laundry or opening a bank account, so Elevate "spend[s] a lot of time with life skills education." Behind the scenes, programs are designed to overlap. "We've always referred to it as an umbrella agency," said Nora Lovelette, former director of homeless youth programs and current youth access coordinator. "We also, as an agency, work hard to not silo ourselves." One young person may see a counselor in the office, grab a snack at the teen drop-in center in the Kellogg-Hubbard Library basement, and live in a HOP House — all operated by Elevate.

Elevate Youth Services Executive Director Favor Ellis with her assistant, Birdy, in the organization's office.

Youth Homelessness in Vermont

Vermont's January 2025 point-in-time count found 868 people under 25 experiencing homelessness, according to the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, administered by Elevate. About three-quarters were minors. The state's coordinated-entry system, which uses a somewhat broader definition, counted 1,388 young people in June alone. In rural areas, youths often rely on couch surfing, sleeping in vehicles, or staying outdoors, making them hard to count.

Not Just a Shelter

The HOP Houses occupy two dorms on the former Goddard College campus

in Plainfield, and accommodate 16 young adults aged 18 to 24. The staff aims for residents to stay about six months, but exceptions can be made.

"We are really meeting folks where they're at," said Lovelette. Residents are required to meet with a case manager and be actively studying or looking for work. "It's not just a shelter," she said. "It's a shelter program."

Because bus service is limited in Plainfield, staff members spend much of their time driving residents to jobs, classes, and appointments.

"I couldn't figure out how to do anything without a car," Quinn said. "I've gotten a lot done because I can get the rides."

While doing so much driving can be challenging, staff members also see it as a chance to talk and to point residents toward the services around them. Doyle described a Monday trip that included a stop for free coffee at the Onion River Food Shelf and "a really great time in the car together." By the end of the day, the resident had scheduled four appointments and felt ready to make some scary phone calls.

Information flows both ways: Doyle said he learned how "epic" the food shelf in Marshfield was from Quinn. "[Residents] bring in their own strings to build that web," he said, "and everyone just benefits."

Welcome Home

Claiming a bedroom was one thing for Quinn. Feeling at home in the rest of the house was another.

"Neive had to tell me that it's okay to take up space," Quinn said, "because I was scared to take a shower."

Doyle knows the urge to stay small. At 21, he was unhoused for just under two years before being accepted to the recently closed Sterling College in Craftsbury. The dean of community at the time, Favor Ellis, told him, "You're safe here, and you can take up space."

That "set me on this whole new dream," Doyle said, "because I was able to land in a safe place. And I think the reward for me is being able to share that experience." Now he tells residents, "You're here, you can land. And let's take that next step forward, that half step forward, that look around the corner at the step forward."

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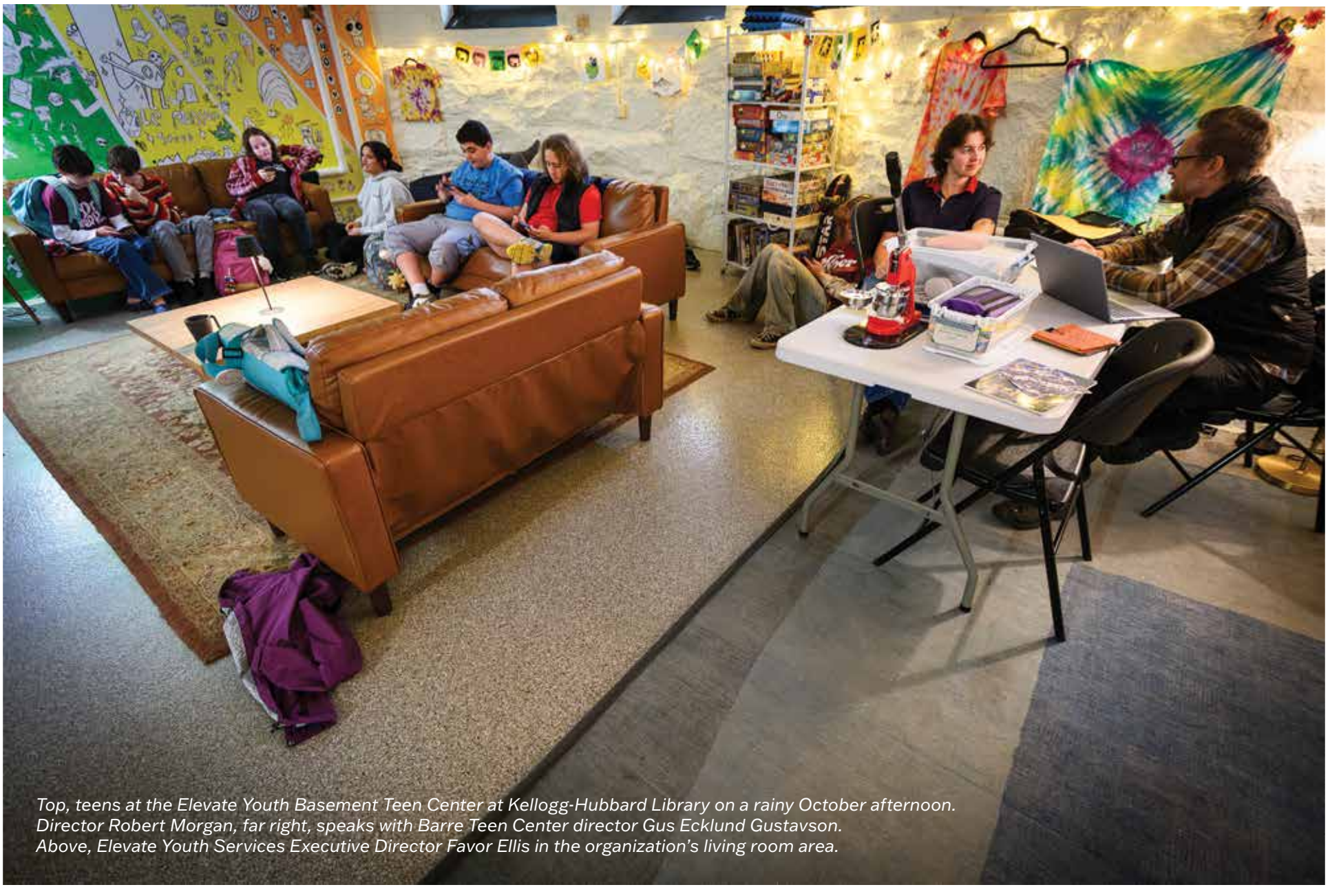

Top, teens at the Elevate Youth Basement Teen Center at Kellogg-Hubbard Library on a rainy October afternoon. Director Robert Morgan, far right, speaks with Barre Teen Center director Gus Ecklund Gustavson. Above, Elevate Youth Services Executive Director Favor Ellis in the organization's living room area.

Homelessness is Rising in Washington County and is Concentrated in Barre-Montpelier

By Phil Dodd

In June 2025, Washington County had the third highest per capita rate of homelessness in Vermont, behind Windham and Bennington counties, according to a survey conducted by homelessness-focused organizations.

Although Chittenden County — Vermont's biggest county by population — had the most unhoused people (1,036), it ranked fifth on a per capita basis.

The survey found 651 unhoused people in Washington County, or 109 per 10,000 population, much higher than the state average, which is the third highest in the nation.

The number of people experiencing homelessness in the county continues to rise, according to advocates. Most live in Barre and Montpelier, and, to a lesser extent, Berlin.

State funding for emergency housing in motels in those three municipalities vastly expanded during the pandemic and has gradually been reduced since, but remains a reason homelessness is concentrated in the two cities, Montpelier Mayor Marc Gwinn suggested.

"A lot of the folks who were housed through state programs are no longer housed in those state programs," Gwinn said of the situation in Montpelier. "Every time we came to a cliff where some portion of a voucher program was ending, the next day or week, we would have an increased population on our streets."

Advocates point out other reasons. As the only cities in the county, Barre and Montpelier have more services than smaller towns, including county courthouses. Both have 24/7 shelters, cold-weather shelters, and food pantries, and both offer free meals on a regular basis. And panhandling tends to work better where there are more people.

Gwinn said camaraderie among the unhoused also helps boost the homeless numbers in Barre and Montpelier. "When people build community living outdoors or on our streets, then even if they wind up off of our streets, because they go to rehab or they go to jail or wherever, often they wind up back here because this is where they know that there's a community, where they have a sense of belonging," he said.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

Food and Shelter

In Barre, free meals are served throughout the week, according to Tess Taylor, Barre City's homelessness and housing liaison.

"There is breakfast every day and then there's some lunches and there's a big community meal on Friday and Sunday nights," Taylor told The Bridge. Barre also has a food pantry and a food shelf, she said. (Montpelier has its own food pantry, the Montpelier Community Market.)

Shelters in Barre City include the year-round Good Samaritan Haven shelter, with beds for up to 17 people, increasing to 24 when it moves next year, and Downstreet's Speranza Inn, a 41-room service-integrated hotel serving the homeless. Barre Town hosts Good Samaritan's 13-bed Recovery Center for people committed to sobriety.

A 12-bed cold-weather shelter opened when temperatures fell below zero at Barre's Congregational Church last winter, staffed by volunteers, and the Aldrich Library acted as a warming center during the day. Taylor's job includes coordinating those volunteers. She has a list of 63 people willing to bring food or take a shift at the cold-weather shelter.

"Barre is a real volunteer town, always has been," she said. "People are always asking, how can I help?"

In Berlin, Good Samaritan operates the 31-bed "Welcome Center" for people waiting for permanent housing, among others. There is no cold-weather shelter in Berlin.

Last winter, Montpelier had a 15-bed, low-barrier shelter open nights, run by Capstone Community Action at the Unitarian Church. Volunteers also managed a 12-bed extreme weather emergency shelter in the city hall basement when temperatures dropped below 10 degrees. This summer, Good Samaritan Haven opened the 18-bed Turret House year-round shelter on Barre Street, open 24/7.

At least one free meal is available every weekday in Montpelier. Monday through Thursday, the nonprofit Community Table provides breakfast and lunch at Trinity Methodist Church, and Fridays St. Augustine's offers lunch. Also, Another Way — a sanctuary for "psychiatric survivors" — offers breakfasts, takeaway dinners, and on Fridays a community meal.

"We have food available essentially all the time," said Another Way's Executive Director Ken Russell.

Nonetheless, from July to September, Another Way saw a 47% increase in the number of people it served compared to 2025, Russell said.

"Our food budget has gone up 50%," he said.

The Trinity Church is also seeing increased demand, said Trinity's pastor Jay Voorhees.

"We were averaging 70 to 80 meals a day last year, and now we're well over a

see **Homelessness Rising,** *page 25*

Alex Wilson plans to camp outside all winter.

As a young transgender person two years sober, Wilson, 28, told The Bridge he does not feel safe in shelters, even in sub-zero weather. He said he avoided "drunks and druggies" by camping outdoors in the coldest weather last year.

"I do have every intention of camping this winter," he said, sitting at a picnic table outside the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in October. "I like being by myself. But I don't like the cold."

Wilson and his dog Luna have been camping for two years, he said, noting that he lost a place at Good Samaritan Haven, the details of which The Bridge has not confirmed.

Wilson moves his camp every two weeks to avoid detection by Montpelier city officials, he said, and he is exhausted.

Nonetheless, on Nov. 2, Wilson was issued another notice to move his camp.

"I've just been running and moving my camp since the moment I got here [to Montpelier]," he said.

Wilson grew up in Brattleboro and said he ended up in foster care at age 16 after coming out as trans to his parents. He alleges he experienced abuse in foster care and had to "escape with a tire iron" at 18, before eventually landing in Barre.

He rented an apartment from the Barre Housing Authority (BHA) until 2024 at a subsidized rate of $284 per month.

Wilson had some incidents that ended his rental at BHA; the details were not clear, but he still owes BHA nearly $3,000 in outstanding rent and other charges. He's been trying to find funding to help clean up that balance, because it disqualifies him on rental applications.

Both Wilson and Luna have complex medical needs; Wilson receives $900 a month in disability payments because he lives with documented PTSD and Mast Cell Activation Syndrome. Luna requires a special diet and has received free surgery from the Mitzvah Fund.

Luna is a cherished companion, but also "provides me with protection and I protect her, too," Wilson said. Having protection while camping solo cannot be overrated; Wilson has experienced his share of harassment, he told The Bridge.

Wilson still needs a number of supplies to camp through the winter, so he created a wishlist at Walmart (bit.ly/4BEu0Y7) that he calls "Alexander's & Luna's winter survival fundraiser."

The list includes winter and camping gear for Wilson, dog care items for Luna, and sleeping bags for both of them.

— photo and story by Cassandra Hemenway

Understanding Montpelier's Homelessness Committee

The committee's role, its limitations, and the challenges of addressing homelessness

By Emma Rosenthal

Via Community News Service, a University of Vermont journalism internship, for The Bridge

MONTPELIER — For people experiencing homelessness, finding a place to sleep during a Vermont winter is only one part of the challenge. For the city, figuring out how to respond is another.

The Montpelier Homelessness Committee works to bridge that gap, bringing the needs of unhoused residents into conversations about local policy and possible solutions.

The committee began as a task force in 2019, as the city prepared to address the growing problem of homelessness.

"It became clear that in the midst of the pandemic there was going to need to be some coordination around how we're dealing with the growing homeless population in Montpelier," said Rev. Jay Voorhees, a member of the committee and pastor of the Trinity United Methodist Church.

The group eventually transitioned from a temporary task force to a permanent committee, giving it an ongoing role in advising the city council on homelessness-related issues.

Cary Brown, a city councilor who serves as a liaison to the committee, said the change formalized the group's place in city government but did not substantially alter its work. Its purpose is to identify community needs, gather input from people who have been homeless or work with unhoused people, and recommend possible responses to the city council.

"What I'm really looking to the committee for is recommendations, advice and input from people with lived experience and who work with people with lived experience," Brown said.

The committee has helped inform efforts such as opening the basement of Montpelier City Hall last winter for overflow cold-weather shelter and exploring ways for unhoused residents to safely store their belongings. But its role has limits.

"The committee doesn't have the authority or power to make dramatic changes or take a lot of action," Brown said. "It's really just an advisory body."

Committee members discuss the needs of unhoused residents, hear updates from outreach workers and city staff, and consider which approaches could be most effective.

The committee meets twice a month over Zoom, with agendas covering updates from city staff, the city council, and outreach workers, as well as ongoing issues and potential projects. While the discussions can identify possible next steps, turning recommendations into action requires coordination with city staff members and officials, Voorhees and Brown said.

The committee has been discussing the possibility of reinstating a locker program that would allow people experiencing homelessness to store their belongings safely. The city previously installed 12 lockers behind the recreation center on Barre Street, but Brown said they have deteriorated and are no longer adequately weatherproof. The city staff is researching alternatives.

"The hope is that people who have more stuff than they can carry around with them will have a safe place to keep it," Brown said.

Beyond exploring practical solutions like the locker program, the committee is also working to address how the community understands homelessness.

"The work that we're doing for the most part right now is working on education for the community, because there are a lot of myths about homelessness that get passed around," Voorhees said.

Some of these narratives involve where homeless people are originally from or why they settle in Vermont, Voorhees said.

Those misconceptions can influence how residents respond to efforts to address homelessness, particularly when proposed solutions affect public spaces or neighborhoods, he said. Voorhees described a tension between supporting the opening of a homeless shelter in principle and opposing it when it's proposed nearby.

For Voorhees, addressing homelessness also means recognizing the people behind the issue. He said unhoused people are often seen as dangerous but argues that there isn't enough data to back up those assertions.

"There's a tendency to dehumanize those who are experiencing homelessness," Voorhees said.

The committee's work, then, extends beyond recommending programs or identifying immediate needs. Voorhees says encouraging public education and bringing the experiences of unhoused residents into local discussions can help create a more informed conversation about how Montpelier responds to homelessness.

Whether that work leads to broader change will depend not only on the committee's recommendations, but also on how city officials and the community respond to them.

As Montpelier continues to address homelessness, the committee remains one way for community concerns and the experiences of unhoused residents to reach city officials.

Residents who want to learn more about the committee's work can attend its meetings, which are open to the public. Those interested in becoming members can submit an application through the city's website, with appointments made by the city council.

"These people are really struggling, and we do have a responsibility to help them." Voorhees said.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

PROFILE: **Zack**

Zack Hughes spent one night homeless in Burlington in the year 2000, and that was enough to change his life. At the time he'd been planning to run away from home. A night in a shelter with no money and no way back home permanently shifted his perspective, he told The Bridge.

"I have only been unhoused one night in my life. And it changed me forever," he said. "After that night in the homeless shelter, I changed my mind (about running away), and that saved my life."

It also launched Hughes into a life of service.

He graduated from Montpelier High School in 1998 and has been focused on community service ever since. Currently he is co-chair of the Montpelier Homelessness Committee; a board member for the Vermont Center for Independent Living; and represents Vermont Psychiatric Survivors (for which he is also a board member) on the state's Mental Health Crisis Response Commission representing "an individual who has a personal experience of living with a mental illness or psychiatric disability," according to the commission website.

That's more than enough for most people, but Hughes also serves on the Vermont Housing and Conservation Land Access and Opportunity board, an entity created "to recommend new opportunities and improve access to woodlands, farmland, and land and home ownership for Vermonters from historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities who continue to face barriers to land and home ownership," according to its website.

But where you most often might see Hughes is in his volunteer street outreach work with those who are unhoused in Montpelier and Barre. He volunteers through an organization called Peer Plus, checking on individuals who live outside; delivering camping gear; assisting with hotel renewal paperwork; and managing requests for basic needs, such as food.

One thing Hughes has observed, he says, is that "we're all one step away from homelessness. It can happen just like that — from a fire or flood, or anything."

— photo and story by Cassandra Hemenway

Commentary

Balancing Compassion and Accountability

By Kelly McNicholas Kury

There are great opportunities that lie ahead for the city of Montpelier. It also has challenges, as all cities do. I have been the city manager for eight months, and among the most surprising has been the city's intimate involvement in addressing homelessness. City staff members in most departments are regularly called on to facilitate solutions, respond to incidents, and connect resources around both individual cases and the systemic problems that underpin homelessness.

One of the most difficult aspects of the job is responding to reports of encampments on city-owned public lands. The authority to enforce the city's encampment policy lies with the city manager. I am asked to attend camps and assess whether there is a public health concern or conflict with other public uses. It is a discretion that I endeavor to apply thoughtfully. It is a heavy decision every time I notify someone struggling in the most fundamental ways that they need to relocate. The city's process involves police presence only during initial visits when safety risks are unknown. There have been situations where a camper violated conditions of release or had an outstanding warrant, but those are rare.

What has been most challenging is grappling with the systems that have rendered individuals unhoused. I have visited camps occupied by a wheelchair user, a family with very young children, and individuals with clear mental illness. In all cases, they were well known to service providers. We have a robust ecosystem of human and behavioral health services, yet I remain frustrated that even the most vulnerable individuals are not getting permanently housed.

In exchange for being a compassionate community, Montpelier wants to retain clean and safe access to its public spaces and avoid some of the unhealthy and undesirable impacts of camps and untreated mental health and substance abuse disorders in public settings. This is one of the hardest balances for a community to strike, and I don't think we have achieved it. I regularly hear opposing perspectives: some business owners fear we are on a slippery slope to Burlington or Portland and want a stronger enforcement approach, while others embrace the homeless community without emphasizing accountability to the broader public.

I believe balance is possible, but it requires a coordinated effort to close systems gaps and pair compassion with accountability. I also believe the perception of public safety is as important as what the data say. Negative perceptions arise when people encounter erratic or unpredictable behavior, public intoxication, or drug use. Perception affects residents' experience of the city and our ability to welcome visitors, attract housing, and encourage economic development.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

Certainly, this is not perpetuated by everyone experiencing homelessness. A small group of a few dozen individuals, generally well known to service and public safety communities, account for many of the most challenging situations. Yet the systems of support and accountability have not been strong enough to successfully intervene. The most challenging individuals often cycle through services until they lose privileges or move through the court system with little consequence before returning to the streets.

Within my first six weeks as city manager, I was called upon to plan a special meeting of the city council to discuss homelessness and consider an actionable plan. That discussion focused on what I see as the four powers the city possesses on this issue: Authorize, Allocate, Convene, and Advocate. These powers have informed my proposal for an additional strategic plan pillar that we are calling Community Safety and Wellbeing.

My impetus for introducing it is not one factor alone. It reflects the significant amount of staff time devoted to issues at the intersection of public health and public safety, as well as the attention the topic receives by the council from the community.

This summer I responded to reports of dozens of encampments, requiring collaboration with service providers, police follow-up when necessary, and contracted cleanup of public spaces. Staff members attend weekly Situation Table meetings and regularly convene with state, regional, and local partners to address underlying causes of homelessness. We also experienced the departure of four police officers, all of whom indicated that the increasingly intractable nature of these calls influenced their decision. During our police chief recruitment process, candidates were asked to embrace community policing, de-escalation, and collaborative partnerships as core expectations of leadership.

I have also been involved in discussions exploring temporary and permanent sheltering and the city's role in supporting such efforts. Regular conversations with colleagues continue to deepen my understanding of the systemic patterns contributing to homelessness and behavioral health disorders across the region.

The Community Safety and Wellbeing pillar is intended to recognize the council's commitment to positive change and the staff's ongoing efforts around these issues. It proposes continued work to improve conditions for vulnerable residents while stabilizing public safety resources. This includes planning for recruitment and retention so our police department can avoid another severe staffing reduction as retirements approach. It also contemplates expanding downtown resources to improve outreach and maintain public order and a peaceful downtown experience.

We are looking to successful efforts such as Project Vision in Rutland and One Brattleboro for inspiration. These multiagency partnerships bring together decision-makers to centralize information, define problems and expectations, and measure accountability of our efforts and progress toward improving conditions for vulnerable individuals while protecting life, peace, and property.

Montpelier is ripe for such a coordinated effort.

Kelly McNicholas Kury is Montpelier's City Manager.

The material presented on these pages represents the opinion of the authors and does not reflect the opinions of The Bridge. Commentaries may be submitted to editor@montpelierbridge.com. Preference is given to submissions by those who live in central Vermont. Submissions are encouraged to be 500 to 750 words in length.

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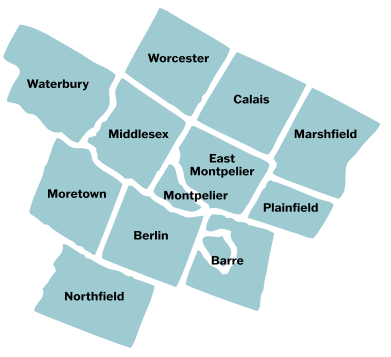

Are you from **Barre, Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Plainfield, Middlesex,** or **Worcester?**

The Bridge is seeking correspondents
in those towns.

Email **editor@thebridgevt.org** for details.

Commentary

The Question We Carry Out the Door

By Jay Voorhees

On Friday, Oct. 16, 80 people came together at the church I serve, Trinity Methodist Church in Montpelier, to remember.

We came to remember two people we knew who had lost their lives far too early over the past few weeks. We came to remember that we live in a place where there are people in Montpelier who, to use the words of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, live in places not "meant for human habitation." And, we came to remember that it shouldn't be like this, and it doesn't have to be this way.

One of those we lost believed that life was too hard to bear. Another died on the front lawn of another local church. In those losses, the community was reminded that homelessness is a life-and-death situation.

I have spent a lot of years walking and talking with those experiencing homelessness in Nashville, where I lived before moving to Montpelier. And far too often, I've stood in a hidden cemetery next to a large pile of dirt and prayed over a friend who was being lowered into the ground. I carry Jimmie, Will, Whitney, and scores of others with me everywhere I go, and the more I think about it, the more I ask "Why?"

I've asked "Why?" so many times that I've lost count. Why do people who have no place to call home die so much younger than the rest of us, when a JAMA Internal Medicine study of unsheltered adults in Boston put the average age at death at 53 and the CDC puts the national life expectancy at 79? Why are our systems to help others so unwieldy that people lose hope and give up? Why do we not have enough housing for those at the bottom end of the economic ladder? Why is our society unwilling to do what it takes to ensure people have a place to live, along with resources for mental health, addiction, and services to help people move from chaos to stability? There are all sorts of "Why?" and while analysts have some answers, people continue to die alone, in the cold, with no place to call home.

At the vigil I said it was scandalous that we live in a place where people are dying on the streets, and I asked everyone there to carry the question "Why?" out the door with them.

Yet, asking "Why?" is not enough. It's time to ask "what do we need to do?" That night, as I sat listening, I heard a good place to start.

"We just need to love one another," a friend said. "That's what we need to carry from this night."

We would likely nod in agreement, but that sentence asks more of us than any of my earlier questions. Those questions pointed outward, at systems and budgets and a society I could comfortably call "it." It is much harder to turn the question around and ask why we are able to live alongside this at all, why we offer sympathy from a distance when empathy would ask us to understand what life is actually like for the people we pass on the sidewalk, and why so many of us can see a person sleeping outside and tell ourselves that it is somebody else's job. And I'm not exempt, because there are moments when I want to close my eyes to the pain around me.

People at the vigil spoke about the two we had lost as individuals, with their humor and their struggles and their flaws, as people who had been known, and that kind of knowing is what I mean by empathy: not feeling sorry for someone from a safe distance but making the effort to understand where a person is coming from and what they are going through. I suspect that is also what my friend meant by love, which is empathy that doesn't leave when it becomes inconvenient and refuses to let anyone become a category. Empathy of that kind doesn't excuse anything, but it keeps the question honest, because it is very hard to stay comfortable with something once you know a person's name.

I don't know what Montpelier should do about all this. What I do know is that we gathered that night to remember, and that remembering, done honestly, is uncomfortable, because it asks what we are willing to keep living with. If we can sit in that discomfort a little longer than is convenient and ask "Why?" of ourselves as readily as we ask it of everyone else, then the two people we gathered to mourn may have changed us in ways that matter, and that may be the best place we have to start.

Rev. Jay Voorhees is the pastor of the Trinity United Methodist Church in Montpelier, and a member of the Montpelier Homelessness Committee.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD
Homelessness

Commentary

How Can I Help?

By Julie Bond

As a shelter operator, I am often asked why homelessness is so pervasive and how it can be solved. It is akin to asking a firefighter how this fire came to be an inferno as they rush into the burning building with the vital task of saving anyone inside.

Over a half century ago, physician John B. McKinlay wrote what would become a seminal public health article that coined the academic phrases 'upstream' and 'downstream' factors in public health, based on a parable from his friend and fellow physician, Irving Zola.

Zola told McKinlay that in the practice of medicine, it sometimes felt like standing on the shore of a river hearing the cry of a drowning person. He would jump in, pull the person to safety, and begin CPR. Just then he'd hear another cry. He'd jump in again, bring that person to shore, and administer rescue breaths. Over and over. Zola noted he was so busy responding to crises that he had no time to 'run upstream' and figure out who or what was pushing everyone into the river in the first place.

This parable led McKinlay to examine the paradox of focusing so much of our collective energy on 'downstream' quick fixes while little long-term progress is made. He suggested we reorient toward the 'upstream' causes of the challenges we see downstream.

Here we are in 2026, and the message of McKinlay and Zola could not be more relevant. What they were pointing to is the need to center individuals, well-being, connection, and social capital — rather than political or financial interests — in how we design our systems. What and who we center upstream makes a huge difference to how calm the waters remain downstream.

As an emergency provider, whose organization's 40-year-old charter is solely to provide beds and support services for people experiencing homelessness, I sometimes feel I'm the last person who should be asked how we arrived at some of our biggest systemic failures and how to fix them.

Like firefighters, we are responders — the providers at the end of a long chain of cause and effect, reacting to what has been built over decades through the choices we make about whose needs come first in our laws, plans, policies, and practices.

In the spirit of McKinlay's upstream and downstream framework, I want to share some observations and invitations for how we — as individuals and as a community — can make upstream changes, from small tweaks to broader policy, that put people ahead of the bottom line.

These suggestions aren't flashy or especially comfortable, and they may stir up some feelings. None of them ask the people I serve 'downstream' to change. They simply ask the rest of us to consider where we hold power to shift things upstream.

If you're a business or lender who works with people whose income and credit history you know, is your pricing structured to protect low-income customers? If your organization isn't a community development financial institution, could it build in similar lending practices and financial literacy support for unbanked or low-income patrons?

Invest in social capital like your life depends on it. Because it does.

If you manage rental property, are your rents more than 20–30% of your tenants' monthly income? Have rents climbed in step with real estate speculation over the last several years, or shifted toward short-term rental income over long-term tenants? Multi-year leases with capped, reasonable rent growth can reduce vacancy and turnover costs while keeping people housed — it's worth considering.

Housing precarity, homelessness, elders on fixed incomes losing their homes, and college graduates leaving the state all trace back to housing affordability. I'd ask landlords to consider truly affordable rates, decoupled where possible from the speculative market, or sliding scales based on income.

If we're going to solve our housing crisis, we need to center people, not the dollar. Business practices that make it harder for low-income earners to access transportation, health insurance, banking, food and housing are a direct contributor to the homelessness we're seeing. I know the response to this is often, 'that's just what things cost these days' — but we always have a voice and a choice in calling for something different.

I invite leaders of both nonprofit and for-profit organizations to weigh social well-being alongside financial success in their programmatic and policy choices.

I invite those who govern and legislate on behalf of Vermonters to make choices that center people over short-term fiscal fixes — to enable visionary, multi-year investment rather than tinkering that doesn't go deep enough to last. Build in sliding scales of terms for people with varying incomes that are meaningful, not just symbolic.

If the first reaction to any of this is frustration, it's worth asking what that reaction is about. If the concern is lost profit, that tells us what's being prioritized over people's well-being.

Centering the bottom line over one another affects every one of us, at every income level. We are all trying to make our way in a world where the rising cost of living touches everyone who needs food, transportation, housing, health care, and education.

If you have the ability to shape policy or programs where you work, consider how to weigh people and well-being alongside profit. Small shifts in language and rules can change outcomes.

CAPITAL CITY FORWARD Homelessness

Saying 'this is just how we do things' keeps systems exactly as they are. We're all connected to the systems of daily life, and we all have some power to shift them — through our actions, our votes, and our spending.

If you see room for change where you work — something that would ease access to care, services, or healthier products — speak up. That's how change begins. If you don't agree with how your workplace operates, ask for change, and know that voicing it is itself worthwhile.

If you're a voter who wants to see change: vote.

If you're a tax payer in a community with a challenging school budget decision: demand the quality our students, teachers, and schools deserve. Invest in them and the future, not just the budget line.

If your organization can teach practical life skills — a version of Home Economics 2.0, an amped up consumer-savvy Life Economics for budgeting, cooking, shopping on a budget, financial literacy, literacy, and numeracy — this kind of investment will help people avoid falling through the cracks and into predatory situations.

If you ask me how to solve homelessness, or simply improve quality of life for everyone, I'd say choosing practices that empower rather than disempower is one of the most impactful things we can do, across every industry. I see the cost of the alternative every day.

I've named a few industries here not to single anyone out, but to illustrate that nearly every job or role carries some choice about centering people over profit.

I suspect that a business known for treating people fairly through right-sized transactions would find the difference between 'making a buck' and 'making a difference' more than pays for itself.

We've had four deaths of people experiencing homelessness in our community in the last month, and winter hasn't even arrived. That weighs heavily on all of us who do this work, and it's part of why I believe so strongly that each of us holds some power to make intentional, human-centered choices in our own corner of this system.

What I'm excited about is bold vision, creative solutions, and the understanding that each of us can be a changemaker. Look for ways to keep the waters downstream a little clearer and more hospitable — for yourself and for others. Center one another over the bottom line. Invest in social capital like your life depends on it. Because it does.

Julie Bond is the co-executive director of Good Samaritan Haven, a shelter network for the unhoused serving Washington County and greater central Vermont.

The material presented here represents the opinion of the author and does not reflect the opinions of The Bridge. Commentaries may be submitted to editor@montpelier-bridge.com. Preference is given to submissions by those who live in central Vermont. Submissions are encouraged to be 500 to 750 words in length.

Poetry: Two Totes

By Julie Bond

They say I can only have two totes

to store my things at the shelter.

How can two totes carry all that I am?

I may be neat as a pin or messy as a sandstorm — 2 totes will contain neither way of being.

How can two totes contain all that I have come from?

This anchor I need to stay grounded to this earth will not fit in this 2×4 space.

The memories alone take up dozens of storage units across space and time.

How can two totes contain all that I hope for in the future?

Where can my complexity be stored?

I'll try to stuff away my grief in this corner.

I'll fold my dreams and lay them flat on top.

I am gathering items for my future apartment — these steak knives and utensils are for my new kitchen someday.

Yet the knives must be locked up for safety.

The yoke around my neck will not fit in this plastic box at night. I'll just keep wearing it so it doesn't count towards my two totes.

Belongings, trash, treasure ...

This picture frame is broken, but the photo within the glass is of me and my beloved, who is no longer with me.

Lost are my albums

my birth certificate

my IDs

Begin again from nothing, but don't accumulate.

How can I take up space without taking up space?

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Safety Concerns

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could help. "What we decided to do [as a state] through policy was to really minimize incarceration as an option for providing accountability for behaviors."

"On the one hand, I understand that," he said. "On the flip side, it does really seem like people who have committed violent acts are not receiving a lot of accountability. They go through the courts and they kind of cycle through. It really does tie the police department's hands in terms of what they can do."

"I came from a large metropolitan area [Nashville] that had city jails and all of those kinds of things. And we believed in restorative justice and we really worked towards restorative justice, but there are also times when people, for their own safety, may need to be segregated from the rest of the population."

Crostic Answers (puzzle on page 31)

Cameron Crowe, "The Uncool" -- "Music was already more than music. It was a door that opened for three minutes, sometimes way longer. In the forbidden world, there was no judgment. And when the song was over, the door clanged shut again."

A.	Chewed	L.	Entropy
B.	Around the world	M.	Twigs
C.	Moods	N.	Howe
D.	Emirates	O.	Enter the Dragon
E.	Rajah	P.	Unforgiven
F.	Old hat	Q.	Nemesis
G.	Nemo	R.	Caws
H.	Chugged	S.	Owen Meany
I.	Rims	T.	Out and about
J.	Omar Sharif	U.	Little Head
K.	Witness stand		

Elevate

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Not every resident settles in as quickly. For young people who have experienced generational homelessness, Lovelette said, "It was surprising to me that being housed can be traumatizing when it's not what you're used to." When a resident breaks a house rule or a social norm, staff members try compassion and conversation before discipline. Even lying, Lovelette said, can be understood as a survival skill: "They're lying to us because lying has served them." The answer is trust. "How we build that trust," Doyle said, "is showing up every time the same way: steady, willing to be here with care, with kindness, with respect."

Looking Ahead

With a place to live and people to lean on, young people can turn toward their own goals. Quinn is working on finishing their GED and sorting out what comes after — maybe studying massage therapy, art, or cosmetology.

"I'm just trying to figure out what I want to do …" they said, "because then I could just get started." Quinn is learning to take up space beyond the house, too. They sat in on a coalition youth advisory board meeting and found it easier to join than expected. "I didn't realize that I could be a part of something like that," Quinn said.

"Come to the Statehouse with us in the springtime," responded Doyle.

But first, the GED.

"It's been so long," Quinn said. "I can finally tell my parents, and they'll maybe be proud of me or something."

Need help?

Young people up to age 24, and their families, can call Elevate's 24-hour youth line at 802-229-9151. Insurance can be billed, but services are free regardless of ability to pay.

- Mental health emergencies: 802-229-0591.
- Crisis line: call or text 988.

Want to help?

Elevate always needs towels and toiletries, which can be dropped at 652 Granger Road, Barre, VT 05641.

- For donations: elevateyouthvt.org/donate
- For information about volunteering or learning about other ways to help: info@elevateyouthvt.org

Homelessness Rising

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hundred," he said. "We've had as many as 140 meals served in a day." The lunches are open to everyone in the community, not just those experiencing homelessness, he added.

"We are seeing a number of new people that have entered the community, and it's not clear exactly where they're coming from," he said. "They are people who can't find a place to live or have gotten themselves in a situation where it's difficult for them to find a place to live."

Vorhees also noted that — despite historically providing services such as soup kitchens — churches cannot carry the full burden of helping those who are homeless.

"That was great back when everybody went to church and we were all flush," he said. "Today, Vermont has one of the lowest rates of church attendance in the nation and the days of us being able to fund all that are gone." On top of that, Montpelier's downtown churches are still recovering from the 2023 flood, he pointed out.

Who should pick up the slack around homelessness? "Cities say it's the state's responsibility, they should take care of it," Voorhees said. "The state says no, the cities should take care of it. There is a lot of finger-pointing about who is responsible for addressing this issue. And the reality is we all are."

Some community members, including Montpelier City Councilor and Homelessness Committee liaison Jim Sheridan, say shelters and free meals in Barre and Montpelier, while compassionate, may be attracting unhoused people from across the state.

"There's an old saying, if you want to attract birds, you put out bird feeders," Sheridan said.

Sheridan said other larger towns in the county, such as Waterbury and Northfield, do not offer daily free meals or cold-weather shelters. "I talked to a woman in Northfield who said if they get a homeless person, they tell them to go to Montpelier," he said.

Four Montpelier police officers, including the police chief, left for new jobs in Northfield recently. According to Montpelier City Manager Kelly McNicholas Kury, "all indicated that the increasingly intractable nature of the calls responding to members of the unhoused community influenced their decision." Northfield does have an 18-bed transitional home for unhoused veterans from anywhere in northern New England.

Voorhees is a pastor not only for Trinity United Methodist Church, but also Methodist churches in Plainfield and Northfield. He said the Northfield church has considered offering free lunches or emergency winter shelter, but "so far, we have not been able to discern a need to do that."

"Probably people who are in Plainfield and Northfield and become homeless might gravitate to Montpelier because it's a bigger city with more access," he said.

"If Montpelier's going to call itself a city, we need to recognize that cities come with what I would call urban problems," he said. "And some of that is poverty. Some of that is homelessness, which is just a result of poverty in a lot of ways."

Barre Mayor Thom Lauzon supports shelters in his city. "When it gets very, very cold we really fear for people's safety," he said. "We have allowed the churches to stand up shelters overnight, giving people breakfast in the morning. We will continue to do so."

But Lauzon said it would help if other towns in the county offered shelters. That's a view shared by Luke Rackers, co-director of Good Samaritan Haven.

"Ideally, we would have more smaller-scale shelters in all communities around Vermont, so folks can provide that service in their community. But it would take more resources for that to happen," Rackers said.

Encampments

In Barre and Montpelier, people who have nowhere to stay but outside will likely have to move if they camp on public property.

"There is no camping in Barre on public property and we have no plans to make it legal to camp on public property," Lauzon said. "There are no facilities that are adequate. There's no running water."

"The problem is you move [people] along and they'll just find another spot, which again, doesn't offer water," Lauzon said.

So far no one appears to be camping on Berlin town property, although the town is considering developing a policy on the subject, said Berlin Town Administrator Vince Conti. In the past, Berlin has broken up encampments on private property upon request by property owners, but no requests have been made about two such current encampments, he said. Conti said people have donated supplies such as food and sleeping bags to Berlin police, who deliver them to the encampments.

Montpelier Mayor Marc Gwinn told The Bridge some residents think the city should designate city land for camping, but others have raised questions about liability and staffing costs and whether a designated encampment would attract more unhoused people.

"Could we do that?" he asked. "We could, but then there's a whole host of effects that we would have in order to be able to responsibly do that," he said. "It doesn't cost nothing. And it doesn't have no impact."

Whatever the reasons a homeless population continues to grow in Montpelier and Barre, Gwinn said, "whether it's municipal government or businesses, churches, residents, the community as a whole, it falls to us to deal with it when more people show up on our streets, because they literally have nowhere else to go."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Swan Lake: Symphony of Lights. 7 p.m. Chandler Center for the Arts, 71 North Main Street, Randolph. Tchaikovsky's iconic score opens the door to an entirely reimagined world: vivid light design, illuminated costumes, and world-class dancers.

"The Foreigner" – Opening Night. 7 p.m. Plainfield Town Hall Opera House, 18 High Street, Plainfield. Plainfield Little Theater presents this hilarious farce and poignant social commentary by Larry Shue. Additional dates through Nov. 15.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Artisans Hand Craft Gallery Birthday Sale. Artisans Hand Craft Gallery, 89 Main Street, Montpelier. Celebrating our 48 years as a fine craft gallery and honored to have been part of the Montpelier community for so many years.

Mark Lorah: The Invention of Intention — Opening Reception. 4 to 7 p.m. The Front, 6 Barre Street, Montpelier. Sculpture and painting exploring the generative relationship between material, form, and impulsive divergence.

GRG Trio. 7 p.m. Three Penny Taproom, 108 Main Street, Montpelier. Electric-piano driven jazz trio riding slightly under the radar as one of the area's best acts.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

U-32 Fall Craft Fair. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. U-32 High School, 930 Gallison Hill Road, Montpelier. Featuring over 100 craft vendors, a silent auction, a raffle, and food trucks.

Story Songs of the 70s: Cat Stevens, Gordon Lightfoot, and Harry Chapin. 7 to 9 p.m. Unitarian Church of Montpelier, 130 Main Street. Featuring singer/songwriter Tom DiMenna.

No Land's Man — Guitarist Edwin O. Munera. 7 to 8:30 p.m. Montpelier Performing Arts Hub, 35 College Street. Solo guitar performance that explores how place, memory, and movement shape identity through sound.

Landslide: An Epic Fleetwood Mac Singalong. 7:30 p.m. Barre Opera House, 6 North Main Street. "Why see a show when you can BE the show!?" Presented by Choir! Choir! Choir!

Contra Dance. 7:45 to 11 p.m. Capital City Grange, 6612 Vermont Route 12, Berlin. Calling by Mary Wesley and music by Geordie Lynd and Colin McCaffrey. No partner or experience needed. All dances taught.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8

"A Farmhouse Notebook" Author Talk. 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Hunger Mountain Co-op, 623 Stone Cutters Way, Montpelier. Margaret Osha discusses her new book about producing, preserving, and preparing food.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Storytime. 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Aldrich Public Library, 6 Washington Street, Barre. Stories, songs, and fingerplays for children ages birth to 6.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

Parkinson Mutual Aid Meeting. 2 to 3:30 p.m. The Old Meeting House, 1620 Center Road, East Montpelier. For individuals and caregivers dealing with the challenges of Parkinson's to share resources and practical ideas for improving quality of life. Free and open to the public.

Stick Season Social. 6 to 10 p.m. Zenbarn, 179 Guptil Road, Waterbury. Paint Night begins at 6 p.m. All skill levels welcome. Children under 10 must be accompanied by an adult. Music by Wormdogs starts at 7 p.m. All proceeds support the Bolton Outdoor Adventure Fund.

Ira Friedman and Friends. 6 p.m. Three Penny Taproom, 108 Main Street, Montpelier. Come see why we let Ira take over the room every Tuesday.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Central Vermont OLLI. 1:30 to 3 p.m. Greenway Institute, Chapel in College Hall, 36 College Street, Montpelier. "500 Generations of Continuity and Resilience: Vermont's Indigenous People Through the Eyes of An Archaeologist," with Giovanna Peebles, retired Vermont State Archaeologist.

Creative Kids Monthly Arts and Crafts Group. 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Washington County Mental Health Services, 260 Beckley Hill Road, Barre. Youths have the opportunity to engage in activities where they can let their inner artist shine.

"Sex with Strangers" — Opening Night. Montpelier Performing Arts Hub, 35 College Street. High-voltage comedy about love, ambition, and identity in the digital age. Runs through Nov. 15.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

Mr. Paul's Variety Show Storytime. 10:30 to 11:00 a.m. Kellogg-Hubbard Library, 135 Main Street, Montpelier.

Sing songs, play with puppets, see magic tricks and more. Join us for a rollicking good time.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

Karaoke at Barre Post 10. 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. American Legion Post 10, 320 N. Main Street, Barre. Let your voice be heard.

Opera Vermont Presents "Costaso" — World Premiere. 7 p.m. Chandler Center for the Arts, 71 North Main Street, Randolph. Set in the Spanish-ruled American Southwest, this three-act opera follows Lieutenant Ramon Costaso and his wife as their love is threatened by jealousy, betrayal, and corrupt power. Second performance Nov. 14, 4 p.m.

Jarrett-Eames-Morse Trio. 6:30 p.m. Three Penny Taproom, 108 Main Street, Montpelier. Irreplicable lowdown-psychedelic-blues-funk sensibilities.

Community Contra Dance. 7 to 9:30 p.m. Willey Building (Cabot Town Hall), 3084 Main Street. Lively music is provided by skilled musicians on fiddles and guitars who will get your feet moving.

Samantha Fish — Paper Doll Live World Tour. 8 p.m. Barre Opera House, 6 North Main Street. Fish, a leading guitarist of her generation, is known for her boldness, musicianship, and emotional depth.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

One Town — Three Fairs. 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fair no. 1: St. John the Evangelist, 206 Vine Street, Northfield, offers products, pies, and chili. Fair no. 2: Greater Northfield Senior Center, 168 Wall Street, presents its annual Christmas Tag and Bake Sale. Fair no. 3: United Church of Northfield, 58 Main Street, offers crafts and baked goods. Come to Northfield and visit all three.

Book Launch with Robin Crofut-Brittingham and Charlie Nardozzi. 2 to 3:30 p.m. North Branch Nature Center, 713 Elm Street, Montpelier. Celebrate Robin's new book, "The Illuminated Book of Blooms," and Charlie's latest book, "The Continuous Vegetable Garden." Each author will give a short book talk and answer questions.

Out of the Past — Noirvember Movie Event. 7 p.m. Savoy Theater, 26 Main Street, Montpelier. The peaceful life of a gas station owner is disrupted when a man from his past arrives in town and forces him to return to the dark world he had tried to escape. Intro and post-film discussion with Rick Winston and Joe Moser.

Voices of Ireland. 7:30 p.m. Barre Opera House, 6 North Main Street. Ger O' Donnell, Trevor Sexton, and Don Stiffe, three of Ireland's top folk-singers, unite for an evening of rich harmonies, storytelling, and Irish soul.

The Zenniversary: Celebrating 10 Years of Zenbarn. 7:30 p.m. Zenbarn, 179 Guptil Road, Waterbury. Musical guests Matt Hagen's Classy Boss and DJ Taka.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15

The Hollywood Blacklist. 4 p.m. Adamant Community Club, 1313 Haggett Road. Film historian Rick Winston will explore the origins of the blacklist in Hollywood's labor unrest and what led to its ultimate end, showing clips from newsreels, interviews, and films.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Ira Friedman and Friends. 6 p.m. Three Penny Taproom, 108 Main Street, Montpelier. The residency continues.

Mark Lorah: The Invention of Intention — Artist Talk. 6 p.m. The Front, 6 Barre Street, Montpelier. Sculpture and painting exploring the generative relationship between material, form and impulsive divergence.

ONGOING EVENTS

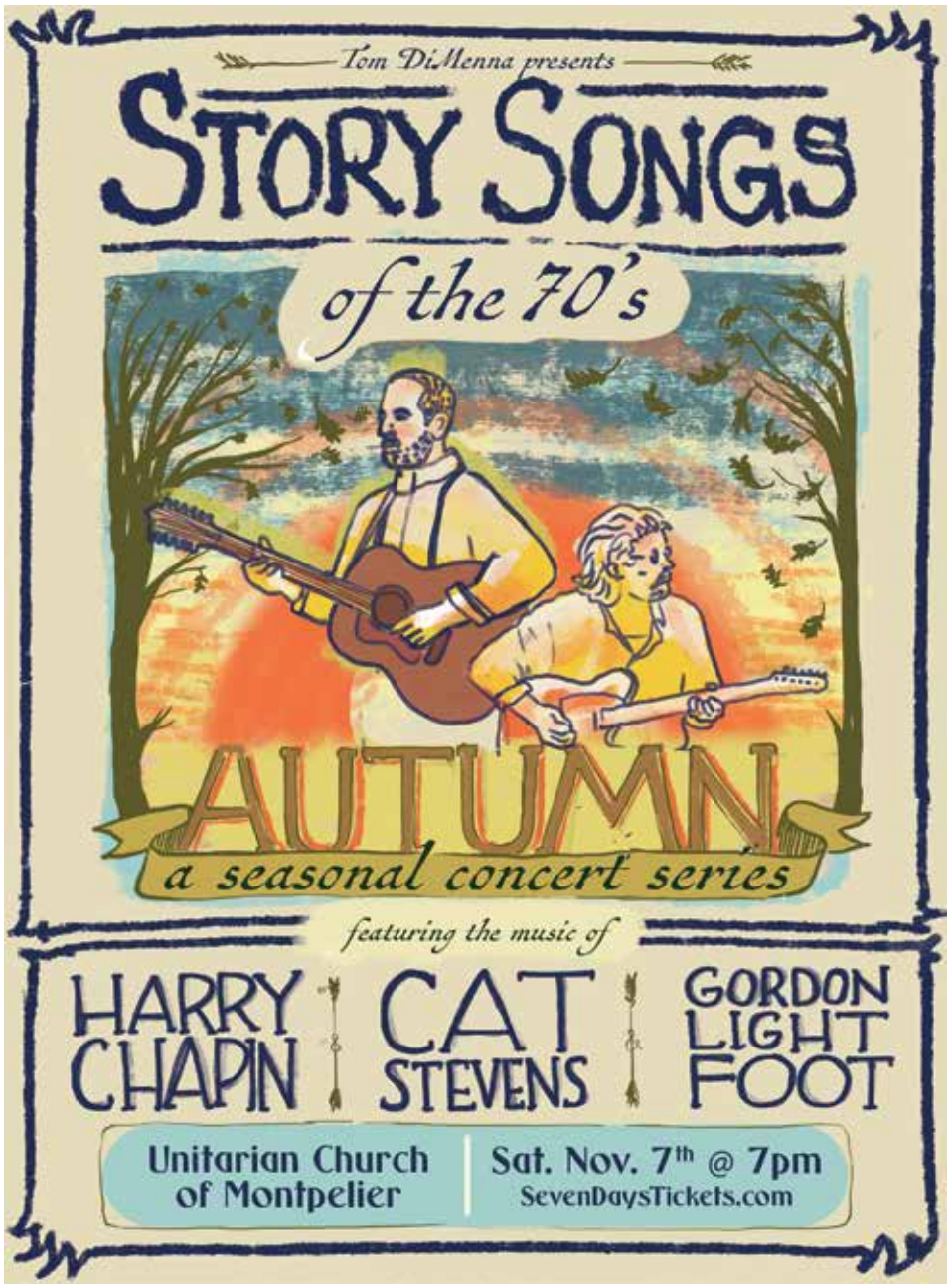
African Drumming and Dancing Classes. Thursdays, 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. Big Picture Community Hub for the Arts, 48 Carroll Road, Waitsfield. Bringing people together through the joyful energy of traditional West African rhythms. Adults drumming, 2:30 p.m.; kids drumming, 3:30 p.m.; adults dance, 4:15 p.m. Presented by Shidaa Projects.

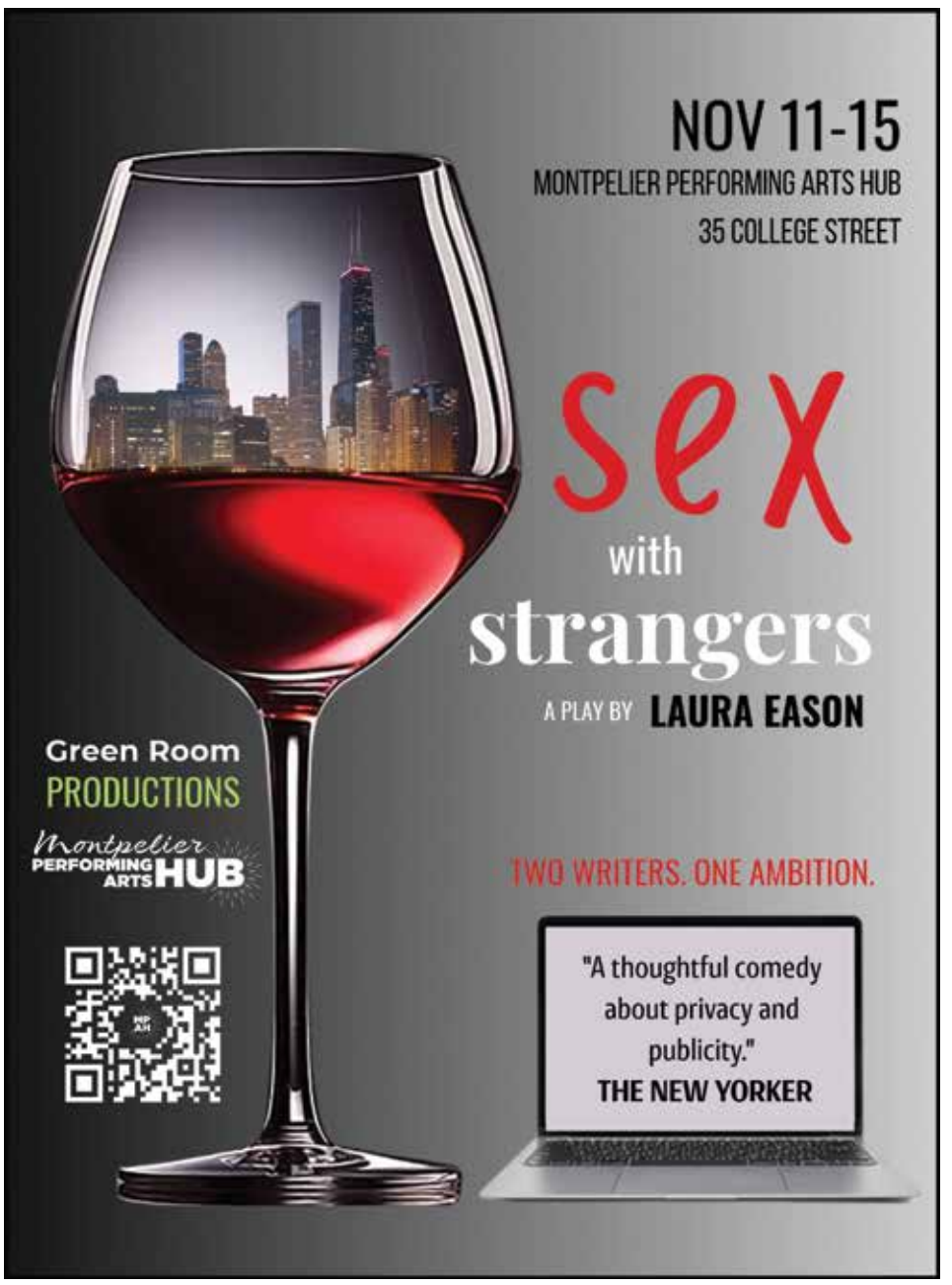
Montpelier Downtown Ramble. 5 to 7 p.m. every Thursday. A weekly downtown stroll with evening shopping, live street music, specials, pop-ups, and plenty of reasons to stay awhile.

Portrait Drawing and Painting. Mondays, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. T.W. Wood Museum, Center for Arts and Learning, 46 Barre Street, Montpelier. This class offers a welcoming environment for artists of all levels to experiment with portrait drawing and painting with a live model. No registration is required.

Robin's Nest Nature Playgroup. 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Thursdays, Sept. 3 through December. North Branch Nature Center, 713 Elm Street, Montpelier. Free activity for children five and under with parent or caregiver to gather, learn, and play in nature. No registration required.

Connections — Oil Paintings by Kristen Santucci. Espresso Bueno, 248 North Main Street, Barre. An evocative exhibit of Vermont landscapes, wildlife, and figurative subjects capturing the beauty, mystery, and deep connection between humans and the natural world.





Film Review

‘You Can See Everything’ is a Key Cultural Event but a Mediocre Film

By Joseph Moser

If any prognosticator had claimed in January that one of the biggest draws at the cinema this year would be a three-hour documentary, I’d have said, “Here’s hoping,” and been incredulous. So I’m thrilled that Nathan Fielder and Lance Oppenheim’s “You Can See Everything” has defied all expectations by playing to packed theaters from coast to coast, and I enjoyed the communal experience of seeing it with an appreciative crowd. In my view, though, while it’s a great film to discuss, it’s far from a great film. For much of its running time, “You Can See Everything” amounts to reality TV with exceptional production values.

Elizabeth Holmes and her partner, Billy Evans, allow Nathan Fielder and his crew to observe them and their family (including their two young children and, at times, Holmes’s parents) during the final 34 days before she must report to a minimum-security prison in Texas. The family stays at a posh but drab beachside rental unit near San Diego, and true to his TV persona, Fielder lurks and awkwardly interrogates Holmes and Evans. Some of these interactions are played as weird-funny, others are represented as sad-funny, and a few seem profoundly serious and potentially insightful.

Still from “You Can See Everything.” Courtesy image.

Invariably, these moments involve promotional playacting, or as Evans describes it with unintentional irony, “radical transparency.” Throughout, the chilling musical score by Ari Balouzian and stunning closeups by cinematographer Bolen lend the proceedings an air of gravitas, and undoubtedly, the film is technically superb.

This documentary may be essential viewing for those enthralled by the saga of Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos. I knew very little of her story going into the movie (and that’s not a problem, since succinct exposition is supplied), but I was familiar with actor-filmmaker Nathan Fielder’s quirky cringe comedy via his irreverent TV series “Nathan for You.” Is a comedian an odd choice to tackle the Holmes saga? Perhaps anticipating this question, near the beginning of the movie, Fielder asks Holmes and Evans whether they chose him to film them because of his lack of scientific expertise.

Beyond that moment, however, the documentary suffers from its lack of rigor in interrogating its subjects and a dearth of apparent expertise regarding what Holmes and her accomplices may or may not have done to defraud and hoodwink investors and the public. The charming Amanda Seyfried (who played Holmes in a limited series) injects levity and intrigue into the film but not much substance. The only possible technical expert that Fielder and company consult on camera is a business partner of Evans — one who says a little too much before Evans intervenes. In the end, Fielder is no match for Holmes and her doll-eyed opacity or for Evans and his unremitting PR offensive, but the movie is open-ended enough that some viewers may interpret Fieldier’s chats with them quite differently than I did. Be forewarned, however, that “You Can See Everything” is as much about Evans as Holmes. The first shot of the film centers on him for very good reason.

Of course Holmes and Evans do not play fair with their audiences, but does Fielder? He omits key details and then reveals them later in a way that is both intriguingly self-reflexive but also ethically troubling. Beyond that issue, what ultimately is at stake in “You Can See Everything”? Aside from the fate of the at-best dubious figure of Holmes, whose survival is never in doubt as she resides in her comfortable prison facility (where Ghislaine Maxwell is also incarcerated), very little is at stake at all. Is she an outright liar or a master of self-deception? How much of a Machiavel is the slippery Evans? I must admit that after three hours, I didn’t really care.

If “You Can See Everything” becomes the first documentary to be nominated for the Best Picture Oscar, that will be a welcome breakthrough for the genre but a bittersweet one. In this critic’s view, other recent documentaries are (and have been) much more deserving. This year’s “The History of Concrete” explores the environmental and public-safety calamities stemming from the titular material with refreshingly self-deprecating humor, and “The Cycle of Love” (also 2026) offers a poignant story of the pain of social stigma and the transcendent power of human connection. Beyond those, 2024’s “No Other Land” and 2022’s “All the Beauty and the Bloodshed” achieve both artistic brilliance and urgency as narratives of universal, life-or-death significance. By contrast, “Everything” is polished but vacuous, buzzy but inconsequential.

“You Can See Everything” screens at the Capitol Theater and Savoy Theater in Montpelier through Nov. 5.

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OBITUARY

Patricia 'Pat' Foulkes

Patricia "Pat" Foulkes of Montpelier, Vermont, passed away unexpectedly on Sept. 23, 2026, at the age of 82.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, to Carl and Margaret Leupold, she moved at age eight to Jacksonville, Florida, where she grew up alongside her two brothers. She graduated from Florida Presbyterian College (now Eckerd College) in 1965 and soon drove west to Sonoma County, California, where she settled and raised her daughter. Pat earned her master's degree in special education from San Francisco State University and spent her career teaching for Sonoma County as well as for Santa Rosa Junior College.

Pat had a creative and adventurous spirit. She loved travel of any kind, from flying in her father's Cessna to driving coast to coast in her Scamp trailer with her beloved dog Jackson, making friends all along the way. In later years, she took up kayaking and spent happy hours on Vermont's lakes and ponds with her daughter and close friends. From her childhood in Florida through her last summer in Vermont, Pat loved being in the water, floating, swimming, and laughing with her grandchildren. She walked the woods of Hubbard Park often, usually with a rescue dog at her side, and had a special love for the beech trees that hold their curled leaves through the winter. Pat was a lifelong ceramist with a focus on Raku pottery as well as a painter, bringing color and imagination to every part of her life.

Above all, Pat delighted in her family, in whom she found a deep well of happiness and love that both surprised and completed her. She treasured the smallest moments with those she loved: building extravagant creations with Legos, weekly painting dates, cooking breakfasts, and walks through the woods. You could always hear her strong "woohoo" from the sports sideline.

Pat was devoted to her community and lifted up her friends in countless ways. She was strong and vibrant until the very end, and she will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

She is survived by her daughter Sian Foulkes and Sian's partner, Eyrich Stauffer; her beloved grandchildren Kathryn and Calvin; her brothers John and Stephen Leupold; her nieces and nephews Grady Leupold, Ashley Juiliani, and Nick Leupold; and the many friends she loved, supported, and leaned on in both California and Vermont.

Patricia's friends and family will hold a celebration of her life on Nov. 8 at 3 p.m. at the Unitarian Church of Montpelier with a reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, please consider a gift in her name to the Central Vermont Humane Society or Hubbard Park in Montpelier.

Arrangements are in the care of Guare & Sons Funeral Home. To share online condolences, please visit guareandsons.com.

News

Central Vermont Plan Includes Housing Targets, Opens Door to Act 250 Exemptions

By Jenni Belotserkovsky

Members of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission discussed its updated plan during a second public hearing on Oct. 10. The plan includes legislated housing targets and qualifying certain areas for Act 250 permit exemptions. Residents asked about timely communication, impact on flood zones, and the contested Act 181.

The plan includes state designations, such as the "Neighborhood Development Area" in Plainfield. Such an area may be exempt from Act 250 review, and, if not qualified for an exemption, could receive 50% off the application fee, receive tax benefits, and get priority with certain grants and incentive programs.

Henry Harris, of the Grassroots Center, said he met with a variety of municipal employees and noticed a growing worry about "the funding being held hostage for a plan that is way more extensive than in years past," he said, noting that the 416-page proposal is 200 pages longer than past plans.

Another participant expressed concern about developments in flood corridors, and one participant said the issue was that many Vermont municipalities historically developed along flood zones.

In order to help residents understand proposed changes, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission held four virtual public meetings. During the Oct. 10 meeting, Executive Director Christian Meyer and Planner Lorraine Banbury explained the basics of a regional plan and a regional land use map and how these affect local issues.

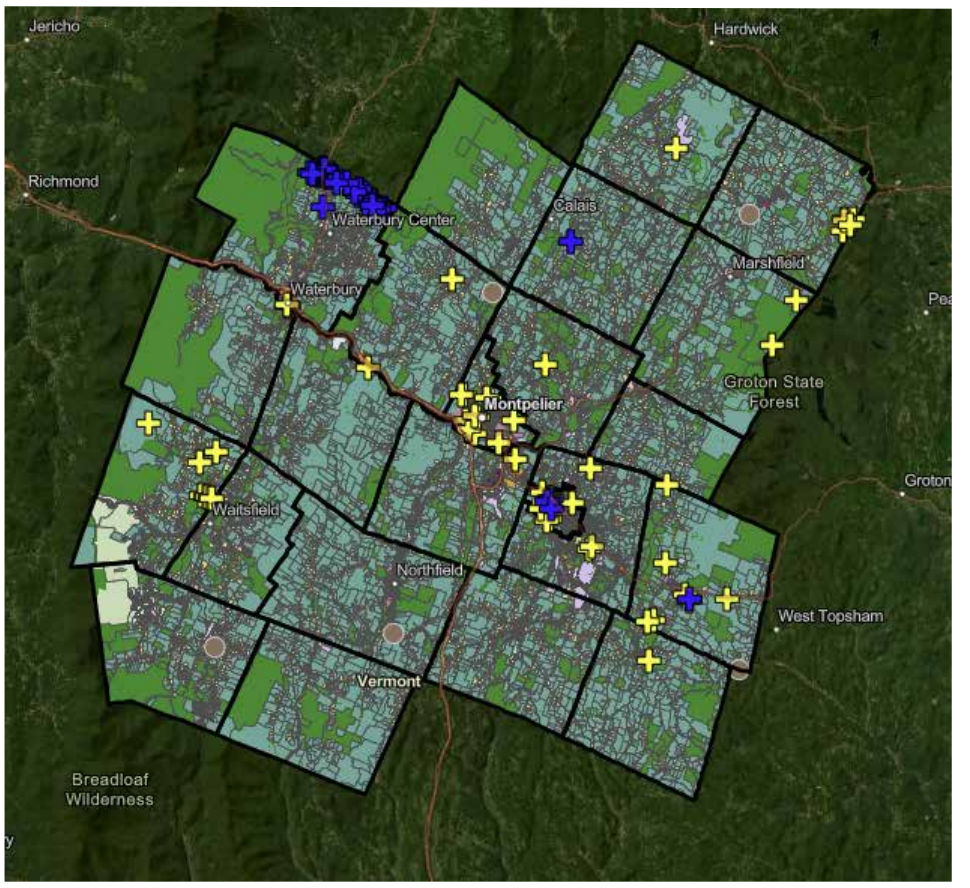
Regional planning commissions act as a link between municipalities and the state government. The Regional Planning Commission works as a subdivision of the state in the areas of land use, transportation, housing, economic development, environmental quality, and more. The Regional Planning Commission also provides assistance to municipalities, such as help with grant writing for example.

The Regional Planning Commission is divided into eleven commissions. One of them is the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, which spans 20 municipalities, including Washington County and more.

The legislature requires regional planning commissions to update plans every eight years. Much of the Central Vermont plan has been around since 2016, said Meyer. The commission updated its proposed plan after the Land Review Board adopted it in 2024. This new plan includes a "heavily updated future land use map that conforms with current statute," which includes new housing targets, said Meyer.

The legislature mandated the deadline of Dec. 31 for adopting the updated regional plan. As for the length of the plan, Banbury explained that the previous plan used a small font that has been enlarged to improve readability. The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission added the previously separate document, "Energy Element and Energy Supplement," as an appendix.

"Local towns and cities discuss what they need, areas of growth, preservation issues, infrastructure problems, and more, and then create a local plan," said Banbury. The Regional Planning Commission reviews these plans, comparing them to state requirements and writing a regional plan. When a local plan and a regional plan disagree, the commission prioritizes local plans, unless they substantially impact the region.



A draft image of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's future land use map. Courtesy of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission.

"Regional planning commissions do not make or enforce any state regulations," said Banbury. "A key role of Central Vermont Regional Planning is to support our 23 member communities as they work to understand and carry out policies created at the state level in ways that meet local needs."

State law does not require municipalities to adopt a regional plan and the local plans of some towns have expired. "Many state grants require letters of support from the Regional Planning Commission to demonstrate compatibility with a specific grant and the regional plan," said Meyer. For towns with an expired plan, this could create challenges applying for state incentives and grants, he said.

During the meeting, one resident asked how the new plan would affect private property owners in particular regarding the partially repealed Act 181.

Act 181 mandates tiered land-use categories, mapping Act 250 requirements for certain areas and granting permit exemptions for others. Opponents of Act 181 say one of the designations, Tier 3, mandated restrictions on privately owned land.

The updated plan will "open the door for municipalities to pursue exemptions on certain Act 250 permits but will not add any new regulations," said Meyer.

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission will amend Future Land Use Maps for the coming year "to make sure it meets all local planning goals while not putting lives or properties at risk," said Meyer. Since the original version of the plan is at least 10 years old, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission will be working on a new plan that matches local goals, once the updated plan has been adopted, said Meyer.

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission adopted the plan on Oct. 20. The next step is for the Land Review Board to hold a public meeting for a final review in December before issuing a decision.

Meyer explained that the commission was aware of the need to create a completely new plan that "matches local goals." He said that the commission will begin working on it as soon as the updated version is adopted by the Land Review Board.

Jenni Belotserkovsky is a Community Reporting Fellow receiving training through the Journalism New England Career Lab to do civic reporting that provides people in towns across New England with the information they need to be engaged in their community.

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Crostic Puzzle

A Few Moments of Bliss

By Rick Winston

Answer the clues; transfer the letters on the numbered dashes to the correspondingly numbered squares in the diagram. Work back and forth between the grid and the word list to complete the puzzle. The finished puzzle will spell out a quotation reading from left to right; black squares separate the words in the quotation. The "crostic" part of the puzzle ("crostic" derived from the Greek, meaning "head") is that the first letters of the clued answers, reading down, will spell out the name of the author and the source of the quotation.

Answers are on page 24.

1Q	2H	3J	4P	5A	■	6B	7S	8K	■	9K	10F	11B	12O	13E	14U	15L	■	16C	17F	18O	19K	■	20T	21H	22O	23S	■	24D
25P	26C	27I	28R	■	29U	30K	■	31R	32J	33K	■	34B	■	35B	36J	37O	38I	■	39U	40F	41E	42B	■	43B	44L	45P	46G	47Q
48O	■	49J	50G	51P	■	52L	53A	54D	55U	56N	■	57J	58D	59P	60B	61F	62L	63K	■	64M	65L	66G	67O	68T	69J	70S	71H	72D
■	73A	74D	75S	■	76U	77C	78O	79P	80A	81B	■	82K	83P	■	84O	85B	86S	■	87P	88C	89E	90T	91Q	92H	93A	94D	95S	■
96N	97P	98L	99B	100C	■	101K	102N	103U	104J	105Q	■	106K	107J	108R	■	109O	110N	■	111E	112T	113K	114H	115I	116S	117Q	118O	■	119R
120B	121T	■	122S	123U	124A	125L	■	126U	127E	128B	■	129I	130B	131T	132O	■	133M	134T	135Q	■	136T	137P	138O	139J	■	140M	141J	142G
■	143B	144T	145S	146O	■	147H	148U	149T	150K	151M	152D	153F	■	154Q	155O	156T	157D	■	158U	159H	160F	161M	162K	■	■	■	■	■

A. _____ the fat (gabbed)

5 53 124 73 80 93

B. Showy yo-yo trick (three words)

34 81 43 60 120 35 42 85 128
6 130 11 99 143

C. Depression and elation, for two

16 77 88 100 26

D. Kuwait, Dubai, and Qatar, for instance

152 24 58 54 74 157 94 72

E. Indian ruler of old

89 41 111 13 127

F. No longer stylish or novel (two words)

17 10 153 40 160 61

G. Jules Verne's Captain

46 142 66 50

H. Moved along steadily, as a train

147 21 2 159 114 71 92

I. Some glasses have them, some don't

38 27 115 129

J. Egyptian movie star born Michel Yusef Dimitri Chalhoub (full name)

36 57 107 139 3 141 32 104 69 49

K. Place to hear swearing? (two words)

106 82 101 150 19 33 63 8 30 9 162 113

L. Tendency towrd chaos, scientifically

62 125 52 98 65 44 15

M. Fire starters, for campers or wood stove users

140 133 161 151 64

N. New York State landmark, ____ Caverns

102 110 96 56

O. Bruce Lee hit of 1973 (three words)

138 109 84 12 18 118 155 67 48
146 22 132 37 78

P. Clint Eastwood Oscar winner of 1992

25 59 87 97 51 79 4 137 45 83

Q. Archenemy

117 47 1 105 154 91 135

R. Ravens' vocalizing

28 119 31 108

S. Title character in a 1989 John Irving book (full name)

145 122 86 95 70 116 7 23 75

T. Doing errands; wandering around (three words)

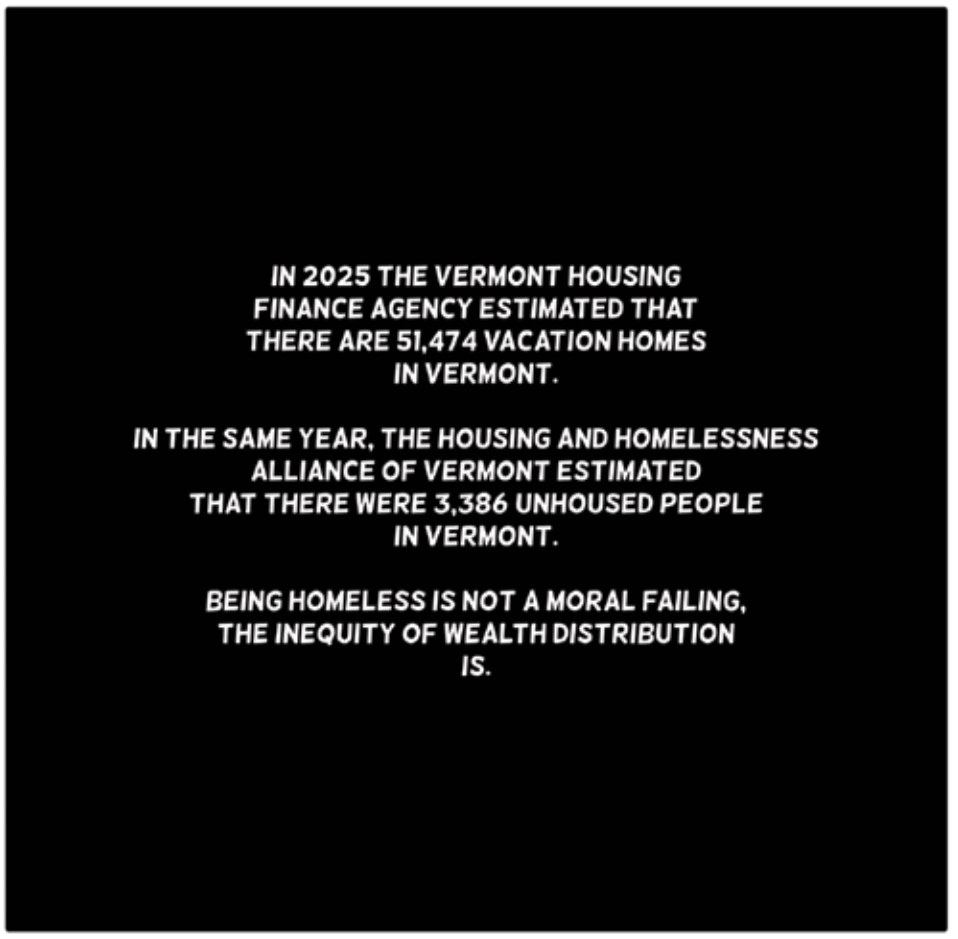
136 156 20 134 131 121 149 90 144 112 68

U. Jefferson Airplane album, "Bless its Pointy _____" (two words)

76 29 126 39 148 103 123 55 158 14

The Comics

Hazel and Jart #41



Bee's Buzz by Jenni Bee

Homeless vs Unhoused

JENNI BEE

Bridge Traffic

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- **At Vigil, Memories of Two Who Died While Unhoused and a Call For Change,** by Tracy Brannstrom
- **Janoo Fields Questions from High Schoolers at Candidate Forum,** by Hojun Choi
- **Enna Introduces New Menu Concept,** by Chris Therrien
- **Who's on the Ballot: A Gude to Central Vermont Candidates,** by Bridge Staff

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