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BETTER DAYS

It's Spring, many more people are vaccinated and we are all waking to better days. Between that and the increasingly warm and nice days we can visit each other outdoors now as the situation calls for. In this issue we are presenting activities for the season. This includes hunting for morels and visits to local Vermont gardeners for a varied view of how to do this. Bees recovering from a cold and deadly winter can be seen. We also present important information about zoning for the town and the importance of maintaining Farmland Preservation.

We also started a new series about photos and memorabilia from early times in the town. You can contribute to this by sending material to Judy Robb at judy@vandehoney.com or Michael McDermott at mmcdermott75@outlook.com.

We hope you enjoy your Springtime and this issue of *Vermont's Voice*.

–Michael



FARMLAND PRESERVATION: What is it and why is it important?

by Michael McDermott

The Town of Vermont's Comprehensive Land Use Plan designates the entire township as a Farmland Preservation District. For most of us, the concept of Farmland Preservation sounds like a good thing and we're okay with not being clear on exactly what this designation means to us. The state of Wisconsin created the Farmland Preservation program to encourage municipalities to preserve farmland and to provide a tax credit to farmers. Specific zoning designations determine what land in each county "counts" toward the township maintaining its farmland preservation program status. In order to maintain our designation, the Town of Vermont must maintain 80% of its acreage in a qualifying zoning district. For us, the zoning districts that qualify are FP-35 (FP for Farmland Preservation), FP-1, FP-B and NR-C (Conservancy). Since the Town of Vermont still maintains more than 80% of its acreage in one of the qualifying zoning categories, property owners in the township may be eligible for a Farmland Preservation tax credit. As listed on the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection website, requirements must be met to claim the farmland preservation tax credit:

- 1. The landowner must have been the owner of the farmland for the year in which the credit is claimed. The landowner need not be the farm operator and may rent the land to a farmer.**
- 2. The landowner must have been a resident of Wisconsin for the entire taxable year.**

- 3. The landowner may not have claimed homestead credit or veterans and surviving spouses property tax credit for that year.**
- 4. The farm must meet applicable state soil and water conservation standards. For exact requirements, contact the county land conservation department in which the land is located.**
- 5. The land produced \$6,000 in gross farm revenue in the preceding year or \$18,000 in gross farm revenue during the preceding three years. If a landowner rents the farmland, the landowner may claim on that land provided the renter meets the gross farm revenue requirement.**

In addition to the Town of Vermont's designation as a farmland preservation district, the Town also adopted a density policy that results in roughly 35 acres of land remaining undeveloped for each home that is built. On January 1, 1985, landowners were allocated potential development rights based on the contiguous acreage owned at that moment in time.

Many residents and property owners in the Town of Vermont value the rural character of the Town. The rural nature of the Town of Vermont is important for many reasons. Appearance,



If all of the unused 480 potential development rights for homes built were used and each parcel pulled just the two acre minimum out of FP zoning, the Town would fall below the required threshold.

density, natural features, privacy are all important. Perhaps most important is farming itself. This is what the nature of our town is based on to be considered rural. As mentioned above, there are four zoning designations that are considered Farmland Preservation: FP-1, FP-35, FP-B and NR-C. The three FP zones have different permitted and conditional uses depending on size and functions. The NR-C indicates natural features and conservation. As each rezoning petition comes through the Town, here is consideration as to how many acres are being rezoned out of

a Farmland Preservation zoning district for housing and in Farmland Preservation as land is rezoned out for housing. The Town has 887.08 acres remaining that could be rezoned out of FP before we would fall below that 80% threshold required for our Farmland Preservation designation. Yet, if all of the as of yet unused 480 potential development rights for home built

were used and each parcel pulled just the two acre minimum out of FP zoning, the Town would fall below the required threshold. This is very unlikely in the near future but still there is concern about how to plan and protect the land in FP zoning and thus the Town. At a recent Planning Commission there was discussion about planning and that when applying for a rezone and homesite, attention should be paid to not rezoning more than needed from FP. One applicant was praised for paying strict attention to this.

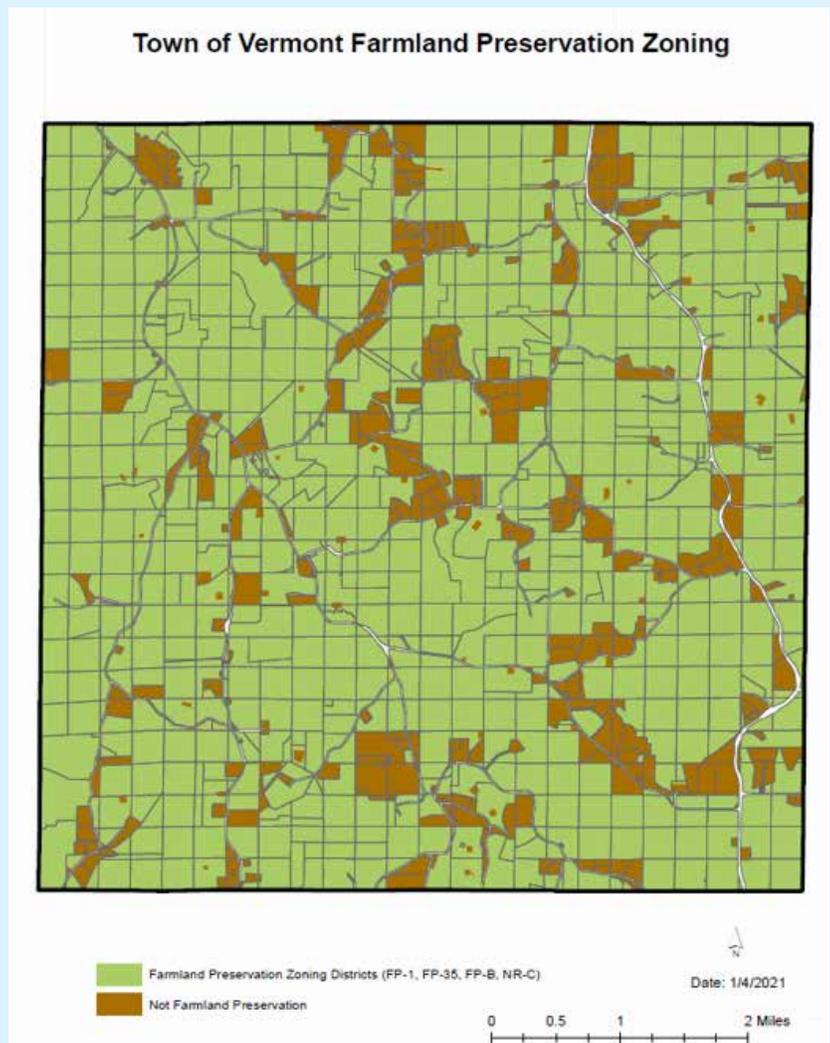
Just over 200 acres were taken out of FP in the last six years. If this rate continues, we would exceed our 887 acres in 20-25 years. There are many considerations to new home siting: view shed, ridgetop protections, driveways and house set

back. All are taken into account of by the Planning Commission in zoning change requests. It is most welcome that there is attention paid to the amount of land being removed from FP zoning. Beyond zoning formalities preserving farming itself is essential to the town's character and the FP designation helps farmers.

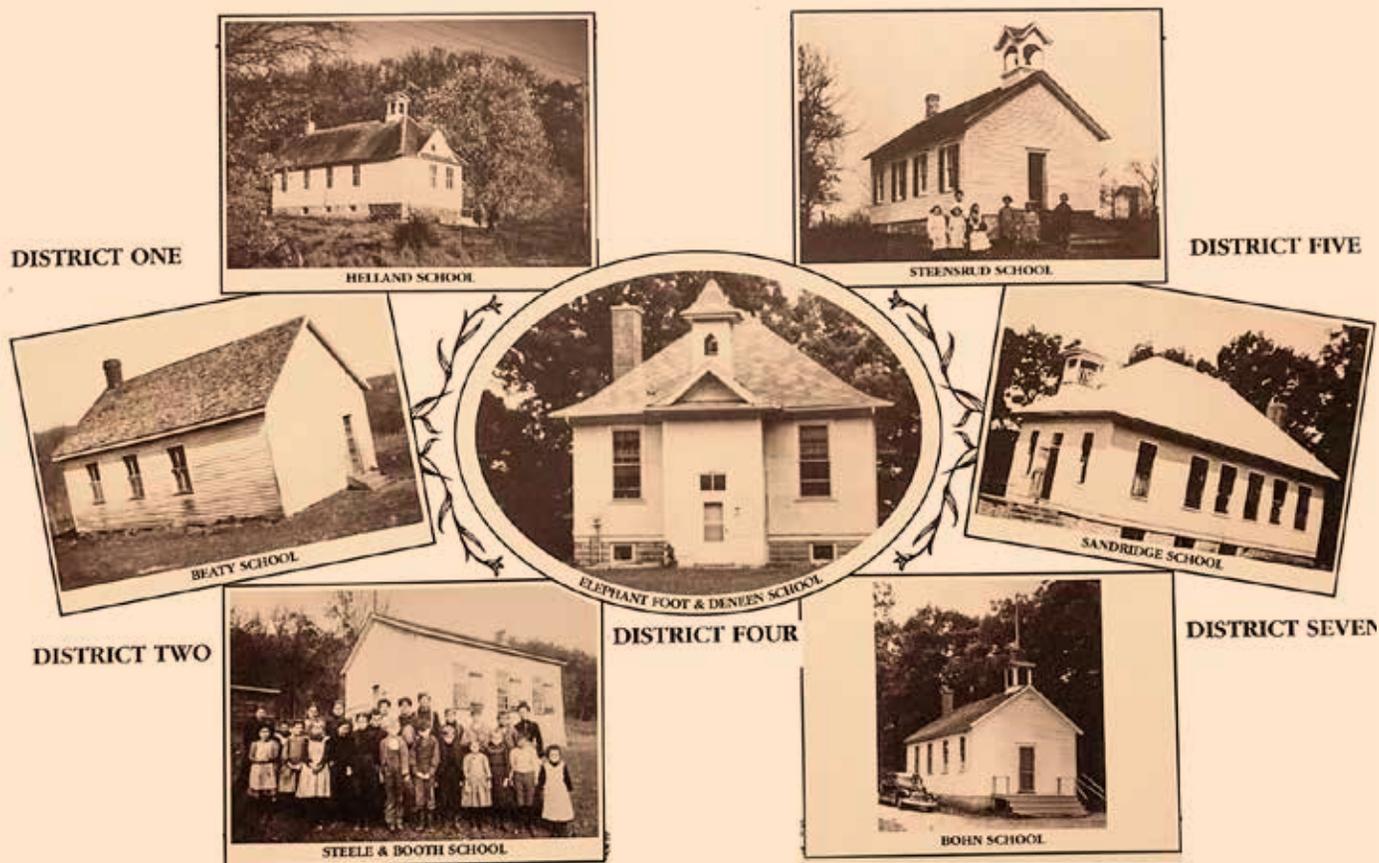
How can you determine your zoning category and what you can do?

First, visit Access Dane (<https://accessdane.countyofdane.com>). Here you can look up your property, view your parcel and its zoning. You can also see your acreage and assessed valuation.

Once you know your zoning category how do you determine what is allowed? Here you can see a list of all the Dane County zoning categories, what is permitted regularly and conditionally: (<https://plandev.countyofdane.com/Zoning/Zoning-District-Fact-Sheets>).



SAVE OUR TOWN OF VERMONT TREASURES



Do you have old photographs or family artifacts from your ancestral Town of Vermont families?

We have begun a town initiative aimed to assist with the preservation of family photographs and papers, military uniforms, quilts and other ephemera that document early European settlers in the Town of Vermont.

The goal is to photograph and digitize relics to honor personal pieces of American history in our own backyard, with the hopes of sharing in an exhibit at the Town of Vermont hall and possibly beyond.

If you would like to assist with this initiative, know of family relics that may be of interest to others or would merely like to champion the preservation of local historical stories, please reach out to us at the *Vermont's Voice*.

VICTORY GARDENERS

by Judy Robb

With the onset of spring, birds and humans alike are sounding happier, and if you're anything like me you have been plotting and planning your 21 garden strategy since January 1 if not earlier. Seeds started. Check. Greenhouse cleaned out and winter's mouse nests removed. Check. Plant beds raked. Check.

Survey of the yard situation – did all the perennials make it through the winter?

Many of us herald our plant endeavors as Victory Gardens, as did many worldwide in 2020. It seems fitting to offer homage to those WWII garden plots as supplements to our food supply whilst also boosting our spirit.

W took some time this Spring to chat with a few Town of Vermont gardeners, each with their own focus of passion for plant companionship. Here are a few snippets of Town garden delights.

Steward of the Land

Agnes Kanicula is not only a long-time Vermonter, but she is also what some would say an expert gardener. Nestled at the top of winding road, the homestead and garden reside amongst a hilltop prairie and woods. "One of the first things we planted was Concord Grapes from vines that were 80 years old when I took the cuttings", she says. "Now these vines are 35 years old." The grapes in addition to apple trees were the first things Agnes and Brian planted on their town homestead, and have since added pear, apple, cherry and plum trees.



"I'm a little on the wild side of gardening," Agnes noted. "I don't color within the lines. The garden is getting taken over by cut flowers, and my favorite is Lisianthus – so elegant".

Walking through the robust garden in early April one takes notice of the special care given to its resident plants, with rhubarb peeking out from its winter straw covering.

"We grow vegetables as well, but we have shifted our focus to what we need for a two-year supply." The conversation shifts to pickles, with Agnes offering "I have a really good recipe for refrigerator dills. Heavy on the dill and garlic."

"A definite no on tulips," Agnes adds. "They are a deer buffet".
(What gardener in the Town of Vermont cannot relate to this statement?)

Agnes and her family make jelly, juice and wine, using fruit from their trees as well as blueberries and other fruit and of course the prolific blackberry, with one homemade luxury being 'black and blue jelly'.

For Agnes, it isn't all about the harvest. "We are stewards of this land. Generations of people have walked here, and I have vowed to care for it as well as I am able."

Every Day is a Lily Day

Many in the town know of Judy Urness' beautiful gardens filled with prolific Day Lilies. "Day Lilies are what I have been planting in my flowerbeds for quite some time. They are easy to grow, are in a wide range of beautiful colors and I enjoy searching for new varieties."

In fact, the offspring of many of her lilies are all around the Town. When the flower beds burst at the seams, Judy shares lily splits with many friends, family and neighbors, and each year you can count on lily greenery as one of the first plants to emerge and bring on spring.



"Day Lilies can bloom early, mid-season and late summer into early fall. July is usually the best time for a Day Lily show here in the Town of Vermont!"

Greenhouse Effect

When asked what he likes most about being the owner of Vermont View Greenhouse, super-friendly and funny horticulturist and gardening expert Stuart Petsel says "being in touch with all the neighbors and locals. If I don't see them during the year, I at least see them once or twice in the Spring and they all come in here like a long lost friend. That's kind of nice."

"People are looking for something different – not anything in particular, but different. Like popcorn plants, things that are unusual. We grow everything right here – either from seed or plugs". Vermont View is also known for having one of the best succulent selections in the area.



Stuart loves his work but says watering and having to be at the greenhouse seven days a week this time of year can curb his free time. "It's close to being a dairy farmer. You have to be here every day."

"I'm toying with the idea of retiring." Stuart says after all these years he has never finished his own flower beds because doesn't have the time. "I'd like to get to a point that I'm doing what everyone else is doing for myself. I've got an old classic car in the barn that needs finishing. I've got a few other things I'd like to do."

Located on Vermont Church Road, just across from Vermont Lutheran Church, a visit with Stuart and a bit of shopping in the greenhouse make for a pleasant stop on any gardener's plant sojourn.



Got Walnut Trees?

You may want to give Straw Bale Gardening a try

Bob Bruck has been a Town resident since 1984 and has tended a garden for the last 30 years.

For the last three years Bob has been "gardening above ground" – growing vegetables in straw bales. This approach appealed to Bob due to the location of a number of walnut trees bordering his garden. The walnuts, although a favorite of our squirrel friends, are not so great for gardening. "The trees exude a chemical called juglone from their roots that is toxic to many plants," Bob lamented. "Onions and beans are less affected by juglone, so we plant those directly in the soil."

As for the results gleaned from gardening in straw, Bob raises tomatoes, a variety of peppers, broccoli and cucumbers very successfully in the straw bales. He has found that there is no weeding required, and that the bales are easier to hand water.

"When the bales are properly prepared, they are warm to the touch which can be an advantage in the early part of the growing season," with last year's crop of tomatoes especially successful yielding the best that he can recall.

Tried and True

For Gary and Nancy Cox, establishing a garden was one of their first projects after moving to the Town of Vermont. Located on the top of a ridge, Gary notes “all the good soil is in the neighbor’s property below”.



“We started out with clay and rock and have built up the soil over the last 25 years. We started small and have tried various gardening techniques over the years --standard roto-tilling folding in horse manure from the neighbors, straw bales, no-till, lasagna gardening.”

Gary and Nancy settled on mainly raised garden beds that they built from their barn’s scrap galvanized panels. They’ve expanded their

garden to its current 50’ x 100’ size which required a shift to a drip irrigation system to cover the area well and reduce some disease due to soil splashing up on the plants.

“To maximize the space we allotted for the garden, we built many structures and train the plants to grow vertically,” Gary explains.

Most of the structures are branches from brush clearing projects so they are temporary and need to be repaired or replaced each year.

“We have settled into a tried and true set of crops that grow well for us and that take minimal care. Early on we would try a new vegetable that we read about in a seed catalog on a dark day in January. Spring would come and I’d plant two rows of something and one of two things would happen: either nothing would come up or everything would go nuts and we have bushels of something we had no possible way to eat.”

“We do small hoop structures with a ground cover cloth for things like lettuce and greens. That allows us to get them started earlier in the spring and extend the season well into December.”

“The variety and size of the garden works for us as a balance of the work we want to put into the garden and the size and variety of the harvest.”

One enjoyable aspect of gardening for Gary and Nancy is in the years where a crop does well they invite the neighbors and friends to come and pick.

“That sharing of produce is one more way we can enjoy the community of living in Vermont Township.”

The Flowers are the Thing

Deb Krebs is a flower gardener. “What was my hobby is now my passion as I have a beautiful large yard to play in,” she cheerily chimed.

“My favorites are pansies and lilacs to honor my Grammy.” Deb also enjoys growing lilies but added “I actually love it all.”

Herbaceous Newbie

A self-described herbalist, Clare Kritter is relatively new to the Town. Regarding gardening “I’m attempting. I have a lot of different starts going --culinary and herbal.”

Clare’s goal is to get some of the hardier herbs established this year.

“It’s a beautiful process – a relationship with plants, cooking and making medicine.”

“I’ve never done a vegetable garden before” but Clare says she is loving the process of watching seeds become sprouts and plants. “I want to understand the land and the seasons.”

Regarding being a Town of Vermonter, “we realize how lucky we are and how easy it was to get to know our neighbors.”

Plants are People Too

As for this author’s gardening, every year I start way too many tomatoes and pepper plants, and it seems every Memorial Day weekend I leave plants out on a roadside table with a sign that says “Free”. By Sunday, everything has gone to a good home. Every seedling is sacred.

Gardening Joy to All!



SPRING ART TOUR JUNE 4 – 5 – 6

The Spring Art Tour will be rolling through the Town of Vermont! Escape with a road trip to the wonderful world of painters, potters, jewelers and more Friday through Sunday June 4, 5 and 6. Journey along the hills and valleys of Black Earth, Blanchardville, Blue Mounds, Mazomanie, Mount Horeb, New Glarus, and beyond.

Town of Vermont artists Tamlyn Akins and Judy Robb are participating in this year's tour.

You may find the complete map of tour stops, information about each artist and samples of their work by visiting www.SPRINGARTTOUR.com.



Blue Jay Study, Oil on Canvas, Judy Robb



Opulent Orchids, Watercolor, Tamlyn Akins



THE MYSTERIOUS MOREL MUSHROOM

by Judy Robb and Gary Cox

It's a Sunday morning in early May. The sun is shining, and the air is crisply steamy following a good rain.

On a morel mission, hiking up a rocky trail you can feel the earth moving as the culinary delights pop out of the ground.

Or did you just imagine it?

Morel hunting is full of trials and tribulations, agony and defeat, myth and lore. Morels are known to be hidden in places forever secret and never to be found by humans, but... for the faithful mushroom hunter, a few go to spots exist in the prairies and sidehills of the Town of Vermont and across the Driftless region.

As spring emerges, foraging for ramps, fern sprouts, watercress, nettles and the elusive morel is top of mind for foodies. As the weather warms, conversations with neighbors evolve from antler shed hunting to morel activity.

Have you found any? How many? There's not been enough rain. It's been too warm. It's been too cold. When does the season start anyway? Does anyone really know?

Opinions vary as to where to find them. For some it is old orchards near dead or dying trees. Others say elm. A sunny slope. Along farm fields or in a totally unthought of location where you least expect it. But don't ask – no one will say for sure. One thing is for certain – once the trees have leaves and the forest earth cools, the morel season is soon to pass.

Yes, folks have opinions about their favorite varietal flavors – the small early grays are sweet and delicate. The larger yellow more robust, meaty and earthy. Everyone has their own ideas as to where, when and what is best.

Forager Gary Cox offers his take on the mysterious morels:

"Each spring I look forward to getting out in the woods and finding those wonderful mushrooms that grow with no effort on my part. As delicious as they are, I think I am more excited about the aspect that all I have to do is find them -- no weeding, no composting, no watering – just picking.



The hunting part is enjoyable, especially after a long winter but getting the timing right is a bit of a challenge. I would start looking way too early in the season, or miss the peak, or tromp around so much that I crushed early spores. Now I use the free morel timing app, otherwise known as 'Craigslist'. Just search for morels on Craigslist and as soon as you notice people selling morels, get out and check your favorite spot.

Morels are just the first of the foraged foods we enjoy every year that include, fiddleheads, asparagus, blackcaps, blackberries and nuts. There are a lot of other plants and foods we have access to, but often just miss the timing or just lack the time or energy to get out and harvest them. Maybe this year!"

Culinary preparation thoughts range from morels sliced in half, tossed in a traditional Wisconsin style flour, salt and pepper mix and sautéed in butter (the old school purist method). Others relish a morel-topped pizza or a flashy risotto.

Whatever your favorite preparation, most can agree, the mysterious morel, even if you stumble upon only one, is a treasure trove for the lucky.

A ROUGH WINTER FOR THE BEES

Ask any beekeeper in Wisconsin or in the USA – it was a really bad winter for honeybees and most likely native bees. Many hives were completely lost due to the extreme cold conditions made worse by bees' low immunity due to pests, pesticides, herbicides and general decline in their ecosystems.

Here are a few things you can do to help the bees this Spring, Summer and Fall.

- **Plant a bee garden, rich in nectar and pollen. Keep the dandelions! They are the bees first food of the year.**
- **Go chemical free for the bees. Think twice before you use chemicals on your lawn or fog your yard before a party.**
- **Create a Bee Bath. Bees work up a thirst foraging and collecting nectar. A shallow bird bath or a bowl with clean water works great. Add some wine corks or rocks for the bees to use as "islands" while they catch a drink.**
- **Support your Local Beekeeper! Buy locally made honey – our beekeepers and bees are working hard for you.**

For more information on how you can help the bees: visit [The Bee Conservancy](#)



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