

New Owners Plan To Renovate Inn At Newtown

BY ANDREW GOROSKO

The new owners of The Inn at Newtown property at 19 Main Street said this week that they plan to renovate the long-closed historic building that stands on the 3,002-acre site and put it back into service as a restaurant, bar, lounge, and banquet hall.

The renovated facility also would hold six living spaces that may either be designed as lodgings for temporary stays, or as rental apartments that would have one-year leases, said developer Russell Barton, a member of a group which has purchased the property from the Ryder family.

According to legal papers filed with the Newtown Town Clerk's office on March 10, DWR Company III, LLC of Vero Beach, Fla., on March 4 sold land and structures at 19 Main Street to a firm known as Newtown 19 Main LLC of Washington, Conn. Barton is doing business as Newtown 19 Main LLC. The sale price was \$650,000, according to conveyance tax documents.

The inn, which suddenly closed for business in January 2016, has been the focus of much attention and controversy during the past six months as two developers representing the Ryder family sought Borough Zoning Commission (BZC) approval for a new set of

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The Show Will Go On... Only Later: 'Pippin' Postponed

Newtown High School students — in front from left, Will Crebbin as Pippin, Danny Ingersoll as Charlemagne, and Jonathan Crosby as Lewis — rehearse a scene on March 6 from the high school's upcoming musical production of *Pippin*, which was postponed to next month as of March 11. All of Newtown Public Schools musicals were postponed. Newtown Middle School's production of *Willy Wonka Jr* will be staged April 23 to 26, NHS's *Pippin* will be staged April 30 to May 3, and Reed Intermediate School's *Lion King Jr* will be staged May 8 to 9. Dates and times mentioned in the related story on *Pippin* on Page B5 in this week's print edition went to press prior to the change and are no longer accurate.

—Bee Photo, Hallabek

Exit 9 Gas Station Proposal Draws More Opposition

BY ANDREW GOROSKO

Following extensive comment at a March 5 public hearing on a controversial proposal to build a gas station/convenience store on a 3.7-acre site at 13 Hawleyville Road (Route 25), Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z) members concluded the hearing, but did not vote on the application in order to allow members to review new information submitted by the developer.

The P&Z meeting drew about 25 members of the public, who listened attentively as experts for development firm 13 Hawleyville Road LLC explained technical aspects of the project. The complex is proposed for a currently vacant lot on the west side of Hawleyville Road, just south of eastbound Interstate 84's Exit 9 off-ramp. The site is in the Hawleyville Center Design District (HCDD) zone.

Last November, in a 5-0 vote, P&Z members rejected a somewhat larger version of the project in light of traffic concerns that had been raised by people living in the area. Shortly thereafter, the developer returned with a scaled-down version of the project, which has been the subject of three sometimes-emotional public hearings.

Nearby residents have mounted stiff opposition to the current project, charging that it was not the size of the first project that troubled them, but that such development would occur at all in what is a congested area.

In 2015, the P&Z approved construction of a diner on the development site. That approval

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Local Officials Grapple With Unknowns As COVID-19 Spreads Closer To Home

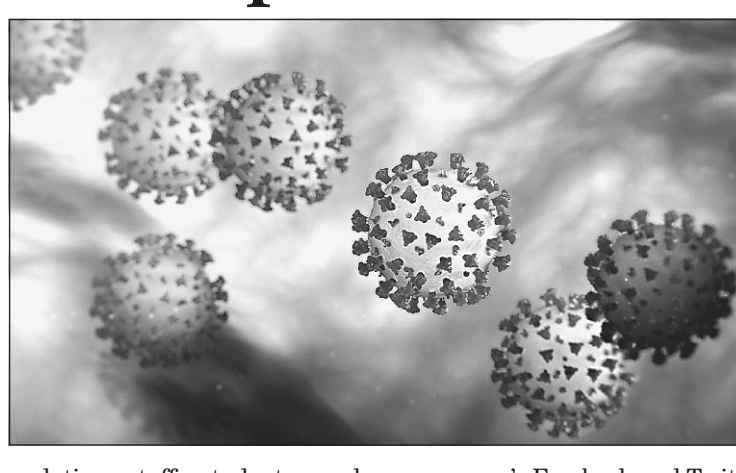
BY JOHN VOKET

Although it is certain that COVID-19 is spreading into the state and particularly southwestern Connecticut, local officials are scrambling to help protect Newtown residents as best they can, considering numerous uncertainties regarding the outbreak that has now been classified by global health leaders as a pandemic.

So what does that mean? From a clinical and technical angle, "pandemic" has nothing to do with how serious the illness is. It just means a disease is spreading widely.

The head of the World Health Organization, which made the declaration Wednesday, March 11, said the UN health agency is deeply concerned about the alarming levels of spread. But at the same time, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made clear the declaration did not mean that countries should give up trying to contain the virus, which has — as of press time Thursday, March 12 — been identified in three people in Connecticut.

The latest impact in Newtown is related to how the school district is moving forward. Superintendent Lorrie Rodrigue has been working to keep in contact,



key Newtown staff members and volunteers at the local Emergency Operations Center to discuss preliminary plans to respond as the very fluid situation develops in the coming days and weeks. Rosenthal and Culbert also reassured community members as best they could, reiterating basic precautionary measures.

The first selectman explained that he is taking steps to ensure town employees curtail official travel plans, and requested they also consider cancelling all personal travel outside the immediate area if possible. The health director admitted that it is possible there may be one or more COVID-19 infections in Newtown or neighboring district communities of Roxbury and Bridgewater already.

Nonetheless, she continued to assert how important it is that everyone follow all prescribed measures to protect themselves and others from transmissions. This practice of distancing from others, particularly at gatherings, has triggered massive cancellations of activities and events, which are being updated regularly at newtownbee.com.

Rosenthal said, immediately,

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updating staff, students, and parents as often as possible in an environment where any given message could be outdated by the time it goes from final draft to delivery an hour or two later.

Dr Rodrigue's latest notification indicated she is closing local public schools for at least one day on Friday, March 13 (see accompanying story on Page A1), and she also sat with First Selectman Dan Rosenthal and Health District Director Donna Culbert late Wednesday afternoon for a video message to the community that is part of a series of outreach clips being shared on *The Newtown Bee's* YouTube channel and on the

newspaper's Facebook and Twitter feeds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_RfBBl1Ow&t=277s)

In that message she reassured the community about infection controls and disinfecting protocols being followed to date in school buildings and facilities, and on local school transport vehicles. Following the taping, Dr Rodrigue also said, in part, that the district is applying for a waiver from the state of Connecticut to support distance learning that may be counted as regular school days in the event schools must be closed for any extended period.

On Wednesday morning, the first selectman also convened

EDITORIAL INK DROPS

It Is (Almost) Always Sunny In Newtown

For journalists and news organizations, including *The Newtown Bee*, March 15-21 marks "Sunshine Week" — the annual celebration of access to public information and what it means for you and your community.

Much like Newtown is fortunate to have its very own self-contained and exclusive media organization in this newspaper, this community also enjoys a tradition of having local government officials who take freedom of information pretty seriously.

While there have been a few occasions over the past couple of decades where *The Newtown Bee* has been forced to file an appeal with the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC), these incidents are mere blips across a landscape in which dozens of Newtown boards, commissions, and committees conduct public business in thousands of meetings, hearings, and other open sessions every year.

Certainly there are a few tweaks that could propel Newtown's solid "A" to an "A+" when it comes to public access to information, but these are mostly minor points that are addressable, if not immediately correctable. For example, Newtown's Municipal Center council chambers — the room where many of the community's highest level meetings take place — is not only equipped with assistive listening gear for those who are hearing impaired, but full audio/video streaming capabilities, which are utilized regularly.

That means many of the most locally relevant meetings that happen can be viewed live in real time or through archived web broadcasts in the comfort of one's own home or via mobile device, 24/7. It is vitally important that officials who meet in this venue — and anywhere else, for that matter — be heard as well as seen as they conduct the peoples' business.

That means properly using microphones and enunciating in a loud, clear manner when microphones are not available. Every single board, commission, or committee chair can lead by example, insisting that anyone speaking on the record does so in a way they can be clearly heard.

It is also appreciated when these same chairs ascertain that meeting notices are thorough and accurate. Unfortunately, there are a few Newtown and Borough of Newtown panels using templates for their agendas, which either occasionally or regularly fail to appropriately reflect the planned subject matter for those gatherings. On the other hand, and to the credit of their clerks, most local municipal meeting minutes typically reflect significantly more information than is required under the state FOI statutes.

Newtown officials are to be commended, as well, for the frequency with which they conduct FOI trainings for the public and public officials. That probably explains why — when it comes to citizens pressing for access to information — Newtown is nearly absent from any state FOIC hearing dockets.

So as communities like Newtown and its community news organization mark Sunshine Week 2020, its citizens can celebrate in the bright glow that highlights accessibility while remaining ever vigilant and holding local officials accountable any time shadows begin to creep into places where the peoples' business is being done.

This guest editorial was produced by Associate Editor John Voket, a past president of the New England Newspaper & Press Association.



Superintendent's March 11 COVID-19 Update

Superintendent of Schools Dr Lorrie Rodrigue announced schools will be closed for a professional development day this Friday, March 13, in a message to parents and staff regarding COVID-19 updates.

The message reads:
Dear Staff and Families,
I wanted to take this opportunity to update you on the con-

cerns regarding COVID-19 and its impact on our community at the present time. Please know that while Newtown Public Schools remain open, this situation may change, and you will receive immediate notification. Any decision to close schools is made with input and support

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Your Source For COVID-19 Information

The Newtown Bee is providing current information regarding the COVID-19 threat within its pages. Additional local and state news related to the novel coronavirus can be found on Pages 9 and 12 of this edition, including postponements and cancellations (contact organizers of any event to confirm before going); ruling by the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference; the Governor's Public Health Emergency declaration; insurance coverage for testing; the state general information hotline; and more. Information will be regularly updated at newtownbee.com, as well.

Revisiting Selma: Four Ministers Travel During A Historic Era

BY SHANNON HICKS

(Note: This is the first of a two-part story that will look back at four Newtown ministers who traveled to Selma, Alabama, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, 55 years ago.)

On the front page of the March 19, 1965 issue of *The Newtown Bee*, one of that week's stories covered a visit by four local clergymen to Selma, Alabama, where civil rights efforts were making national headlines.

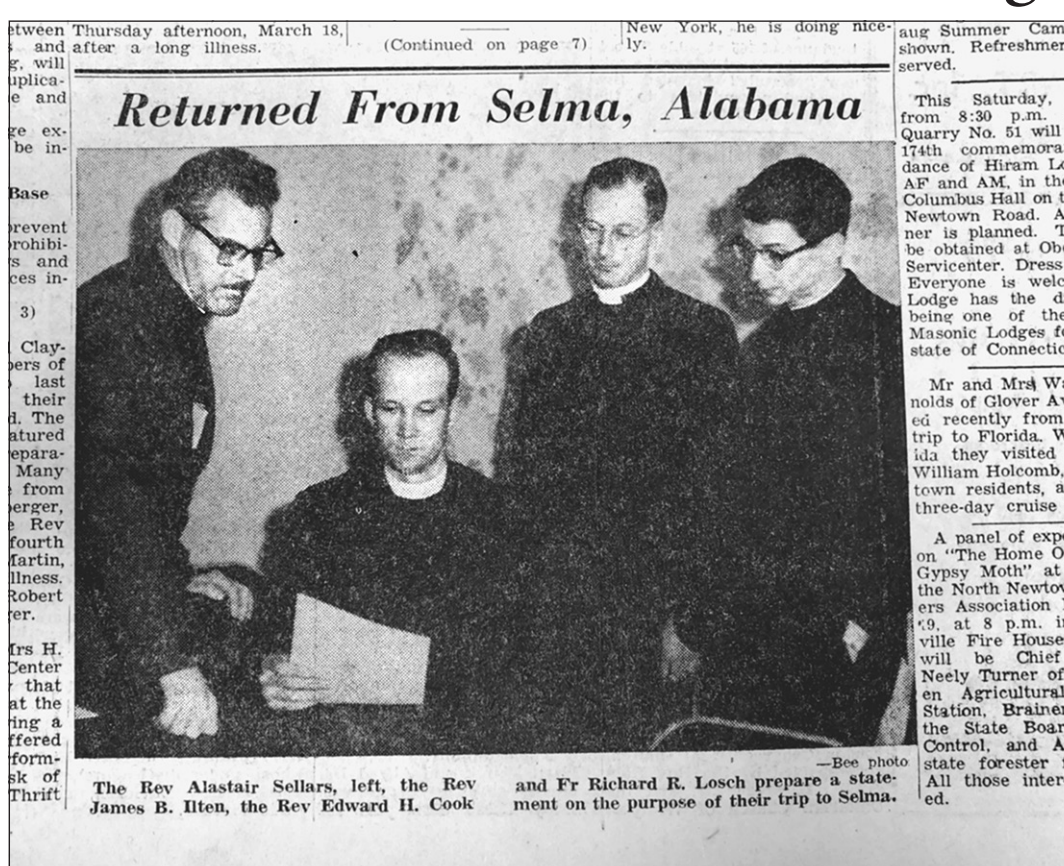
The men had been in the South for five days, arriving March 12 and returning late Tuesday, March 16, after seeing firsthand the struggles of those fighting for equal civil rights.

The Alabama town was at that time the center of the Civil Rights Movement. Selma was home at that time to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Led by the Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, the conference was operating in a renewed effort to register black voters.

The Rev Edward H. Cook of Trinity Episcopal Church, the Rev James B. Ilten of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Father Richard R. Losch of St John's Episcopal Church, and the Rev Alastair Sellars of Newtown Congregational Church had decided to travel to Selma, *The Newtown Bee* reported, while at the March luncheon meeting "of the Newtown clergy who are in the habit of a monthly series of luncheons. It was an Ecumenical, inter-faith, joint decision."

A call was placed to the headquarters of the Episcopal Church in New York. Although "the difficulties of transportation to and accommodations in Selma were cited to the Newtown group...the suggestion was made that they call Selma direct to see if they would be welcome," the newspaper reported (it was a style of the era that the reporter who wrote the recap went uncredited).

It was at that time that contact was made with the Rev Lewis, pastor of Brown's Chapel,



A photo on the front page of the March 19, 1965, issue of *The Newtown Bee* shows, from left, the Reverend Alastair Sellars, the Reverend James B. Ilten, the Reverend Edward H. Cook, and Father Richard R. Losch. The four clergymen were working on a statement concerning a trip they had just made to Selma, Alabama, during the civil rights movement.

—Bee file photo

a Roman Catholic Church in Selma, according to the report.

The visit by the four ministers landed between the second and third of the three attempts by activists to make the 54-mile walk from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital of Montgomery.

The marches had been organized after

months of unrest to demonstrate the desire of African-American citizens to exercise their Constitutional right to vote.

The marches were also a reaction to the murder, on February 26 of that year, of activist and deacon Jimmie Lee Jackson, who had been shot by a state trooper during a peaceful march in Marion, Ala.

The first march, on Sunday, March 7 ("Bloody Sunday"), ended when state troopers and others attacked the unarmed marchers with billy clubs and tear gas after the group crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, at the county line.

In a lecture he plans to present this week in Alabama, where he now makes his home, Rev Losch addresses Selma and that historic day, which he calls "the final straw." Rev Losch, now 82, shared a copy of his lecture, "From Boston To Selma: The Manifestation of Racism in the North and South," with *The Newtown Bee*.

The 600 protesters were met, he said, "with excessive, but perhaps not unexpected violence."

Rev Losch points out in his lecture that "any violence would have been excessive, because they had been carefully trained to have a peaceful march, obedient even to the point of not obstructing traffic and obeying traffic lights at crossings.

"The only civil disobedience," he continued, "was violation of the parade permit act."

The peaceful marchers, he points out, were met with "tear gas — but more...unrestrained attack dogs, [and] mounted police with truncheons.

"Some people even jumped off the bridge into the river to save themselves," he said.

Disturbing News From Home
The second march was two days later. Troop-

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