

Hotel approval seems heading for reversal

By Wayne E. Rivet
 Staff Writer

Will the Planning Board's approval of Hotel Bridgton stand?

Or, will an appeal reverse the decision?

The answer comes this Wednesday, Nov. 6 at 5 p.m.

The Bridgton Board of Appeals last Thursday failed to cast formal votes regarding six "points of errors" filed by Attorney David Lourie, representing Susan

Hatch, Sigvard Von Sicard and "Save Kennard Street."

However, straw poll votes taken on some of topics — including Point of Error 1, the approval of the hotel structure that is not compatible in scale with the surrounding neighborhood was arbitrary and capricious — seemed to point that the Appeals Board questioned the Planning Board's "findings of facts" and "conclusions of law."

After several hours of attorney presentations and debate amongst the Appeals Board, member Mark Harmon was prepared to settle the matter.

However, BOA Attorney James Katsiaticas suggested that he prepare a written summary of points made during the hearing, turn the information over to the board for review and possibly further contemplation, and then set another meeting

date to officially vote on the appealed points.

The board voted 4-1 to call for a second meeting. Harmon cast the dissenting vote.

Katsiaticas opened the meeting by setting ground rules for the proceedings, which included 20 minutes set aside for attorneys representing each group to make their cases. A 15-minute rebuttal followed.

Lourie targeted a couple

of key points — whether the project is compatible with neighboring Kennard Street residences, questioning the Planning Board's decision to allow earth moving and filling in the Stream Protection zone to install a drain pipe, and planners erred in "constructing storm drains and electrical lines to be essential services."

He was critical of developer Justin McIver and his team for altering the Hotel

Bridgton plan numerous times, which he ultimately felt put the Planning Board "under the gun" to make decisions that his group feels were in error based on the town's ordinances.

Lourie emphasized that when two standards seem to conflict, planners were to follow the more restrictive guideline.

McIver's attorney, Mark Bauer, disagreed with Lourie

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Roof ready for the winter?

By Dawn De Busk
 Staff Writer

NAPLES — Hopefully, this winter won't be too rough on the roof of the Naples Gymnasium.

Actually, the gym roof will have to tough it out for two more winters. That's because the decision to either repair the roof or to demolish that section of the town hall and rebuild a community center is a consideration that won't face voters until 2021.

On Monday, one selectman brought up concerns about whether the roof could handle the weight of snow. He pressed the town to hire an engineer to double check that before winter sets in.

In fact, the Naples Board of Selectmen decided to hire an engineer to determine weight loads for the gym roof, especially the center which is not supported by walls.

Selectman Bob Caron II said he was dismayed last week when he saw a tarp being put over the gym roof again.

"It raised an issue with me when I drove by and saw the blue tarp on the roof," Caron said.

Caron sits on the Community Center Exploratory Committee (CCEC), which has been reviewing the possibility of building a community center by renovating the existing town hall, gym and post office space. Other sites are also being considered for a proposed community center.

Therefore, a permanent solution for the roof is another "two years out," Caron said.

"I feel strongly that [we] as a board [are obligated] to

ROOF, Page 2A



HEADING IN A NEW DIRECTION — Halls Funeral Home, situated along scenic Quaker Ridge Road in Casco, has been sold by Eric Hall (left) to Eric Nelson (center). They are pictured with longtime director, Loren Hall. (Photo by Casey Shea)

A family feel Hall Funeral Home sold, to keep familiar approach

By Wayne E. Rivet
 Staff Writer

CASCO — When Eric Hall thought it might be time to change careers after serving as a funeral home director for the past 25 years, he hoped history might repeat itself.

He had developed good relations with several nearby funeral homes, and thought they might be interested.

"I tried to imagine what that might look like — maybe they would close and sell this facility and open one up on Route 302?" he speculated.

One tough prospect was seeing the family-owned business, established in

1833, end with the sixth generation.

Another interesting possibility emerged.

"We heard that Eric and Erin (Nelson) might be interested in pursuing ownership of a funeral home, so we reached out to them," Hall said.

An initial meeting was held a year ago. "What if?" was the question posed.

"The Nelsons were a perfect fit. They are going to move in with their two little boys, Cooper and Sawyer, and do what we've been doing all along — serving the community. Our goal was to keep Hall Funeral Home going, and we feel

we've put it in very good hands," Hall said. "It was important to us...and for the community. There are a number of people who have prepaid for funerals, coming here because of our service, and the unique setting. I want to honor that the best I can."

On Sept. 30, history did repeat itself.

One Eric (Hall) is moving on. He and his wife, Jen, have no real set "plan" — something quite unusual for the couple — but have "several irons in the fire."

Another Eric (Nelson, the former director of Chandler Funeral Home in Bridgton)

FUNERAL, Page 3A

ON THE NOV. 5 BALLOT

Q. 2, Housing preference repeal

Bridgton's ballot on Nov. 5 includes three referendum questions up for consideration. Question 2 reads, "Shall an Ordinance entitled Nov. 5, 2019 Repeal of the Town of Bridgton Affordable Housing Local Preference Ordinance be enacted?"



As Bridgton continues to evolve, selectmen felt it was time to take a look at various ordinances on the books to be sure they were compatible with new standards or even were still applicable.

The board charged the Ordinance Review Committee (ORC) to take a closer look at town regulations to remove contradictions, increase clarity and make changes based on attorney and other expert input.

The committee, which makes recommendations to selectmen as an advisory group, is led by chairman Len Rudin, and includes Deb Brusini, who serves as the Planning Board's chairman, and Samantha Zawistowski.

One standard the Affordable Housing Local Preference Ordinance — has been recommended for repeal.

A "yes" vote repeals the ordinance, which the ORC says "restricts development opportunities for more affordable housing" and has been deemed by legal counsel as "potentially problematic and discriminatory."

A "no" vote keeps the ordinance on the books.

This is the second time this issue goes before voters. At town meeting, the repeal attempt was rejected, but officials decided to bring it back because there was a feeling confusion may have existed — people possibly thought repeal was a strike against allowing affordable housing here.

ORC says the opposite exists. Repeal will make it easier to bring forth affordable housing projects in designated districts in Bridgton.

"This series of preferences, and direction in the ordinance how it is to be managed, organized and approved, discourages development of affordable housing (built with federal and state subsidy). Subsidized housing, particularly for the elderly, is needed in Bridgton. Local research found there is a waiting list for such housing," the ORC reported.

"We want to encourage development, not discourage it by making it so hard that it just doesn't happen. Where are people supposed to go when they can't pay their taxes and keep up with their homes when they don't have much of an income anymore?"

The repeal is supported by the town's Community Development Committee, and is in "harmony" with the Comprehensive Plan, ORC members said.

The existing ordinance would be repealed in its entirety. The ORC feels what is currently on the books is so difficult to manage, authorize and approve that people will not build affordable housing facilities.

The ordinance was crafted in response to an Avesta proposal to build affordable housing in the downtown area (where the former stone business operated) or property off Route 117. The fear was the potential for "undesirable"

HOUSING, Page 6A

Naples' debt to MDOT draws differing views

Hall Funeral Home sold, to keep a 'family' feel

(Continued from Page 1A) is moving forward, but keeping a sense of the past as part of the plan.

"The sense of ownership and totally responsible and accountable — it has new meaning for me. I really want families to leave here after my family serves them to say Eric Hall couldn't have found a better person. They came here because of him, his dad and his grandfather. I want them to have that same sense of friendship, relationship and trust," he said.

Same names, similar paths

Their names are the same, and followed similar career paths.

In 1995, Eric Hall's dad contacted his son regarding whether they would be interested in purchasing the business because he was contemplating retirement. Eric previously worked for Husson College as an admissions counselor, and then for Black & Decker for eight years as a salesman, selling small appliances in upstate New York.

"It afforded Jen and I a chance to come back home," Eric said. "I never wanted to do it (be a funeral director). I was around it a little bit. I never lived here when my father was the funeral director. I lived in Naples. When we moved to Casco, I went off to school. I wasn't immersed into it. But, it ended up making sense for us," he said. "I was a little nervous about the things we have to do and what we have to see. It took quite a while to acclimate to. I really enjoy being there for families and working with people. It's very rewarding, that way."

To become a funeral director, Eric went to the Simmons Institute for

Funeral Service in East Syracuse, N.Y., for a year.

"We tried to just be ourselves — regular people. I don't know if I was viewed as the 'typical funeral director, but I didn't want to be. It was more our family helping their family," Hall noted.

Eric Nelson followed in the footsteps of other family members.

"Funeral service and cemetery work is all that I have known. I was born in Bridgton, raised in Stoneham, my father, grandfather and great-grandfather were all cemetery sextons and grave diggers. When my parents separated, I lived in a funeral home. I've always been around it. I was comfortable there. It was natural for me to navigate in that direction (a career as a funeral director)," Nelson said. "I try to be a normal Joe, likeable guy who is in this business to help people during a very difficult time."

After graduating from college with a Funeral Service degree, Nelson worked in the Farmington area for 15 years as a Funeral Director, as well in the monument business before moving back "home."

"It was wonderful for me to get back and reconnect with old friends and serve the families of this area and nearby towns. Especially nice for me was to also become part of the Fryeburg Pine Grove Cemetery Association where, as a kid, I learned to run a lawn mower alongside my father and brother," he noted.

Nelson moved back home to the area in 2014, when he took a position locally as a Funeral Director at Chandler Funeral Home, while wife, Erin, started her career at Norway Savings Bank, now serving as the Market Manager for the

Lake Region working out of the Bridgton and Naples offices.

The couple have two boys (Sawyer and Cooper) in the Lake Region School District. Eric and Erin settled in nicely with various civic organizations including the Lakes Region Rotary Club, the Bridgton Lions Club, and the Greater Bridgton Lake Region Chamber of Commerce.

"It takes a certain type of personality to do this work, clearly. For me, the thanks I get is helping somebody. They may come in very emotional, but maybe less emotional when they leave because I offered some guidance or help," he said. "To me, there are two very distinct pieces of what we do. There is the handling and care of a decedent. That's technical for me, regardless of the circumstances of that person's death. The other piece is dealing with an emotional family — the living. They're emotional because of the loss of someone they love and they look to Eric and I for answers regarding how they move forward."

As Erin and Eric started discussing the notion of funeral home ownership with one another, a big concern was moving to an unfamiliar place and the "starting over," if you will.

"As we started to have more serious conversations, Eric and Jen Hall came into the fray. As it progressed it just seemed so natural for everyone and with minimal impact, especially and most importantly to the families that Hall Funeral Home has served since the early 1800s. It meant that the boys wouldn't have to change schools, Erin would still serve the same people in her position at the bank, and ultimately, I would as well," Eric said.

The two families met for dinner and a positive connection immediately occurred.

"What can you say, it was a no brainer. Speaking to his folks about the pur-



NEW CHAPTER IN OWNERSHIP — After 25 years, Eric and Jen Hall have sold Hall Funeral Home in Casco to Eric and Erin Nelson. The sale was finalized in late September. Pictured are: (back row, left to right) Eric Hall, Jen Hall, Eric Nelson, Erin Nelson, Loren Hall and Carol Hall; (front row) Camron Hall, Sawyer Nelson and Cooper Nelson. (Photo by Casey Shea)

chase, they were somewhat nostalgic. His mom (who lives a short distance from the funeral home) said she was just so happy to look up and see the lights on. I love being that guy turning the lights on for her. My kids have built forts in the woods already, it's been great," Eric Nelson said. "I hope to do exactly what Eric and the generation of Halls before him did, just serve the folks of the Lake Region with the same quality of service. Having been at the other funeral homes, the call volume was greater, so I was exposed to a lot of different products and services. I've seen a lot because of sheer numbers. There are things I would like to introduce here. But as far as nuts and bolts, it's about serving families respectfully, carefully and accountable."

By law, within 30 days of the sale, Eric Nelson had to send out letters to those with mortuary trust accounts.

"I was very, very careful

to state that it was my desire to operate this funeral home just the way it has been run. We're keeping the name," he pointed out.

Announcing the sale to his fellow Bridgton Lions Club members, Nelson clarified that he did not own the Bridgton funeral home, but was the "face" of the local facility.

Eric Hall is very pleased to be turning the keys over to the Nelsons.

"I wanted for it to go as it did — having an independent person, like Eric and Erin, continue what we've established," he said. "Negotiations went very smoothly. Before the attorneys got involved, we sat down and discussed 'this is how we want it to go.' There were hardly any negotiations. Everything just seemed to work. We were very forthcoming with each other. We were on the same page throughout the process, including all the assets."

While he has a few ideas

about what comes next, Eric Hall hopes to give Eric Nelson something he never had during his 25 years as funeral director — backup.

"Once Eric gets established, if he needs help, I'll be here to help him. There is no question in my mind he will serve the community well. I plan to be involved in the community, still," Eric Hall said. "When Jen and I were here for 25 years, there was no one to step in if we needed a vacation or a break. You need a licensed funeral director to do a service, to be at the cemetery. Most are full-time. If you call another home when you go away, their business is going to come first. It was hard to get away. We're hoping to be for Eric and Erin what we didn't have. I think that will be valuable to them."

When asked what he found as most rewarding a caretaker of the Hall legacy, Eric said, "the people."

"That is the reward. To

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Set your clocks back one hour Sunday, November 3rd.

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QUESTION!

Do you believe that Bridgton ordinances should be written by outsider private interest groups?

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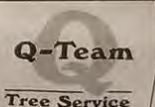
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Funeral home sale

(Continued from Page 3A)

still be real is what people appreciate. You're on their side. Weddings and funerals, you get only one shot at it, usually. There is no do-overs. There's a lot of pressure on funeral directors to get it right. We try the best we can. It doesn't always go perfect, but if you're real and there for them, they understand," he said. "Maintaining the history of Hall Funeral Home, carrying it on for 25 years and now leaving it in good hands with a new generation of ownership, I'm really happy about that. We tried to serve the community the best we could."

Now, another Eric — Nelson — is ready to take on that same responsibility.