

—Slug:.....COMM-0837.rock.project_updates
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—For section..... News
—Format..... News - byline and dateline
—Dateline..... Rockingham
—Article Number:..... 42470



Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Multiple projects in Rockingham approved and funded
2 this fall

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3 Voters approve bonds for Town Hall, Meeting House
4 repairs; tax credits OK'd for restoration of and addition to Miss
5 Bellows Falls Diner

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6 TEXT BODY:

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7 Over the past couple of weeks. several important
8 projects in Rockingham have taken significant steps forward.

9 At the same time, the federal government shutdown,
10 combined with ongoing massive cuts in federal funding and

11 staffing, have added elements of uncertainty to the process for
12 some of the work.

13 The federal chaos has led to many questions on what
14 approved federal grants will be fully funded and when or if the
15 money will be received.

16 But locally, on Oct. 14, two bond votes — one for major
17 preservation work on the historic Rockingham Meeting House,
18 and the other for funding a new roof on the Town Hall — were
19 both overwhelmingly approved by voters.

20 In addition, Rockingham for Progress Inc. (RFP), which is
21 restoring the dormant Miss Bellows Falls Diner, received a major
22 state tax credit award. And the long-anticipated restoration work
23 on the village train depot also began last week.

24 These projects involve preserving and maintaining four of
25 the most historically significant structures in the town. Over the
26 past several years, both town officials and volunteer citizen
27 groups have been instrumental in moving these projects forward.

28 Town Manager Scott Pickup said he was pleased with the
29 bond votes, as well as the progress on the train station and the
30 Meeting House.

31 Preserving and maintaining the town's historic structures
32 is both "our responsibility and our obligation," Pickup said.

33 He added that citizens have been giving their time, skills,
34 and monetary donations, all of which have been necessary in
35 moving these projects along.

36 "A lot of this work is grant funded," Pickup said, "and the
37 community has been very supportive." This is particularly true of
38 the restoration of the Miss Bellows Falls Diner, he noted.

39 "We need the grants," to get these projects done, he said.
40 "Unfortunately, at the moment politics has frozen a lot of the
41 funding."

Town Hall and the Meeting

House

One of the most urgent projects facing the town is the replacement of the roof on the Town Hall, which houses the administrative offices, a 553-seat theater and performance space, and other venues in constant use.

“The roof leaks horribly,” Pickup said, and the water has damaged the plaster in several offices and threatened the camera equipment in the movie theater’s projection room.

The Town Hall will celebrate its centennial in 2026, and Pickup said that the roof has been “sealed several times,” but is failing and now needs to be replaced.

“We have a contractor, and the materials have been ordered,” Pickup said. “We hope to start this next week. I would really like to see this done before Thanksgiving.”

The total cost for the project is \$680,000, covered by a \$160,000 state grant. The \$525,000 balance is covered by the local 30-year bond.

The Rockingham Meeting House is considered an architectural gem of the community. Built from 1787 to 1801, it was used for decades for meetings by church, community, and government alike.

Neglected for some time, it was restored in 1906, and preservation efforts have continued since then.

Owned by the town, the Meeting House was designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. government in 2000 and is considered one of the oldest and best-preserved buildings of its type in the nation.

The Meeting House bond article for \$125,000 was approved in the Oct. 14 vote. The funds will serve as the local match for two large National Park Service Saving America’s Treasures federal grants that the town has already received toward the project, estimated at nearly \$3 million.

75 “We’ve started the bidding process for work to begin in
76 spring 2026,” said Walter Wallace, the coordinator of the
77 Rockingham Historic Preservation Commission.

78 Preservation includes maintenance on the slate roof,
79 foundation work, plaster and exterior woodwork conservation,
80 and restoration of interior details such as the box pews.

81 Wallace said that an open house with a detailed report to
82 the community about the project is being organized at the
83 Meeting House for Saturday, Nov. 1, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with
84 a formal discussion scheduled to start at 11 a.m.

85 Voters originally approved both bonds earlier in the year
86 by voice vote. Then town was advised by its attorney that the
87 bonds had to be approved by Australian ballot, necessitating the
88 October balloting.

89 Of 3,800 registered voters, 171 cast ballots, with the
90 outcome mirroring the earlier decisions. The bond for the
91 Meeting House was approved 135–35, and the one for the Town
92 Hall roof, 138–33.

93 **Work begins on train depot**

94 The \$3.3 million train depot restoration project began
95 last week, starting with a focus on environmental hazard
96 remediation.

97 Pickup said that three firms have been contracted for the
98 initial environmental work.

99 A vapor barrier in the basement of the building will seal
100 it from gases resulting from soil pollution, followed by asbestos
101 remediation. Then work on the building’s windows will ensure
102 that the structure is watertight.

103 With the environmental hazards addressed and the
104 building secure from water damage, the rest of the restoration
105 work can proceed safely, Pickup said.

106 Gov. Phil Scott and the Agency of Commerce and
107 Community Development also announced last week just over
108 \$3.3 million in funding for 34 rehabilitation and revitalization

109 projects in 23 of Vermont’s designated downtown and village
110 centers.

111 The Miss Bellows Falls Diner is one of those projects.

112 The total project cost is estimated at \$1.195 million, the
113 award said, and the tax credit award is \$145,000.

114 “The project includes restoration of the historic 1941
115 diner car and construction of a new addition with a commercial
116 kitchen and ADA accessible restrooms,” the award stated. “State
117 tax credits will support important code-compliance work as well
118 as façade repairs[,] ensuring this landmark can once again be a
119 flourishing community asset and gathering place.”

120 These tax credits “remain one of Vermont’s most effective
121 and popular tools for breathing new life into every corner of
122 Vermont,” said Department of Housing and Community
123 Development Commissioner Alex Farrell in a news release.

124 The diner restoration project is the work of the
125 Rockingham for Progress (RFP) citizens group.

126 “We got those pesky 75% plan sets in to Preservation
127 Trust of Vermont,” RFP said in a release last week, “along with the
128 report from the Historic Preservation consultant outlining how
129 brilliantly compatible the new construction is with the classic
130 lines of Worcester Lunch Car #771, a.k.a. The Miss Bellows Falls
131 Diner. In turn, PTV has submitted it to the National Park Service.”

132 RFP is sponsoring a final Diner Dinner fundraiser of
133 2025 on the evening of Saturday, Oct. 25, at the Bellows Falls
134 Moose Lodge, where the group says they will update the
135 community on the progress of the project.

136 “Moose Lodge member Aime Theroux will serve as chef
137 and prepare roast pork, mashed potatoes, stuffing, squash, green
138 beans, cranberry sauce, gravy and rolls,” the group announced.

139 “Please specify vegan option at time order is placed. Dessert will
140 be apple crisp with whipped cream.”

141 For more information and tickets, visit
142 missbellowsfalls.com.

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