

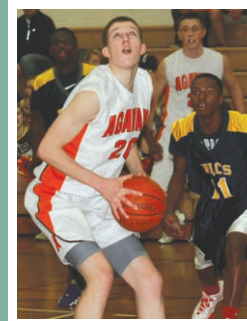
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Council to consider restriction

Next meeting set for Feb. 6

By Jennifer Wroblewski
Staff Writer

AGAWAM — If the efforts of one city councilor come to fruition, the town will place a restriction on the deed to School Street Park, prohibiting growing vegetables or fruit that would be consumed on a section of the park adjacent to the Agawam Sportsman's Club on Corey Street.

Councilor Robert Magovern sponsored the resolution, which the council will mull over at the Feb. 6 meeting.

According to the resolution, the parcels contain residual hazards associated with contaminants and volatile organic compounds, and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is requiring the town restrict the deed to School Street Park in order for the sportsman's club property to be sold.

A Massachusetts Contingency Plan (MCP) risk assessment was conducted on the site, and based upon the recent and historical soil sampling, it was determined that the site does not pose a human hazard if no consumable fruits and vegetables are grown there. In a letter to the town of Agawam, dated Jan. 4, licensed site professional Thomas Duffield of Duffield Engineering and Consulting, based in Keene, N.H., stated that a restriction should be placed prohibiting the growing of fruits and vegetables and excavation into the ground there.

Please see COUNCIL, page 6

Winter's shadows...



Turley Publications photo by Connie J. Casagrande



The lack of penetrating cold and precipitation throughout the region seems to have confused the local bird population, as many species of birds have been spotted perched in the trees, silhouetted by the blue winter sky. Do you have your own photo to share? Send it to Agawam Advertiser News Editor Jennifer Wroblewski at jwroblewski@turley.com.

Feral cat population causes concern

By Gregory A. Scibelli
Turley Publications Correspondent

AGAWAM — Town and animal control officials in two communities have been dealing with a feral cat population that has already resulted in two confirmed cases of rabies in Agawam and the first case found recently in Southwick.

Agawam town officials recently learned there have been issues with feral cats in their community and have begun taking steps to remedy the situation through a partnership with the Dakin Pioneer Valley Humane Society.

Dakin has been helping to trap and remove many feral cats from the population and have even euthanized some cats free of charge.

In Agawam, Animal Control Officer Alison Strong has been contending with the issue of feral cats in some neighborhoods, and said she has had two instances of rabies in the community. She complimented Dakin for their help in accommodating the needs of Agawam, which does not normally deal with cat situations.

"They were very generous in helping us to deal with the situation here," said Strong.

According to Massachusetts General Laws, towns are required to have a method in place to handle dogs, but they are not required to take care of cats. Most recently, Agawam reached an agreement to join a joint shelter in Westfield along with the town of West Springfield.

Residents should continue to be aware of possible feral cat populations in town and report issues to the Agawam Police Department as soon as possible.

In Southwick, one of a few communities that boards cats after they are found, Animal Control Officer Tracey Root came before the Board of Selectmen Monday night and sought permission to notify residents and begin entering some neighborhoods near the Congamond Lakes to attempt to trap and obtain some control of the population.

Please see FERAL, page 6

Forging ahead with historic restoration

School Street Barn a 'diamond in the rough'

By Jennifer Wroblewski
Staff Writer

The town of Agawam is steeped in agricultural history, the last vestige of which is known today as the "School Street Barn," a structure that, for the last 130 years, has stood prominently above the floodplain of the Connecticut River. In its heyday, the barn was once the center of one of the most thriving agricultural hubs in western Massachusetts.

Though it still touts the red exterior, decades of hard use and some neglect have masked its facade, causing some to question its importance to the community. But cynics need only slide aside the grand double doors to notice the structure's awe-inspiring interior and realize the School Street Barn is "a diamond in the rough," said Deborah Dachos, director of Planning and Community Development.

"When you open those doors and you walk into it, it just takes you back to the 1800s," she said. "I've been in a lot of barns and they're very utilitarian, but this barn is extremely special."

According to Dachos, the barn was purchased by the town in 2002 along with 49.3 acres of land on which the structure currently sits. Since that time, a dedicated group of residents have been working to raise public awareness of the barn's historic past. The goal, she said, is to restore the barn to its original glory while at the same time renovating it so that it could be used for a host of community activities and functions. "They're all in love with the barn," she said of the half-dozen residents who have committed to working on behalf of the barn since it came into town ownership.

Recently, with the support of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the town of Agawam has submitted to the U.S. Department of Interior a National Historic Register nomination form. Listing on the National Register is a "rare privilege" granted to those structures and places that "hold a special place in American history," said Dachos.



Turley Publications file photo

The old red barn stands at the entrance to School Street Park.

"The School Street Barn is one such place, representing a rare New England style high-drive post and beam structure," she said.

A unique past

The barn represents not only a rare construction style, but also occupied a unique place in Agawam's agricultural heritage.

Starting in the 1940s, the barn was part of the Hamden County Jail prison farm and housed equipment, livestock and farm products used to feed prisoners at the former York Street Jail, said Dachos. Thirty to 40 inmates came to work the farm daily. In 1943, the farm produced 1,500 gallons of tomatoes, 450 gallons of green tomato relish, 300 gallons of spinach, 125 gallons of carrots, 12 barrels of sauerkraut, and 10 barrels of pickles.

The program continued through the 1980s, with the number of inmates being fed rising from 200 in the mid-1940s to more than 600 in the late 1980s. An abundance of produce allowed the jail farm to send excess food to homeless families in Springfield and Holyoke.

Please see RESTORATION, page 6

