

**Ukraine
fundraiser
Compass,
Page B2**



**Mobile
medical
Page A2**

**Girls
LAX win
Page A5**

**Grove
pricing
Page A4**



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**Celebrating Our
125th Anniversary**

Covering The News In Connecticut's Northwest

**As of last year, 35% of the population in Cornwall
is "housing cost burdened", spending more than
30% of their income on housing costs.**

Cornwall's affordable housing challenge

By Debra A. Aleksinas

CORNWALL — Targeted goals for implementing the town's affordable housing plan and the obstacles that could lie ahead were discussed at a virtual "conversation" hosted by the Cornwall Library, drawing about 65 attendees on Saturday, May 7.

The hour-long event was moderated by documentary filmmaker Bill McClane and featured a discussion between longtime affordable housing advocate Maggie Cooley and urban planning and New York University policy professor Ingrid Gould Ellen. McClane also fielded questions from the public.

The talk focused on ways Cornwall can create affordable housing that supports a "gentle density increase" in town by amending

zoning regulations, helping homeowners renovate homes to increase occupancy and assisting seniors with making their homes liveable to help them age in place.

"The easiest ones to achieve and the ones most palatable to anyone who is nervous about affordable housing are the ones that are quasi-invisible and involve changes within existing structures with no exterior alterations," said Cooley, a West Cornwall attorney who heads up the Cornwall Affordable Housing Committee and has been part of the Cornwall Housing Corporation (CHC) since the 1990s.

Cornwall, like many other Northwest Corner towns, is required to abide by a 2017 state statute mandating an Affordable

See CORNWALL, Page A6



The Sharon Classic Road Race on Veterans' Field. Ben Schildgen, 13

New look

By Hunter O. Lyle

SHARON — Minutes before the race began, contestants for the 37th running of the Sharon Classic Road Race on Saturday, May 7, lined up in the entrance to Veterans' Field in Sharon Valley. Although the route

CORNWALL

Continued from Page A1

Housing Plan by July 2022. According to McClane, an initial \$10,000 grant from the state funded the creation of Cornwall's plan, which was backed by the Board of Selectmen and submitted to the state.

The long-term goal of the plan is not only to meet the housing needs of current and future residents, but also to attract and retain a diverse workforce within the community.

"It is now a regulatory document still in discussion among the selectmen and Planning and Zoning," said McClane, who noted that the mandate had been on the books for years and sat mostly dormant until the past two years. "It became apparent that the state was getting more serious about it."

Statistics support the need

Housing advocates pointed out that a household that spends more than 30% of its monthly income on housing costs, which includes rent and/or mortgage, utilities and maintenance, is considered "housing-cost burdened."

In Cornwall, as of last year, 35% of the population fit that category. On a related note, Connecticut is the third most costly state in the country in terms of home maintenance, which is estimated at a yearly expense

of about \$18,000, according to statistics from a May 24, 2021, Cornwall Housing Forum presentation.

The big picture across the country in the past five decades, Gould Ellen said, is that the slowdown in construction has resulted in higher demand and skyrocketing home and rental prices — if rental units can be found at all. Add to that, a global pandemic. "COVID exacerbated everything and affordable disappeared."

"As a result, households are limiting spending, making it impossible to pay for down payments and any financial crisis," Gould Ellen said, adding that in many areas, adult children continue to live in their parents' homes. "All this is true in Cornwall, too."

Another side effect is that as available homes are purchased, their values increase with subsequent ownerships, as the structures are renovated and expanded.

"These houses will never be affordable again. It makes them larger, and even more out of reach," explained Gould Ellen.

65 more units needed

According to Gould Ellen, there are 36 affordable housing units in town, representing about 3% of all housing stock. In order to meet the state's benchmark that 10%

of housing become affordable in every municipality, "Cornwall would need 65 more affordable units," she said.

Affordable housing is defined as housing that costs less than 30% of the income of households earning 80% or less of the area's median income. Under that formula, said Gould Ellen, for a three-person household, that is someone earning less than about \$74,000. "An affordable rent for that household would be \$1,800 or less." For a two-person household, she said, the rent would be about \$1,600 per month.

Cooley, who held positions on the Planning and Zoning Commission and was Cornwall's land use clerk and also served as town probate judge for 20 years, responded that the rental rates quoted by Gould Ellen "are still astronomical for the people that we serve."

She noted that the highest rental at the 18-unit Kugeman Village housing project is around \$590 for a three-bedroom apartment, which is "extraordinary" by comparison. "That's what's manageable. The rentals that Ingrid quoted aren't easy for anyone."

On the other hand, the construction of additional multiple-unit affordable housing projects in Cornwall can be a challenge, as there is limited infrastructure to support such large-scale housing, said Cooley. "It's a huge undertaking to do a

Cornwall Housing Corporation's bucket list has five main components: to build dedicated, affordable housing that supports gentle density increase. This goal may involve amending zoning regulations to allow for accessory apartments or Accessory Dwelling Units on existing single-family lots, which can be in separate buildings on the property like barns, garages or pool houses.

Other goals include helping seniors age in place in their homes, connecting residents with available affordable housing units and educating residents about the Affordable Housing Plan and its incentives.

"One of the other ideas kicking around is the creation of a revolving loan fund in the town," to help seniors make adjustments to their homes and to assist with down payments, said Gould Ellen. "Modest reforms to the town zoning regulations could end up producing a fair amount of affordable rental housing."

Community values matter, too

McClane asked the panel what conversation they would have with homeowners who support affordable housing but are concerned that the addition of such housing will negatively impact property values.

Gould Ellen pointed to Bonney Brook and Kugeman Village as examples of good

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PHOTO BY PATRICK L. SULLIVAN

A wooden bowl with an intricate painted design from Shaari Horowitz and Alistair Jones.

thing.

Salisbury photographer Sarah Blodgett had some unusual prints that at first glance appeared to be paintings. At second glance, too. A reporter felt pretty silly after making the same mistake twice.

Blodgett also specializes in wildlife photography, and runs classes for camera-minded birders.

Shaari Horowitz and Alistair Jones (based in Sharon) offered wooden items

with intricate, painted designs. Jones is the woodworker, Horowitz handles the painting.

Featured was an Indian club, refinished and decorated, which reminded a reporter that he once threw out a perfectly good set of similar clubs.

The Salisbury Artisans Group website is www.artisansale.org. The next sale is scheduled for Saturday, July 23, by which time it might warm up.

start to renting — and that's if you have a clear timeline without any interruptions," like rising building costs. "It can take a long, long time."

Suggested strategies and goals

In response to a question about what the Cornwall Affordable Housing Plan recommends, Gould Ellen noted that there are various strategies and some numerical goals that will target and monitor progress.

These include the addition of 10 additional units of affordable housing in town and creation of 10 more units of rental housing in general. She noted that, at last count, there were only two rental homes on the market in Cornwall, and both were asking exorbitant rents. "It was something astronomical, like \$7,000 a month."

The plan also calls for an additional 10 units of senior housing. Currently, the only age-designated housing development in Cornwall is Bonney Brook, a 10-unit federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) senior affordable housing complex on Kent Road, which has an average waiting list of about two years.

Five buckets on the list

Gould Ellen said the

to undermine your property values and you don't have to worry about that."

Cooley said proponents of affordable housing have been "singing the song for decades about how creating affordable housing has the opposite effect on overall property values."

The reality, she said, is that when a community has ample affordable housing, there is also an array of residents who wouldn't be there otherwise.

"Besides strictly property values, it's good to also think about community values. You have to consider the value of these people and the functions they perform in the town," said Cooley, who noted that almost every business in town has a "Help Wanted" sign on its window.

"These are people who used to live down the road; some are gone forever."

Gould Ellen agreed. "You need housing that is affordable to a range of incomes in order to have a diversity of workers in your community."

"If you don't do that you are going to have people suffering unsustainable commutes, which is not only a burden on the individual, but also environmentally costly for the rest of us."

LEGISLATURE

Continued from Page A1

sibility for their actions at Housatonic Meadows."

Horn said she was pleased that many of the bills that came out of the Public Safety Committee (which she co-chairs) made it through the Legislature in the short session that ended Wednesday, May 4.

Horn said bills concerning the theft of catalytic converters, the accreditation of police departments, and mental health help for law enforcement officers now await the governor's signature.

"Everything that was ready for the big time got passed," she said.

Horn voted for a \$24 billion state budget package. She said the bill includes

\$600 million in tax cuts.

The gas tax holiday was extended to Dec. 1. (The state's gas tax is 25 cents per gallon.)

Child tax credits and Earned Income Tax Credits were expanded, and the property tax credit was raised.

Miner voted against the budget package, even though he conceded it includes "significant tax relief."

He said the budget plan's price tag is too high and relies too much on one-time infusions of federal pandemic relief cash. And he said that funding new positions at the University of Connecticut and community colleges cannot be expected to be one-year expenditures.

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BUDGET

Continued from Page A1

Region One assessment, was the only town to vote against the budget, with 33 no votes to 27 yes votes.

TOWN ASSESSMENTS
2022-23 Fiscal year

Cornwall

2022-2023 REGION ONE BUDGET RESULTS					
	Yes	No	Total	Registered voters	Voter %
Canaan/ Lakeville	36	12	48	846	5.67%

**Doctors have been delivering
babies at Sharon Hospital
for 112 years.**