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GREENFIELD

DEP: More cleanup needed at Lunt site

State audit confirms community, councilors' worries that property still contaminated with toxins, not ready for city sale

By **MARY BYRNE**
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — The results of an audit conducted by the state Department of Environmental Protection show more work is needed to clean up the former Lunt Silversmiths property.

In the audit report, the DEP found that the Phase II Comprehensive

Site Assessment — completed in April 2020 — was incomplete, and did not adequately assess contaminant sources and the extent of contamination at the 298 Federal St. property. The audit began in mid-April.

"This is exactly the kind of information we've been waiting for," said Mayor Roxann Wedegartner. "I'm not terribly surprised by what I'm reading here, but I'm glad to have it

confirmed by DEP. We did ask them quite a while ago — maybe a little over a year ago — to do this, and they declined at the time."

The city has 60 days from receipt of the Notice of Noncompliance that accompanied the audit report to submit a conceptual Phase II scope of work for the DEP to review and approve. The city must also submit a Post-Audit Completion Statement within those 60 days. Wedegartner said she will work with Planning and Development Director Eric Twarog to ensure those deadlines are met.

Resident Glen Ayers, a former health agent with the Franklin Regional Council of Governments, initiated the petition that launched the process to designate the former Lunt Silversmiths property as a Public Involvement Plan site, which led to the audit of the site cleanup process. Ayers said the report ultimately validated the concerns that had been raised by the community, including several city councilors, over the last six months.

"We're pleased with the report — not to say we're happy the site is con-

taminated," he said. "We're happy this shows that a lot more work needs to be done."

The property on Federal Street — which the Springfield-based 401 Liberty St. LLC subleases to the Behavioral Health Network and Clinical & Support Options — has been the subject of controversy among residents and city officials who have expressed concern about the status of the environmental cleanup.

The issue was raised late last year

SEE LUNT SITE A8

NORTHFIELD

Protesters breach FirstLight facility

Activists call attention to hydro-pump station's impact on fish populations, river amid federal relicensing

By **BELLA LEVAVI**
Staff Writer

NORTHFIELD — Ten protesters with the environmental activist group Extinction Rebellion gathered at 5 a.m. Wednesday at the intake area of FirstLight Hydro Generating Co.'s Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Station to demand the facility be shut down immediately.

The protesters trespassed under FirstLight's fence and climbed onto the concrete intake area. For about an hour and half, they held signs and chanted occasionally until a FirstLight worker and Police Chief Jon Hall arrived. They were threatened with arrest if they did not leave and complied with the order.

"I think this protest was successful," commented Conway resident Priscilla Lynch, an organizer of the protest. "We'll be back."

A FirstLight spokesperson said the company called police after learning of the protest and breach of its safety barrier, though it has decided not to press charges.

"If someone were to fall into the water near the intake, it could put that person, as well as first responders charged with rescuing them, into a potentially life-threatening situation," Len Greene, FirstLight's head of government affairs and com-



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Protesters trespass to hang banners on the intake of the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Station on Wednesday morning.

munications, said in a statement. "It is incredibly dangerous for anyone to cross safety barriers in the vicinity of an electric generation facility, particularly around rushing water."

"We are relieved that no one was hurt and we urge anyone with concerns about FirstLight's clean, re-

newable energy operations to express their views in a responsible way," he said.

More electricity is needed at night because more lights are turned on and more people are at home during that time, and electricity is more expensive during this time as well.

The Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Station uses the electrical grid, with 60% natural gas, during off-peak times to pump water from the Connecticut River to a reservoir on the top of the mountain. During peak

SEE FIRSTLIGHT A8

PIONEER VALLEY

'The coup is still underway'

Reps. McGovern, Raskin warn democracy imperiled before packed house

By **DUSTY CHRISTENSEN**
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — A town hall event Tuesday between two powerful Democratic congressmen was billed as a discussion with constituents about defending democracy.

But it was as much a pep rally as it was a back-and-forth with audience members.

Constituents packed First Churches of Northampton, standing shoulder to shoulder down most the aisles and spilling out into the lobby, to see U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Worcester, and fellow Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Maryland, speak about the state of U.S. democracy.

"This is a critical time in our country," McGovern said, referencing the recent mass shooting of 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas, and attacks on democracy from gerrymandering to big money in politics

SEE CONGRESSMEN A8

GREENFIELD

Advocates outline vision for emergency shelter system

Areas of improvement include better transportation, coordination among agencies

By **MARY BYRNE**
Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — In an effort to better identify the needs of the city's homeless population, a group of organizations has prepared a document outlining their vision for an

emergency shelter system.

Susan Worgaftik, a member of Housing Greenfield, a local group exploring housing issues, said the primary areas of improvement the region needs include increased staffing, a more coordinated effort between agencies, and better transportation to the Wells Street homeless shelter.

The process of creating this document, which Housing Greenfield recently shared with social service

agencies regionwide, was prompted by a request for responses from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development for services between April 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024.

"We believe that the organizations that apply for these funds should have an understanding of what the community believes are essential if an emergency shelter system is to meet the needs of those who come to Greenfield for these

services," said Worgaftik, recognizing Greenfield's role in supporting Franklin County and North Quabbin region.

Worgaftik explained the information compiled in the document was the result of a meeting in late April and emails from people who subsequently viewed a recording of the meeting.

"We needed to be able to have

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STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS
U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., right, speaks to a full house at a town hall Tuesday at First Churches of Northampton. He joined U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern, seated center, for the event.

Congressmen: Democracy in peril

FROM A1

and the Jan. 6 insurrection. “This is not how our democracy is supposed to work.”

McGovern said that “the coup is still underway” when it comes to Republicans’ attempts to steal elections. Not content with nullifying the will of voters, he said they are working to prevent people from voting altogether and appointing election deniers to influential positions nationwide. But people shouldn’t give up hope, he said.

“We have to be faithful,” he said. “I have faith in this country.”

Raskin, a former constitutional law professor who led Democrats’ second effort to impeach former President Donald Trump after the Jan. 6 insurrection, took much of the first hour to speak about the insurrection, its aftermath and the efforts to hold its participants accountable.

“The social contract is fraying in America,” Raskin said. The country, he added, came “very close to being a failed state” during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Trump administration.

Raskin said that the insurrection brought together thousands of people and extremist groups looking to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power. Trump never planned to accept his election loss and after the courts rejected his challenges to the outcome, he continued to push his efforts to overturn the election at the state level, Raskin said.

Trump and his supporters, Raskin said, “wanted to pull a rabbit out of the hat to go outside the constitutional order and to wage war on it.”

“That’s why they needed violence,” Raskin said. Later, he urged those listening to refuse to let people say that what happened on Jan. 6 was just a demonstration that got out of control. “This was an organized attack on American constitutional democracy and we’ve got to treat it with the seriousness it deserves.”

Raskin said that democracy “is under siege all over the world.”

“And all the autoocrats, kleptocrats, theocrats, the bullies and the tyrants and the despots have found each other, from Moscow to Mar-a-Lago,” he said.

There were several ovations for Raskin and McGovern throughout the evening. Raskin drew particular applause when he responded to one man’s shouted question about the federal government recently passing a \$40 billion aid package, the majority of it military support,



STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS
Raskin, who led the second impeachment trial of former president Donald Trump, holds forth Tuesday night.

to send to Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia’s invasion. He said he was proud to support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people against “fascist” Russian President Vladimir Putin.

During a question-and-answer period, both McGovern and Raskin spoke about the undemocratic power that the U.S. Senate holds, with the disproportionate influence its structure gives to small states and the filibuster denying the will of the majority. McGovern noted that the U.S. House has passed gun control legislation but that a minority in the Senate has been able to block it.

“Follow the money,” he said, adding that some of his Senate colleagues are more “interested in getting a check from the NRA than protecting our kids.”

“They are afraid of the gun lobby, they are wholly owned by the gun lobby,” McGovern said.

Both said, though, that the undemocratic nature of the Senate and tendencies of the U.S. Supreme Court wouldn’t be changed overnight.

“Is it going to be like that during the period in which we have to save ourselves from Trumpism and right-wing authoritarianism? Yeah,” Raskin said. “We have to deal within that set of rules just like I think we need to be prepared for dealing with these nine Supreme Court justices for a while, at least until we deal with the filibuster problem.”

McGovern urged people not to give up.

“This country is worth fighting for, this democracy is worth fighting for and however long it takes, we have to be in this fight until we prevail,” he said. “The other side, they’re trying to undermine this. They don’t like democracy, it’s too messy. They prefer autocracy or fascism.”

Lunt site needs more cleanup

FROM A1

by Precinct 3 Councilor Ginny DeSorgher when the property was brought before the City Council to declare it as surplus and authorize the mayor to sell it to 401 Liberty. In particular, there is concern for contamination levels of trichloroethylene (TCE).

“As a retired nurse, I am appalled that the city administration chose to ignore the health and safety questions of this community in favor of 401 Liberty Street’s interest in purchasing the property,” DeSorgher said in a statement. “The health and welfare of our residents should come before any tax benefits that the city may receive with this property’s sale.”

According to the report, the boundaries of the disposal site on the property were “generally limited to the former Lunt property boundaries and to portions of Kenwood Street, adjacent to the former Lunt facility.” However, the report states, TCE was detected in areas outside these boundaries, which therefore should be included in the disposal site boundaries.

“It’s clear to me from this report that the interest of the citizens, especially in that neighborhood but also in the city in general, have not been represented,” Ayers said.

While the DEP agreed that the stormwater system beneath Kenwood Street is a “preferential pathway” for TCE migration in groundwa-



STAFF FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ
Community members were effective in pressing for a closer look at potential persistent contamination at the former Lunt Silversmiths property on Federal Street in Greenfield. A “welcoming picket” held in mid-April urged further cleanup of the site, which an audit by the state Department of Environmental Protection confirmed as necessary.

ter, it also noted that other utilities within the area of groundwater contamination were not, but should be, assessed for contaminant migration.

The report also states that further analysis of risk characterization is required at each of the five soil exposure areas. “This kind of cuts to the core of the issue,” Ayers said. “The city must hire an independent LSP (licensed site professional) to represent the interests of the neighborhood and the community.”

Ayers also expressed concern for the fact that O’Reilly Talbot & Okum, the LSP, was among four companies sued by Attorney General Maura Healey in 2019 for allegedly violating the state’s Clean Air

Act during its cleanup of the former Springfield YMCA building.

“That’s definitely on my radar,” Wedegartner responded. “It’s irrelevant to this. OTO has been a consultant we’ve used many times on several different projects.”

Wedegartner said at this point, she isn’t considering hiring a different LSP.

“I do want to have an opportunity to talk to (LSP Bruce Nickelsen) about his response and reaction to this,” she added. “I anticipate we’ll do that in the next couple of days.”

Reporter Mary Byrne can be reached at mbyrne@recorder.com or 413-930-4429. Twitter: @MaryEByrne.

Reagan shooter to get full freedom

By JESSICA GRESKO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — John Hinckley, who shot President Ronald Reagan in 1981, is “no longer a danger to himself or others” and will be freed from all restrictions this month, a federal judge said Wednesday, capping Hinckley’s four-decade journey through the legal and mental health systems.

U.S. District Court Judge Paul L. Friedman said in September that he would free Hinckley from all remaining restrictions on June 15 as long as Hinckley continued to do well living in the community in Virginia as he has for years. At a hearing Wednesday in Washington which Hinckley did not attend, Friedman noted Hinckley has continued to do well, and the judge made no changes to his

plans for full freedom from court oversight.

“He’s been scrutinized. He’s passed every test. He’s no longer a danger to himself or others,” Friedman said at a hearing that lasted about an hour. Friedman devoted much of the hearing to the “long road” of the case, which he was randomly assigned two decades ago, the third judge to be involved in the case.

He noted that Hinckley, who turned 67 on Sunday, was profoundly troubled when he shot Reagan but that he had been able to get mental health help. Hinckley has shown no signs of active mental illness since the mid-1980s, the judge noted Wednesday, and has exhibited no violent behavior.

Hinckley was confined to a mental hospital in Washington for more than two decades after a jury found him not guilty by reason of insanity in shooting Reagan.

FirstLight station called destructive

FROM A1

electricity demand, the water is released and goes through a turbine, generating electricity when it is needed.

“Millions of fish get sucked into it,” said Northfield resident Cate Woolner, an organizer of Wednesday’s protest. “It is really bad for the river.”

“Think of it as a giant electric toilet,” said Karl Meyer, an environmental journalist from Greenfield who was not partaking in the protest. He explained nothing can survive through the turbines used by the storage station. According to Meyer, the volume of a four-story building worth of wildlife gets killed every sec-

ond and the turbine is operating.

“Our river should not be used like this when there is no public benefit,” said protester Glen Ayers, a former health agent from Greenfield.

FirstLight has submitted its Amended Final License Application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for a new 50-year license to operate. The three facilities up for relicensing through FERC — the hydro-pump facility at Northfield Mountain and two hydroelectric dams in Turners Falls — have been criticized for their impact on fish populations, the Connecticut River and the surrounding environment.

Extinction Rebellion is targeting the Northfield facility

now to apply pressure to the government to not renew the license.

The global environmental movement Extinction Rebellion uses nonviolent civil disobedience tactics to pressure governments to take a variety of climate-related actions. The movement is non-hierarchical, and any group can claim to work within the Extinction Rebellion movement.

“It’s not that all power storage is horrendous,” said Montague resident Bart Bouricius, who was at the protest. “Just that here they are doing it poorly.”

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STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ
At the request of Northfield Police Chief Jon Hall, protesters leave the intake area of the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Station on Wednesday morning.

Shelter system needs laid out

FROM A1

that information in order to say, “This is really what we need here,” Worgaftik said.

In addition to the members of Housing Greenfield, the document was compiled with input from service providers, community meal providers, members of the faith community, housing advocates, and people who have experienced homelessness.

“There were a number of people who had been unhoused and had very specific ideas about what they needed,” Worgaftik said. “We wanted to make sure they were involved in the process.”

Erin Forbush, director of shelter and housing with ServiceNet, the nonprofit human services agency that operates the homeless shelter on Wells Street, said including the perspectives of those who use these services is helpful for seeing “what we can bring to the table next.”

“We’ll always have the community’s input to add to whatever we’re looking at doing, and to see how this fits in with what funders are offering at the same time,” she said. “One thing that has come out of this process and the work we’ve done is there’s never a one-size-fits-all to any issue or problem. There needs to be a variety of different models that fit the needs of the individuals we’re serving.”

Worgaftik said in general, the region needs increased staffing, a more coordinated effort among agencies and better transportation to the Wells Street shelter.

“We need to be able to find transportation,” she said. “If we have people in South County who need shelter, we need a way to get them (to Greenfield).”

Currently, she said, that



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ
Residents of the Wells Street shelter run by ServiceNet socialize outside the building Wednesday.

need is fulfilled by volunteers, members from service organizations or relatives.

“It’s not in such a state that, like in Boston, there’s public transportation,” Worgaftik said.

The report also identifies the need for street outreach workers; a fully staffed triage/diversion system to help connect people to emergency shelters and services; fully staffed emergency overnight shelters; support for year-round shelters that provide bathrooms, showers and laundry facilities seven days a week; and support for people “living rough,” or in tents, sleeping bags or tarps.

“We want anyone who is considering applying to provide emergency housing here in Greenfield to understand what is really needed here and that we want a system of services, not simply a building where people can come to escape the cold, rain or extreme heat,” said Amy Clarke of the Interfaith Council of Franklin County.

“We want to meet the real needs of our unhoused neighbors.”

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