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# the Chronicle



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## Border video spurs concerns

by Matthew Wilson

NEWPORT CENTER — Justin LeBlanc lives on Leadville Road here. He's a hunter and outdoorsman and he placed a game camera on his property hoping to spot some big game. Instead he caught footage that was more disturbing than he expected.

His camera captured a short video of people wandering through the woods late on the night of October 21. With backpacks and cellphone lights, five people walked into the clearing in front of the camera. Four of those seen in the footage are men. They have obvious facial hair. One is seen  
(Continued on page 28.)

## Council raises rates

by Joseph Gresser

NEWPORT — At a special meeting Monday evening, members of the city council tried to hash out a solution to Newport's growing debt problem. According to City Treasurer James Johnson much of the shortfall is the result of the council's failure to raise water and sewer rates over the years.

Rates were raised in May, but before that the last rate increase was in 2018. At the same time, several members of the public noted, the city began installing meters in many, but not all, homes. One of the selling points of meters has been the ability of residents to hold their expenses down by using less water.

Another issue related to sewer and water costs is how some city employee salaries are allocated to those departments. City Manager Jonathan DeLaBruere said he has been tracking the amount of time employees spend on water and sewer matters and said the percentages do not seem to correspond to amounts charged to those  
(Continued on page 26.)

## Sinister smile



The grin Adam Cook carved into his entry for the Great Chronicle Jack-o'-lantern Contest, held Sunday evening, is not entirely welcoming. Still it won its creator an award and free subscription to the Chronicle. For more from the contest and Newport's Pumpkinpalooza, please see page twenty. Photo by Joseph Gresser

## Irasburg gets three big grants

by Maria Amador

IRASBURG — Welcome changes are afoot for the town of Irasburg, which received three sizable grants intended to bolster the accessibility and safety of several community fixtures. The money will go for a construction project at the Leach Public Library, a sidewalk connecting the town common and the Irasburg Village School along Route 58, and a scoping study of the town's transportation network.

In September, the Leach Public Library was awarded \$1,082,750 through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The library is one of only 14 in the state to get this grant, and the only one in Orleans County. Unlike other grants, it doesn't require matching money.

Library director Trisha Ingalls said the money will support a 12-by-12-foot, two-story expansion of the library. The addition, at the rear of the building, will have an accessible

entrance, and allow for the installation of an elevator and a bathroom compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. As it stands, the library has a single entrance and a bathroom on the basement floor, both of which can only be reached by stairs. There are also plans to renovate the basement into a community space and to upgrade the current HVAC system.

Ms. Ingalls and Phillis Mosher — a library trustee and member of the town's planning commission — said those developments will be significant for the library, which is used by the community for far more than just checking out books.

The library hosts story hour every week for "pre-preschoolers," an event which is as much for the family members who accompany them as for the children, Ms. Ingalls said. Jessica Simard of Brownington said she comes with her toddler to  
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# Irasburg gets three big grants

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the Leach library specifically for this event each week — despite this not being the closest library to her. When explaining why, she said the librarian, Collette Houle, is great and makes everyone feel at home.

The library also dedicates one week per month to visits from each classroom at the Irasburg Village School. Each ends with students checking out a book to read at home. Ms. Ingalls said the visits are important because they help kids learn about using their local library.

Beyond these recurring community programs, the library is also the only place in town with free Internet access. It also offers a printer and a computer, which can be used free of charge. Those who prefer to listen to their books, can check out audiobooks. They can be listened to over Wi-Fi or on CDs, which the library can deliver throughout winter. Ms. Ingalls and Ms. Mosher said those programs and resources would reach more people if everyone could access the space physically.

When the library's staff and board of trustees started to look for money for the expansion project, they never imagined they would all come from one source. After getting a municipal grant to pay for architectural drawings in 2021, the plan was to apply for six different grants over several years. The library would have eventually "cobbled together enough layers of funding" to handle the size and scope of the project, Ms. Ingalls said.

In 2022 they learned federal money would become available through ARPA and decided to wait for January when the application cycle began. They applied and received \$1.082-million along with an another \$200,000 for contingencies.

The money will be managed through the town, which is the official grantee, and the library is putting together a committee of trustees to help oversee the project. They hope to begin building next fall.

Before then, though, all grantees have to attend a webinar "on Halloween — because it's scary," joked Ms. Ingalls. The course will teach grantees how to manage federal funds, which notably involves learning how to request reimbursement. Because the grant repays the library for work done, said Ms. Ingalls, the town will take out a line of credit to make payments.

The first meeting of the trustee committee overseeing the project will be open to the public and take place on November 4. The partners of Coe and Coe Architecture, who designed the addition, will be there, too. Topics will include the bidding process, she said.

The town received separate grants for the sidewalk project and the scoping study. Ms. Ingalls called the timing sort of magical and said she and Ms. Mosher hope they can coordinate construction to have the library's accessible entryway connect to the sidewalk.

This year's VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program provided \$634,400 in federal funds for the new sidewalk. It will pay for a

dedicated walkway along Route 58, connecting school with the town common.

According to Town Clerk and Treasurer Danielle Ingalls, this has been a town goal for at least three years. Ms. Ingalls is also pleased about the timing of the grants and shares the sense that the town will be able to tie in the sidewalk project with the library's work and the scoping study of the common.

She said there is a need for increased safety around the common, which has a walking path inside that is used very regularly, she said. Though it less common because of heavy traffic, Ms. Ingalls said she sees people walking up and down the hill on Route 58. A sidewalk alongside will make people feel safer walking, she said.

Ms. Mosher, a member of the planning committee, said her children, who are now in their fifties, used to walk to school from their house south of the common.

"It was always terrifying, so it's been decades that we have hoped and prayed for a solution," she said.

Ms. Ingalls said the town got help and support from the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), which visited Irasburg and made helpful suggestions and aided in planning.

The town's scoping study will also be paid for by the 2024 VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program, which has awarded \$40,000 to go toward assessing and enhancing the safety of the town's transportation network.

A press release from the Leach Public Library says the project will "focus on improving crosswalk placement, boosting sidewalk connectivity, and increasing bike and pedestrian safety along key routes, including state routes 14 and 58, Creek Road, and Park Avenue."



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