

## Downtown benches ready to make return

### First to be put at fire station in next couple of weeks

By ANITA FRITZ  
Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — People will soon have a place to rest while shopping downtown.

The town plans to place eight new benches on the Town Common, in front of the fire station, and near the Energy Park by the end of spring.

Janine Greaves, the town's recycling coordinator, said the eight benches are made of recycled material and which cost \$525 each. The money

came from a \$1,200 state Department of Environmental Protection grant and donations from individuals and local organizations, including Greenfield Community College and Cohn and Co. They have been assembled and awaiting installation.

"Now, we just have to wait until our crews have time to pour the concrete foundations for each bench," said Greaves. "We expect the first one to be installed at the fire station within the next couple of

weeks." Greaves said the remainder will be installed before the end of spring.

She said Mayor William Martin would like to "bring the common back to the way it used to be," as a gathering place for shoppers and visitors.

Greaves said Martin, who is currently on medical leave, hopes to buy more benches as money is raised through grants and donations and disperse them throughout the downtown and Main Street.

"People and businesses have been generous," said Greaves.

The town removed all downtown benches more than

four years ago because of concerns about loiterers bothering passersby.

Martin decided he wanted to "try again," but decided to start in places other than along Main Street to see how it went in those areas first.

The mayor said in an earlier interview concerning the benches that the downtown is becoming pedestrian-oriented and benches will help encourage more people to be downtown.

Martin said he decided to bring back the benches his predecessor, former Mayor Christine Forgey, removed, because people who come downtown to shop or eat want to sit and take a break, and

there's nowhere to do so.

Greaves said the inscription on the bench at the fire station near the 2001 memorial will read, "We will never forget." She said another bench will be dedicated to the Greenfield High School Class of 1965 and a couple of benches will be dedicated to individuals.

"This is a good start," she said.

The 4-foot-long bench seats and backs are made of 100 percent recycled, splinter-free material.

Donors may have an inscription engraved on two slats of a bench.

The idea to bring benches back to the downtown came

after the town received a Sustainable Materials

Recovery Program grant from the state to buy two benches and after a major downtown rejuvenation, which has seen the opening of new eateries and stores.

Greaves said she is continuing to look for donations from individuals and businesses and will put as many downtown as people are willing to donate.

"We would check with a downtown business before we'd place a bench in front of that store," said Greaves. "We want this to be a positive thing for everyone."

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Recorder/Peter MacDonald

Deborah Shriver stands on gravel on the Sawmill River in Montague, where the river is washing away and undercutting the bankings.

## Calming the Sawmill River

### Informational meeting set for tonight at 7 p.m.

By CHRIS CURTIS  
Recorder Staff

MONTAGUE — An old effort to address an older problem will surface tonight with a public informational meeting to present and discuss plans to calm a section of the Sawmill River in Montague Center.

The river has been plagued by problems, or plagued its surroundings, for years, according to Deborah Shriver, grant administrator for the Franklin Conservation District.

Shriver said the river flows very

steeply downhill from its source in Shutesbury, and erodes so that sedimentation problems have threatened bridges and roads and damaged habitats.

The current project is intended to slow and redirect water along a relatively short section of the river.

"This is a beginning," said Shriver. "This project is not the sole solution to the problems of the Sawmill River."

The particular section of river in question, a segment along North Leverett Road just west of Route 63, has banks straightened and armored with rocks.

This human intervention has restricted the river's natural inclination to meander and increased the erosive force of the channel downstream, Shriver said.

The project totals just over \$531,000, with much of the funding from an Environmental Protection Agency grant.

The plan, to be presented in full at tonight's meeting, calls for what Shriver said was a natural approach with root wads, rock and log veins strategically placed to direct the channel.

Shriver said the restructured river will be a better habitat for trout and other fish and allow for the natural collection and deposit of sediments.

The public meeting will begin at 7 p.m. in the Montague Public Safety Complex, 180 Turnpike Road, Turners Falls.

The next step will be to seek permits from a variety of state and federal agencies, Shriver said.

If all goes smoothly in the permitting phase, Shriver said construction may be done in late summer or early fall.

You can reach Chris Curtis at: ccurtis@recorder.com or 413-772-0261, ext. 257

## Planners defend solar bylaw proposal

### Board chair says it wanted hearings, special permits, site reviews for installations

By ANITA FRITZ  
Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — When it proposed changing the town's bylaw concerning large-scale, ground-mounted solar panels, the Planning Board wanted them subject to a public hearing and to require a special permit and site plan review, according to the board's chairwoman.

It appears that is what the Town Council had intended to vote last month, but instead accidentally voted on a motion to allow such commercial solar farms "by right" in some residential zones on town-owned land.

The council realized its mistake, with the help of the town clerk's office, and rescinded that vote this week. Then, the council tabled any change in solar panel regulations, saying it needed more time to research it.

Town Council Economic Development Committee Chairman Mark Wisniewski said the council may want to put even more restrictions than the Planning Board had or even forbid large-scale installations in those residential zones.

"When we went through the ordinance and made amendments, we weren't going to allow them in all residential zones and the ones we did would have restrictions," Planning Board Chairwoman Roxann Wedegartner said Wednesday. "We thought the large-scale, ground-mounted installations should be allowed, by special permit, in the RC (rural residential) and RB (suburban residential), but not by-right there."

Wedegartner said the Planning Board also recommended those types of installations not be allowed in urban residential, central commercial, limited commercial and health zones, which are the more densely populated areas of town.

Those include the downtown area, outlying commercial areas and the area near the hospital.

But, large-scale arrays, according to Planning Board recommendations, would be allowed by special permit in the town's general commercial and office zones.

Currently, the only areas where large-scale, ground-mounted arrays are allowed by right are in the town's two industrial zones.

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## Shutesbury Selectboard: New library supporter, opponent face off

By BEN STORROW  
Special to The Recorder

SHUTESBURY — The town's most politically charged year in recent memory will be punctuated by a Selectboard race between two women on opposing sides of the contentious debate over whether to build a new library. Library opponent Melissa I. Makepeace-O'Neil is challenging Selectboard Chairwoman Elaine Puleo for a seat on the board. While both candidates say the controversy is just one of many important matters facing the town, the plan to build a \$3.5 million library nonetheless figures to play a prominent role in the May 5 election.

Puleo had a brief but key role in the controversy. After the project failed 423-382 at the polls in November, the Selectboard met to decide whether Shutesbury should schedule another vote on the issue. With the board tied 1-1, Puleo cast the deciding vote that put the proposal back to the ballot. That revote ended in a 522-522 tie, which means that the proposal failed. The result

is being challenged in Franklin Superior Court later this month.

Makepeace-O'Neil, of 315 West Pelham Road, said she disagreed with Puleo's vote to put the library matter on the ballot a second time, though she acknowledged "it was a very hard decision and a hard place for her to be in."

"I am a strong believer in casting votes and sticking with the votes that are cast," Makepeace-O'Neil said. "(The November vote) was a solid decision by the townspeople. I feel it should have been kept with that first vote." Puleo, an associate dean of research at the University of Massachusetts School of Public Health and Health Sciences and an associate professor in the Department of Public Health, said she stands by her vote.

"I don't think it hurt to ask

(voters) again," Puleo said, adding that she did not think it was right for her to decide the project's fate.

"I think it was a difficult enough question and I don't think it was fair for me to be the deciding vote," she said.

A Shutesbury native, Makepeace-O'Neil, 36, who works as an admissions information coordinator at Amherst College, said she has "grown concerned about the town."

"The community is fractured," she said. "I want to be able to secure a bright future for our town." Makepeace-O'Neil said her opposition to the library is not what prompted her to run.

"Something about this time feels like a good time to run," she said. "No one issue pushed me over the edge to run."

Taxes in Shutesbury are too high, she said, noting that Shutesbury has the fourth-highest tax rate in the state, and the highest rate in Franklin County, at \$19.37 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation.

"I am concerned about taxpayers in town not being able to afford tax increases," she said.

The two candidates have contrasting resumes in terms of town government experience. Makepeace-O'Neil is a first-time candidate for elected office.

Puleo, 60, has served on the Finance Committee, School Committee, Personnel Board. She is also a member of the Shutesbury Education Study Committee and the Regional School District Planning Committee.

Puleo, who lives at 129 Baker Road, said that while she understands the library is the big issue in town, it is not her focus.

"I am moving on from the library," she said, adding that the issue is being addressed by groups that have formed both for and against the project. "I am working on the day-to-day running of the town."

She said that she met with

officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection last week to discuss ongoing efforts to clean up contamination from an old gas leak at the fire station. The Selectboard is also working to finalize an emergency management plan and make a recommendation on a new open space plan, she said.

A 21-year resident of Shutesbury, Puleo said she is focused on how the town can provide high-quality education, police, fire and highway services at a price townspeople can afford.

She said she is running for a second term because "it is important to have continuity."

"After three years ... you get to really understand what the intricacies of town boards are, working with the police, fire and highway departments.

There are so many things going on," Puleo said. "I feel comfortable with all of it, and it really is something I want to continue on." While she acknowledged that taxes in town are high, Puleo said they reflect the cost of services residents desire.

"Do we want good schools,

good roads? Do we want a good police force and someone to be there if we have a fire? Of course we do," she said.

"Everything costs money. I think we've been extremely frugal in our town. We have weathered this recession better than other towns around us."

### Other races

The Selectboard race is not the only contested election this spring. There will also be races for School Committee and Cemetery Commission.

Emily Bloch of 73 Weatherwood Road, Mary Lou Conca of 105 Leverett Road and incumbent Mary-Elizabeth S. Fox of 250 West Pelham Road will compete for two three-year seats on the School Committee. School Committee member Cliff Read is running unopposed for a one-year seat on the board.

Jon Thompson of 266 Pelham Hill Road and incumbent John M. Bell of 11 King Road are candidates for a three-year term on the Cemetery Commission.