

THURSTON PARK Continued from page 3

park. Various raptors (hawks, owls) have nesting sites in the park. You can hardly take a walk there without startling a grouse (partridge) or two, which makes for good hunting for the goshawk. (see picture.)

The park is also home to some of the history of China. An old rock dam is still intact in the southeastern corner of the park near a couple of cellar holes marking the location of early settlers. An old cemetery at the park's southeastern corner still has a post civil war headstone with the names of the residents on it. The northeastern corner has a stone marker that signifies the intersection of three different towns and two counties.

Interesting natural features abound. Located within and close to the park are several small but picturesque waterfalls as well as a small pond in the northwestern corner. The Yorktown Brook and Yorktown Bog form the entire western boundary of the park. This part of the park offers the potential for canoeing and kayaking and perhaps fishing as well.

As evidenced by the repeated logging activity that has taken place throughout its past, the park can also be a potential source of sustainably harvested timber, if managed properly for that purpose. In addition, the various glacial deposits could also be a source of sand and gravel if needed. It was estimated that there may be as much as forty acres of sand and gravel deposits within the park boundaries, though mining it without compromising other natural park values could be a challenge.

What the park needs in order to be more available for recreation

Even though the park offers the potential for a variety of recreational activities, its use is fairly limited. Part of the reason is that many people in town do not know about the park or don't know where it is. A bigger issue, however, is the poor access to the park. At present, the park is not accessible from the north at all during some times of the year when the water in Yorktown Brook is high. At other times, the poor condition of the road would force many potential users to park at the top of the hill outside the park and walk in. The access from south is little better. Although there is no point that is impassable on foot, there is a stretch of about 2500 feet that is not suitable for automobiles. In addition, there is little or no suitable parking on either end. The road access and parking are significant barriers to opening up the park to a wider clientele.

Beyond the access issues, the park needs to have facilities improved to make it a more user friendly destination. The roads within the park need to have drainage and some repairs to improve them even for foot traffic. Trails need to be cleared and connected to create loops or networks. Other facilities like picnic areas or campsites should be identified and developed. A put-in point on Yorktown Brook would encourage canoeists and kayakers to take advantage of this resource. Informational signs need to be developed and placed in strategic locations to help guide the visitor. Additionally, permitting some areas of the forest to grow into mature forest would promote both habitat diversity and a more aesthetically

Hot items bring large crowd to selectmen's meeting

by Mary Grow

VASSALBORO—Between the people interested in a tax-acquired lot, the people opposed to the proposed cell tower and the recreation program representatives, there was an unusually large and attentive crowd at the May 13 Vassalboro selectmen's meeting.

Board members rearranged their agenda—to the confusion of Town Manager Mary Sabins' carefully ordered files—to accommodate audience interests. They began with discussion of the Chenette property on Webber Pond Road, which the town now owns because taxes are unpaid since 2007.

A written report from Codes Enforcement Officer Paul Mitnik said the 3.2 acre lot, which formerly had a house and then a mobile home, meets current ordinance standards for a new residential building. It has about 500 feet of frontage on Outlet Stream, a septic system installed in 1998, and a well. Selectmen voted unanimously to sell the parcel by sealed bid, with bids due at the town office by 5 p.m. Wednesday, June 9.

After considering the taxes due and the costs associated with the bid process, they set a minimum price of \$5,000. Sabins said the town appraiser values the property at \$35,800. Resident John Melrose, speaking for Kennebec Land Trust, said the organization is willing to sell its approximately 1.3 acre lot adjoining the Chenette lot on the south, either to the successful bidder on the Chenette property or to another buyer. The trust's lot does not have suitable soils for a septic system, Melrose said.

Diane Plante, Susan Linscott and others gave selectmen the petition opposing the proposed cell tower that they tried to give planning board members on May 5. They had additional information on radiation hazards from cell towers from the just-released 2008-2009 President's Cancer Panel report. They asked how they could get the tower delayed until the whole town could vote on it.

Developer Michael Willette seeks a permit for the tower on property owned by Colleen Leathers and Clifford Pooler Jr. on Bog Road, a short distance west of the Webber Pond Road

pleasing hiking experience.

Members of the Thurston Park Committee are John Collins, Irene Belanger, Joann Austin, Bill Seekins, Judy Stone, Phil deMaynadier, Tess Carter, Paul MacDonald, Peter Foote, Jane Eames, Al Althenn, Dwaine Drummond, Gary French, Leslie French, Vivian French, Bruce Fitzgerald, Tim Theriault and Leo St. Peter.

intersection. Planning board members found only one potential problem that delayed approval: they asked Mitnik and Road Foreman Eugene Field to recheck the sight distance from the proposed driveway to the tower site.

Selectmen said they, like the planning board, have no authority to act on petitions against a specific project. They agreed with planning board members who told the concerned residents Vassalboro voters have repeatedly rejected efforts to create a zoning ordinance that might restrict landowners' rights. Selectmen said residents can try to develop a comprehensive plan and related ordinances that include zoning. Sabins added they might look for ordinances from other Maine towns dealing specifically with cell towers and propose one for Vassalboro. Neither avenue would help with the pending application, however. Board Chairman Robert Browne suggested seeking another landowner who would lease Willette's site in a location that meets Willette's needs.

Recreation Director Nicole Wasilewski, supported by Recreation Committee member Jennifer Fischer and Victor Esposito from Vassalboro Community School, outlined proposed additions to the town's recreation program and facilities needs. Wasilewski plans to supplement the traditional team sports for elementary-age youngsters with activities that can be pursued lifelong, are not necessarily competitive and take advantage of town resources like hiking trails and lakes. She is organizing a bike rodeo with help from the Maine Bicycle Coalition; a kayaking course with help from Esposito; and a fitness course with help from Fischer and Kim Browne.

Her list of improvements for the ball fields in East Vassalboro included better drainage; more storage space and bathrooms; two sets of metal bleachers; a play area for children whose parents and siblings are involved in team sports; a flagpole; and a broadcasting booth with announcing equipment. She has arranged for the National Guard to help install new drainage at the ball fields, with the recreation program to provide materials. Haines suggested she and committee members ask local businesses to donate materials. Wasilewski said the work might be done this fall; if not, it will be scheduled in 2011.

Selectmen approved of her approach. Browne reminded her to consider costs of upkeep and maintenance as well as initial costs when planning facilities improvements. In a related matter, selectmen appointed Ryan Redman a Recreation Committee

Hannaford presents grant to Erskine



The China Hannaford recently presented Erskine Academy with a \$1,000 education grant through the Hannaford Helps Schools program. Erskine was the top money raiser in the China area for 2009 with a total of \$419. All told, our customers raised a total of \$2,373 for schools in the China area, including China Primary and Middle schools, Windsor Elementary, and Palermo Consolidated. Pictured, left to right, Jon Fortier, Assistant Store Manager; Lee Fecteau, Store Manager; and Michael McQuarrie, Head Master Erskine Academy. Contributed photo

Board almost grants permit to Sears

by Mary Grow

CHINA—China Planning Board members almost approved Joseph Sears' commercial permit at their May 11 meeting. A decision is likely May 25.

Sears, doing business as Windy Ridge Hay Rides, plans to offer haunted rides around his field at 75 Dirigo Road from 5 to 10 p.m., on October weekends and holidays. He intends to have three tractor-drawn wagons, each accommodating 15 or 20 people. Each ride will take 20 to 30 minutes. Sears plans a ticket booth, a concession stand with hotdogs and cold drinks, a fire pit for bonfires, portable toilets and ample parking. He is arranging to have the junior firefighters in the Erskine Academy Fire Corps assist. He talked with neighbors, who voiced no objections. One offered to help.

Planning board members agreed unanimously they did not need to hold a public hearing on the project. They found no problems with Sears' application, though they asked for a couple additional documents for town

records. Codes Enforcement Officer Scott Pierz said he intends to draft written findings of fact to support approval in time for final action at the board's May 25 meeting. Sears is not sure he will be ready this October. Pierz and board members said his permit is valid for one year. If he does not start the business this fall, they advised him to apply for a one-year extension early in 2011, before the permit expires.

The May 11 meeting began with a presentation by Greg Goulette of Hanover Computer Company on laptop computers for board members. Members' goal is to reduce use of town office staff time and other resources by doing more business by email. Pending applications could be shared electronically instead of as paper copies. There was also discussion of improving communications. Sometimes, Pierz and board members agreed, documents do not reach everyone who should see them, or are read by people who do not need the information. No decisions were made.

member.

In other business May 13, selectmen unanimously signed an order of discontinuance for Barrows Road, including giving up any public easement, with no compensation to abutting landowners. Voters will ratify or reject the discontinuance order at the June 7 annual town meeting.

Sabins reported that hearings on the proposed Kennebec County budget are scheduled for May 26 in Augusta and May 27 in Waterville. Vassalboro's county tax will be less this year than last, she said.

The next regular Vassalboro selectmen's meeting is scheduled for Thursday evening, May 27.

Border Trust
the bank for small business families™
Corporate Headquarters
227 Water St.,
Augusta
622-0038
South China (207) 445-4865
Augusta (207) 629-5456
Jackman (207) 668-2251
Topsham (207) 729-1426

FEET!!
Dr. Andrew T. Smith
AUGUSTA FOOT & ANKLE CENTER
26 Eastern Ave., Augusta
623-5100
Physician & Surgeon
of the Foot & Ankle

Hemphill's, Inc.
NORTH VASSALBORO, MAINE 04962
BLUE SEAL EQUI-GRAZE PASTURE SEED
25 lb \$65.95 • 50 lb \$99.95
STRAW \$4.50 per bale
GARDEN LIME 50 lb \$3.75
HAY
\$4.00 per bale
25 or more \$3.75
BLUE SEAL®
QUANTITY PRICES AVAILABLE
872-7964 • Mon. thru Sat. 8 am - 5:30 pm • Fri. 8 to 8 pm

LAKESIDE COUNTRY STORE
FULL DELI ■ PIZZA ■ SUBS
AGENCY LIQUOR STORE...AND MORE
OPEN 24 HOURS/7 DAYS
NOW OFFERING DIESEL FUEL
1390 Lakeview Drive, China ME 04358
968-3663 ■ 968-2222