$15 Toll for Lower Manhattan

‘Congestion pricing’ expected to begin in spring

By Leonard Sparks

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority board on Wednesday (Dec. 6) voted to begin public review of a first-in-the-nation program that will charge passenger and commercial vehicles to enter Manhattan below 60th Street.

If the agency’s “congestion pricing” plan survives a lawsuit filed by New Jersey, car drivers entering the Central Business District would be charged a daily toll of $15. Trucks and private buses would pay $24 or $36, depending on size or type.

The tolls would be in effect from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends, with a rate outside those hours set at $3.75.

Transit and commuter buses would be exempt, and motorcyclists would be charged $7.50. FDR Drive, the West Side Highway and roadway portions of the Hugh Carey Tunnel would be excluded from the toll, and there would be other credits.

(Continued on Page 9)

Beacon’s ‘Good-Cause’ Law Struck Down

City judge rules measure is unconstitutional

By Jeff Simms

City Court Judge Rebecca Mensch has ruled that Beacon’s “good-cause” eviction law is unconstitutional, invalidating the fifth of five such laws to be adopted in New York state over the last two years.

Mensch issued her ruling Nov. 17 as part of a denial of a Main Street resident’s motion to dismiss an eviction proceeding. The landlord, identified in court documents as 201-211 Main St. LLC, went to court in July when the tenant refused to vacate his apartment after being given 90 days’ notice that his lease would not be renewed.

The Nov. 17 decision provides no further details on that dispute. While some details are similar, this is not the case that first challenged the good-cause eviction law in City Court. That case, also filed in July and involving a 73-year-old Main Street tenant, is pending.

Because of Mensch’s decision, neither tenant (nor others in the future) will be able to use the good-cause law as a defense against eviction. The attorneys in both disputes are scheduled to meet with Mensch on Dec. 12. Nancy Brodey Koch of the nonprofit Legal Services of the Hudson Valley represents both tenants.

Beacon is not the only municipality to have adopted a good-cause law that was challenged in court. Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Kingston and Albany all passed similar laws in the same timeframe, as the (Continued on Page 6)
FIVE QUESTIONS:  TOM LUCCHESI

By Jeff Simms

Tom Lucchesi was named the Beacon fire chief in April and began the job full-time in October.

Why did you decide to become a firefighter?
I had a few friends who were volunteer firefighters, so I start hanging around the firehouse when I was 12 and got hooked at a young age. I started as a career firefighter in the City of Newburgh in 2007, was promoted through the ranks and retired as an assistant chief there. When there were layoffs, a couple of guys came to the Beacon department, and they’re the ones who reached out to let me know that Chief [Gary] Van Voorhis was retiring. Beacon is a great city. It’s a tight-knit community and we have a great group of firefighters to work with.

What can you tell us about the central fire station being built on South Avenue?
We started with three fire houses and we’re consolidating into one facility for the first time. It’s going to be a state-of-the-art facility that will hopefully last well over 50 years.

What is a typical day like for a Beacon firefighter?
Firefighters are assigned a 24-hour shift. They work one day on and three days off, with the shift changing at 7 a.m., but it’s common for firefighters to arrive early to relieve the previous shift. When they get into the firehouse in the morning, the first thing they are doing is checking equipment. They talk with the other crew to find out what their shift was like — what tools were used, any problems they encountered. They’re checking their personal protective equipment, their self-contained breathing apparatus, checking all the tools on the apparatus that day, because you never know when you’re going to go out the door. Usually by 7 a.m. they’ve already checked everything and are ready to go for the day.

Then there’s housework. Just like you have to do chores at home, they’re sweeping floors and cleaning the bathrooms, because this is where they live for the next 24 hours. We eat meals together for breakfast, lunch and dinner. We do training a couple of times a day, whether it’s in-house or going out to get to a different neighborhood, throwing ladders or pulling fire hose. It’s also good to be out in the community interacting with people. Between responding to calls and training, that will take us right through the evening, when they do house chores again.

Is every shift the same?
It’s dynamic. You could have a “slow” day with two or three medical calls. Or you could be 15 calls deep and see every variety, from a house fire to delivering a baby or, unfortunately, someone losing their life.

What do firefighters do to relieve stress?
What helps are the four or five other firefighters that you’re working with on a shift. In my career, the only people closer to me have been my family members. If you have a bad call, you can talk about it. Firefighters stereotypically don’t like to talk outside of their circle, so relying on your co-workers is a big stress relief.

Going back to my time in Newburgh, from the time I walked in the door to the time of my shift change the next morning, I would have a smile on my face. My stomach would hurt from laughing.

Race, color, religion, gender orientation — that does not exist to a firefighter. You’re brothers and sisters because your life does not exist to a firefighter. You’re brothers and sisters at the firehouse because your life can depend on each other. You see stuff that normal people don’t see, and you see it day in and day out.

What temperature is cold weather to you?
32 degrees. I just tolerate winter.

30 degrees. Winter’s my favorite, because I’m not sweating.

20 degrees. I’m a cold-weather person.

Nam Race, color, religion, gender orientation — that does not exist to a firefighter. You’re brothers and sisters because your life can depend on each other. You see stuff that normal people don’t see, and you see it day in and day out.

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From New Member Gail Small, Putnam Valley

“We need astute community-focused journalism more than ever, which The Current delivers in spades.”
From New Members Stephen and Jennifer Clair, Beacon

Thank You!

The HIGHLANDS Current
Dutchess pay raises

A vote was scheduled for Dec. 7 by the Dutchess County Legislature to consider a 2024 budget that includes hefty 68 percent raises for county legislators and other officials such as the county executive and county clerk (“Dutchess Committee Approves Large Raises,” Nov. 24).

Republican Legislator Will Tritts’ insistence that higher pay will attract good candidates is a load of you-know-what. It doesn’t work that way and history can prove it. This seems more like tax ‘n’ spend, even more so since the current budget proposal includes an increase in the county sales tax rate to 4 percent.

What the arrogant Democrats, the majority in Albany, did in securing a 25 percent pay raise for themselves in 2022 is no different than what the Dutchess County Republican majority is proposing. As chair of the Conservative Party, this concerns me and my committee.

Although it’s understandable that the part-time legislators may be due for a modest raise, it’s reprehensible that they’re looking at such an increase, especially during these economic times.

We endorsed most of these Republicans for re-election because we thought they had conservative values, including fiscal responsibility. I ask the county Republicans: “Are these your true colors?” On a positive note, we’re pleased to hear that some Republican legislators are against this ridiculous pay hike.

Don Minichino, via Instagram

This huge increase cannot be justified. If I had known this before, I would not have voted for the Republican ticket.

Daniel Pena, via Instagram

This is not a great way for [incoming County Executive Sue] Serino to start things off.

Peggy Hill, via Instagram

The raises are appropriate for the role and the market.

Nancy Drew, via Instagram

Republicans are all in favor of tax cuts for the rich and pay cuts for the working class, unless it benefits them.

Harper Sanchez, via Instagram

Haldane master plan

This seems like a prudent, taxpayer-funded project (“Haldane Capital Plan Moves Forward,” Nov. 24). As with taxpayer-funded transit jobs, it’s necessary.

Joe Hyatt, via Facebook

Just a 30 percent tax increase! Maybe the superintendent’s salary should be predicated on continued excellence in education and cost savings; then we might see some reasonable thinking.

You will find no community prouder of its students or supporters of its faculty. But this plan pits the community and taxpayers against each other. Many taxpayers waited the same halls now deemed antiquated, which makes one wonder if the current matrix is actually part of Haldane’s success.

I also would like to see the projected increase in traffic and visitor numbers from the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail included in the overall plan. Will Haldane still be able to continue with an open campus with hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors daily? The community should not even discuss opening its checkbook until Albany forces the amalgamation of the Haldane and Garrison districts.

Gordon Robertson, Cold Spring

This is the precise time to get the ball rolling for extensive and much-needed projects like this. The economy is doing well, by all indicators. It’s time to show our youth some commitment, and this project seems reasonable and imperative, especially Phase 1. The STEAM classroom should be fast-tracked. Hopefully, the project will get under way sooner rather than later.

Woody Turbeaux, via Facebook

Dutchess comptroller

Sheriff Butch Anderson backed Robin Lois before he passed, and I’ve always found her to be held in high regard. It’s a great pick-up by [state Comptroller] Tom DiNapoli (“Dutchess Comptroller to Resign,” Nov. 24).

Kevin Byrne, via Facebook

Byrne is the Putnam County executive.

Dummy light

I grew up in Beacon and, in all those years, I don’t remember anybody hitting the dummy light (“Don’t Hit the Dummy,” Dec. 1).

Sandy Joan, via Facebook

Watch for it in the next season of Sweeney.

Anthony Grillo, via Facebook

Even with the changes, people are still going to hit it.

Rachel Carhart, via Facebook

(Continued on Page 5)
**Why is One Lane Always Closed on the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge?**

**Q:** Why is the right lane on the Newburgh-Beacon bridge usually closed, with a red “X” over the lane instead of a green arrow?

**A:** The right lane allows drivers to pull out of traffic in emergencies, said Chris Steber, a representative of the New York State Bridge Authority. These breakdown lanes also allow emergency vehicles to cross the bridge quickly. When traffic is unusually high, the Bridge Authority will sometimes open the lanes, he said.

Over the last few years, work being done on the bridge has required the closing of the left and center lanes, meaning the breakdown lane has been used for traffic, which may have caused confusion, Steber said. But that work is now complete.

*Have a question we can answer? Email: question@highlandscurrent.org*

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**Letters and Comments**

### Hitting it must be a form of protest to get rid of it.

Louis Henry, via Instagram

Let’s stop pretending that this is a functional traffic signal. It’s a historical artifact, more like a public sculpture. Build a pavilion or move it out of the road.

James Case-Leal, via Instagram

### Library letter

Thank you for printing the beautifully written and powerful argument by Charles Rangel, himself an impressive figure (“My View: Don’t Rename Library,” Dec. 1). I’m glad to know more about him and Hamilton Fish III. Don’t rename the Desmond-Fish library!

May Case-Leal, via Instagram

### Scouting

Jude Morrison captured the spirit of Scouting and how our Philipstown units are thriving into a second century (“112 Years of Local Scouting,” Dec. 1).

I want to note that, in addition to the help from many parents who volunteer their time as leaders and committee members, these programs benefit from the support of the Little Stony Point Citizens Association and the Garrison Fish & Game Club, which have both been long-term charter partners that enable the pack and troop to operate.

Tom Campanile, Nelsonville

### Visitor booth

Let’s not overlook the dedication of the caring volunteers from all parts of Philipstown who provide staffing for the Cold Spring Visitor Center booth every weekend from May through November, through floods, heat waves and the cold of late fall (“Reporter’s Notebook: Visitor Center Confidential,” Nov. 24).

Organized by the all-volunteer Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce, these men and women create a warm welcome for all who visit, and often answer questions for local residents, as well. They are the kind face of the town, motivated only by love for where they live.

Anita Prentice, via Facebook

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**Correction**

A story in the Dec. 1 issue said that *By the Queen*, which will be presented by the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival during its 2024 season, is an adaptation by Shana Cooper of the *Henry VI* trilogy. In fact, Cooper will be the director. The adaptation is by Whitney White.

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**Why is the right lane on the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge usually closed, with a red “X” over the lane instead of a green arrow?**

George Gannsle, Nanuet

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LETTERS AND COMMENTS

(Continued from Page 5)

re-developed (“Environmental Cleanup Set for Site,” Nov. 24). I am also happy that Rodney Weber will be the developer, as he always does a wonderful job of tying build-

ings with the surrounding environment as well as creating beautiful interior spaces. I am sure this project will be no different, and become another jewel in Beacon’s crown. I am also hopeful that this will move the cit
to complete the restoration of the old suspen-
sion bridge close by. It is of great historic importance and so far, little has been done to restore it. Pieces of this bridge lie in weeds at Beacon’s transfer station. Surely some of the
tax money pouring into Beacon could be set aside for this purpose? If not, then grant writ-
ing should be undertaken. It’s a terrible shame this bridge still awaits resurrection.

Mary Fris, Beacon

Opioid Funds (from Page 1)

managers, peers and other staff who work at community agencies, including the Phili-

pstown Behavioral Health Hub in Cold Spring, which will soon be opening a location on Route 9 in Philipstown.

Putnam also approved $80,600 for St. Christopher’s Inn, a treatment program for men run by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement at Graymoor in Garrison. St. Christopher’s Inn will use the funding to hire a part-time psychotherapist and a part-
time specialist, according to Byrne.

In addition, the Prevention Council of Putnam received $135,000 to reduce overdoses by improving residents’ access to naloxone, peer-support services and strips that test drugs for fentanyl and xylazine.

The final recipient, Brewster-based Green Chimneys, plans to use its $50,000 in funding on a “substance-misuse” program for ages 10 to 21.

New York State is receiving more than $2 billion from opioid manufacturers and distributors to settle lawsuits over their role in drug overdoses. In November 2022, the state’s Settlement Fund Advisory Board recommended that awards from the first-year spending of $192 million go to programs that prioritize harm reduction, treatment, hard-
hit populations such as Blacks and Latinos, and housing and recovery.

Dutchess County

A third of that first-year spending ($64 million) has been distributed to counties for “regional abatement,” including $2.1 million to the Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health. Dutchess also received $306,000 designated for street outreach.

On Oct. 10, the Dutchess Legislature approved spending $551,250 through 2025 to support recovery coaches, public health education coordinators and its Law Enforce-

ment Assisted Diversion (LEAD) team.

County Executive William F.X. O’Neil said Dutchess is working with Oxford House Inc. to open self-run and self-supporting recov-
ery houses.

The state also announced in July an award of $800,000 in settlement funds over four years to the Council on Addic-

tion, Prevention and Education of Dutchess County (CAPE) to combat fentanyl, opioid and prescription-drug abuse.

Good-Cause Law (from Page 1)

state’s moratorium on pandemic-related evictions was expiring.

Like the others, Beacon’s law, enacted in March 2022, required landlords to demon-

strate “good cause” before a judge could begin eviction proceedings. It set forth a number of situations, including nonpayment of rent or violation of the terms of tenancy, as valid causes for eviction. It also set condi-
tions that must be met before a landlord could increase rent by more than 5 percent. It is unclear whether the City Council will rescind the law. According to court docu-

ments, city attorneys were notified of the challenge to the good-cause legislation but did not file any arguments on the city’s behalf supporting its constitutionality.

Beacon attorneys warned the council last year that the good-cause measure was superseded by New York’s landlord-tenant regulations, and said they would not defend the law if it was challenged in court.

Albany’s law, the first in the state, also was the first to be challenged when a group of landlords sued the city. They, too, argued that state laws preempt local legislation. A state Supreme Court judge agreed and struck down the measure; the decision was

upheld by an appeals court in March.

Landlords also sued in Newburgh. Last year, a state judge in Orange County declared that law invalid for the same reason, although the city has appealed. Poughkeepsie’s law fell in March. Kingston officials, in response to the lawsuits, repealed their law in April.

Mensch’s decision notes that those “nearly identical local laws” have already been struck down and acknowledges that trial courts such as Beacon’s must follow those prece-
dents. In addition, the Beacon judge recog-

nized that the city’s law includes the same language that the appellate court ruled in the Albany case is preempted by state law.

The appellate court also found that the good-cause requirements contradict state property law by imposing restrictions other than the written notice the state requires a landlord to give a tenant for a lease that is not being renewed.

As in the other Beacon case, the tenant argued to Mensch that the landlord’s notice was defective because it did not cite a cause for the decision not to renew the tenant’s lease. But Beacon’s good-cause legislation “does not supplement state law, instead it places greater restric-
tions on property owners seeking to evict a tenant,” rendering it unconstitutional, null and void, Mensch wrote.

* Circulation Verification Council, Publication Audit Report, 2022

The Current

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Chip Rowe, Editor (editor@highlandscurrent.org) Michele Gedney, Advertising Director (ads@highlandscurrent.org)
## My View

**Tough Winter Ahead**

*By Jim Witt*

**H**eavy clothing and a good snowblower will be useful items during the winter of 2023-24. Most of the Northeastern section of the U.S. will experience below-seasonal temperatures and above-normal snowfall.

During the last several winters, there were La Nina conditions in the oceans off the coast of South America. Generally, the storm path with a La Nina scenario has storms moving across the northern tier of the U.S. and then up the St. Lawrence River Valley. The center of these storms was then passing to our west.

This is not conducive for causing snowstorms. Actually, in advance of each storm, warm air is pushed into our area, along with some rain. As the storm moves north-eastward up the St. Lawrence River Valley, a cold front passes, the precipitation ends and cold air plunges into our area. Bottom line: no snow.

This winter is going to be different. We are dealing with an El Nino winter and it looks like it will be a strong El Nino. Storms will enter the West Coast. Some will move north into western Canada. We don’t have to worry about them. Our concerns are the storms that dive into the Gulf of Mexico. Here they gather a great deal of moisture and warmth. These storms begin to move north-eastward and redevelop along the southeast coast of the U.S. It is here they strengthen rapidly and move northward.

We call these storms nor’easters. If cold air is present when the storm arrives locally, we get slammed with strong winds, extreme cold and heavy snow.

What are the chances? Over the past 73 years, between 1950 and 2023, we’ve had 33 major snowstorms along the East Coast, or one every 2.2 years, on average. Of those storms, 28 occurred with either an El Nino or neutral phase of Enso (El Nino – Southern Oscillation). Only five have occurred with La Nina. Major East Coast snowstorms are more likely during an El Nino or neutral winter.

Other factors called “teleconnections” are important. One is called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO). This can be negative or positive. When the PDO is negative, more often than not, another teleconnection, the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), is negative. This is important because a negative NAO has been found to cause a blocking situation, resulting in cold and snowy winters in the Northeast. Both the PDO and the NAO are expected to be negative this winter.

Also, I have found that when El Nino extends from the South American coast westward past 180 degrees longitude (the international date line), it is called an “El Nino West situation.” Snowstorms and cold weather are prevalent during those years.

Jim Witt, who lives in Philipston, is the former “weather guy” at WHUD Radio and webmaster of TheWeatherWiz.com. Each year he creates a Hudson Valley Weather Calendar to benefit the Hope for Youth Foundation. Now in its 38th edition, it is available at local merchants or at hfyg.org/calendars.
Beacon Council to Vote on Budget, Consider Raises

Also, moratorium proposed, but not likely yet, along Fishkill Avenue

By Jeff Simms

Beacon residents will have a second chance to comment on the city's proposed 2024 budget on Monday (Dec. 11) when the City Council reopens a public hearing on the $35 million spending plan, which includes about a $300 property tax increase on the average home and $1,000 employee-retention raises for city staff.

After the hearing, the council is expected to vote on the budget.

The plan proposes a decrease in the residential tax rate for the third straight year and a decrease in the commercial tax rate for the second consecutive year. While residential property taxes are likely to see the modest increase because of rising assessments, a $500,000 commercial parcel would see a 14 percent decrease, or $760, in its tax bill.

The budget would use $250,000 from savings to balance the $25.4 million general fund and $96,500 in savings for the $4.2 million water fund. The $5.3 million sewer fund would not be supplemented by savings. Water and sewer fees would increase for city residents by 4 percent and by savings. Water and sewer fees would increase for city residents by 4 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

Only one new municipal position, a part-time police dispatcher, is proposed for 2024. Two positions created this year—a recreation assistant and deputy building inspector—are retained in the budget. The recreation assistant will allow the Recreation Department, which is slated for a 20 percent funding increase, to expand its afterschool programming from three to four sites in early 2024. The department’s summer camp at University Settlement will also expand by two weeks.

Council members decided during their Dec. 4 workshop to schedule another public hearing, this one for Dec. 18, their final meeting of the year, on a proposal to increase the salaries paid to council members and the mayor. The pitch, made by outgoing Council Member Justice McCray in October, would raise council members’ salaries from $9,000 to $11,000 annually and the mayor’s from $25,000 to $29,500.

The reasoning, said McCray, who did not seek re-election last month and will be replaced in January on the council by Jeff Domanski, is to adjust the salaries for inflation and potentially remove one of the barriers that may keep some candidates from running for the office.

The plan proposes a decrease in the residential tax rate for the third straight year and a decrease in the commercial tax rate for the second consecutive year.

“There are a lot of people in the city who are passionate about making Beacon better,” but do not have the resources to run for office and devote time to the position, McCray said in October. The last time the elected officials’ benefits were adjusted was in 2017, when the council voted to give its members the option of a $2,500 payment if they choose not to enroll in the city’s health insurance plan.

If the council adopts the salary increases following the hearing on Dec. 18, they would take effect in 2024. In essence, the council could adopt the 2024 budget on Dec. 11, hold a public hearing on the raises a week later and then vote to amend the 2024 budget following the hearing.

If approved, the amendment would require using an additional $16,500—$2,000 each for six council members and $4,500 for the mayor—from savings to balance the budget.

Council Member Dan Aymar-Blair said Dec. 4 that he believes the stipend would make council members “is disproportionate to the amount of work” the job requires, “but I’m very wary of using this position to give myself an increase.” Mayor Lee Kyriacou said he had at different times voted for and against salary increases during his nine terms on the council.

Fishkill Avenue moratorium?

During the Dec. 4 workshop, Aymar-Blair and Council Member Paloma Wake proposed a moratorium on new development in the Fishkill Avenue corridor while a committee that’s expected to be named next month studies the area.

Since the council began discussing the potential rezoning of a mile-long stretch of the corridor, Aymar-Blair said he has heard from constituents who want to see smaller buildings, affordable housing and bike lanes—measures not necessarily supported by current zoning—in the area. Kyriacou last week announced that he will soon appoint a citizens’ committee to study the corridor and advise the City Council, but that group, once formed, is not expected to complete its work for six to nine months.

John Clarke, a planning consultant, and City Attorney Nick Ward-Willis both said the city is under “pressure to work as quickly as possible, “so bad projects don’t sneak in the back door,” Clarke said.

Regardless, it will be important for the committee to meet frequently and complete its work as quickly as possible, “so bad projects don’t sneak in the back door,” Clarke said.

Internal subdivisions

The City Council could vote on Monday (Dec. 11) on a zoning amendment to allow developers of residential and mixed-use projects with multiple buildings to “internally” subdivide so that individual buildings are recorded as separate lots.

Internal subdivisions allow developers to separate construction loans for one lot, for example, from long-term financing for the remainder of a site to make a project more viable. The law governing such subdivisions currently applies only to commercial developments.

The amendment was requested by the developer of the Edgewater apartment complex, which was approved in 2018 and when complete will include seven buildings. If the council approves the amendment, any lots “newly created” by internal subdivision would still be bound by special-use permits, if applicable, and zoning restrictions as if they were part of one cohesive site.

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- Other buses: $24 or $36 (based on type)
- Motorcycles: $7.50
- Vehicles using the Queens-Midtown, Carey, Holland or Lincoln tunnels: $5 credit for cars, $2.50 for motorcycles, $12 for small trucks and intercity/charter buses, $20 for large trucks and tour buses
- Taxis and for-hire vehicles such as Uber: exempt, but would charge passengers ($1.25 taxis, $2.50 for-hire) for rides to, from and within the Manhattan Central Business District
- Specialized government and emergency vehicles such as garbage trucks, and vehicles transporting people with disabilities: exempt
- Low-income drivers who register: 50 percent discount on daytime toll after the first 10 trips in a calendar month
- All drivers outside peak hours: $3.75

 Congestion Pricing (from Page 1) discounts and exemptions.

Recommendations issued by the MTA’s Traffic Mobility Review Board said the program will shift some of the $90,000 drivers who enter the area each weekday to public transportation and generate $15 billion in capital funding for the MTA, whose Metro-North commuter rail stops at Beacon, Cold Spring, Garrison and Manitou.

Neal Zuckermand, a Garrison resident who represents Putnam County on the MTA board and chairs its Finance Committee, said the tolls are necessary to help fund the agency’s infrastructure needs.

“Ultimately, no one wants to pay more,” said Zuckermand on Wednesday. “But someone has to.”

Jano Lieblie, the MTA’s chair and CEO, said congestion pricing will spur “less traffic, cleaner air, safer streets and better transit.”

The Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA) will lead the months-long process to finalize the rates. That process will involve in-person and virtual public hearings in early 2024 and a 60-day period for comments to the agency’s infrastructure needs.

The MTA board will then vote on authorizing the TBTA to adopt the rates, with tolling to begin by late spring. As of Nov. 30, contractors had installed 60 percent of the infrastructure needed for collecting tolls, according to the MTA.

Lieber said during a budget discussion in December 2022 that the MTA faced an “existential crisis,” with forecasts concluding that ridership would remain below pre-pandemic levels and that the agency’s deficit would reach $3 billion by 2026.

In August, the MTA resumed fare and toll increases for Metro-North, and its buses, subways, bridges and tunnels after suspending hikes during the pandemic. The increases are expected to generate $117 million this year and additional hikes are planned for 2025 and 2027, the agency said on Nov. 29, when it released a draft budget for next year.

The MTA also said that the $19.3 billion spending plan for 2024 will save $427 million from “operating efficiencies” and is projected to be just the second balanced spending plan in five years.

The savings were required as part of a funding boost from the state that includes an increase in the Payroll Mobility Tax, which is assessed on businesses in New York City, as well as Dutchess, Putnam and the five other counties served by the MTA.

The state raised the tax on New York City’s largest employers to generate an additional $1.1 billion annually for the MTA.

“I am proud of the work that has been done,” said Zuckermand during a Finance Committee review of the budget on Nov. 29.

“It’s an extraordinary document.”

Garrison Bus Referendum Passes

Authorizes all students to be picked up

A proposal to authorize the Garrison school district to transport all students by bus regardless of how far they live from the school, at an additional annual cost of $16,200, passed overwhelmingly on Tuesday (Dec. 5).

The vote was 175-3. The measure formalizes a policy that allows children who live within 2 miles of the school to take the bus. The school has provided the service for years but never received approval from voters as required by law, explained Carl Alano, the interim superintendent.

Dutchess Launches Online Zoning App

Provides interactive map of land uses

The Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development on Monday (Dec. 4) announced the release of an online application that enables users to select any of the county’s 30 municipalities, including Beacon, and view an interactive version of the zoning map or a county-wide view of land uses.

The application, available at gis.dutchessny.gov/zoning, allows users to identify the zoning districts of a parcel; reference zoning changes; check the zoning of proposed developments; and ask the department questions about zoning.

Before the release, zoning maps were only available in PDF or paper form, which the agency said made it difficult to zoom in to see individual properties. In addition, overlay zones often needed to be viewed on maps that are often buried in municipal codes and difficult to find.

Fewer Rescues on Breakneck Ridge

Numbers fall from 2021, 2022

The number of rescues at Breakneck Ridge by first responders since March was 70 percent lower than in 2022 and 80 percent lower than in 2021, the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail noted in a news release, attributing the change in part to upgrades made to the trail and train station.

According to the Putnam County Bureau of Emergency Services, there have been three calls on Breakneck Ridge in 2023. Although the trailhead was closed for four months, the Wilkinson, Nimham and Washburn/Cornish trails remained open.

The Fjord Trail also noted that more state park staff and New York-New Jersey Trail Conference stewards were stationed at Breakneck to assist hikers and direct them to designated loops and alternative hikes.

The Breakneck Ridge and Wilkinson trailheads, as well as the Metro-North station, will close in early 2024 for about two years because of construction of a connector path and bridge that is part of the first phase of the Fjord Trail park.

Lions Club Inducts Five

Also selling 2024 discount cards

The Cold Spring Lions Club recently inducted five members — Susan Freeman, Beth Horan, Lesley Robertson, Kristen Peparo and Josiah Peparo — and launched its 2024 discount-card campaign.

The cards, which offer savings at local businesses, are $20 each. They are available on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in front of Foodtown, from any Lions member or at Zara’s Cleaners on Route 9 in Philipstown.

Funds raised by the sale of cards are used to provide scholarships to high school seniors and to support organizations such as the Philipstown Little League, Philipstown Behavioral Health Hub, Philipstown Food Pantry, Putnam History Museum, Chapel Restoration, Putnam/Northern Westchester Women’s Resource Center, Guiding Eyes for the Blind and the Lions See vision-screening program.

The Lions also have a Leo Club, formed by Haldane High School students, that makes blankets for the Linus Project.

What’s Online at HighlandsCurrent.org

These resources can be accessed through the pulldown menu on the top of each page, under “Resources” and “Reader Guide.”

Local Officials

This is a list of elected and appointed officials at the local, state and federal level and how to contact them with your praise or protests.

Local Government Video Guide

OK, it’s not Netflix, but here’s a list of sites where you can watch videos of local and county public meetings.

How They Voted (Congress)

Summaries of consequential and newsworthy legislation in the U.S. House and the Senate; Mike Lawler (Philipstown) and Rep. Pat Ryan (Beacon) voted. Updated weekly when Congress is in session.

Storm Updates and Resources

Storm-watcher resources and contacts for when the power goes out.

Community Directory

This is a continually updated guide to local businesses and cultural sites, with addresses, phone numbers and web links.

Shop Local Online

We created this during the pandemic; it’s a list of local retailers that allow you to order online.

Community Calendar

This is the full Monty — we only have room for the highlights in print.

Real-Estate Data

These graphs are created by a firm called Datalaforal and include the number of new listings in Putnam and Dutchess counties, the number of home sales and median home sale prices.

Job Search

Provided by Indeed, these are continually updated listings for open positions in the Highlands and surrounding areas.

Back Issues

This is an archive of our past issues, in PDF format, from June 2012 to date, except for the latest issue, which is emailed to Current members on Friday morning.

Podcast Archives

Here are links to all the episodes of our podcast, for easy listening. The three most popular downloads so far have been interviews with a barefoot Ironman competitor; Dinky Romilly of Philipstown, who discussed her civil rights work and her famous mother; and the author of a book about stone walls.
Camille Saint-Saëns
Christmas Oratorio

HIGHLANDS CHORAL SOCIETY AND THE HIGHLANDS CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
DIRECTED BY DR. DURWARD ENTREKIN

Join us for the Holidays!

DECEMBER 10 AT 4:00 PM
CHRISTMAS CONCERT SERVICE
FEATURING SAINT-SAËNS, RUTTER AND LAURIDSEN

DECEMBER 17 AT 11:00 AM
LESSONS AND CAROLS SERVICE

DECEMBER 24 AT 11:00 AM
REGULAR SERVICE

DECEMBER 24 AT 5:00 PM
CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE WITH COLD SPRING/SOUTH HIGHLAND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ALL ARE WELCOME | FREE ADMISSION BUT DONATIONS GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED
Influenced by jazz and Joni Mitchell, Beacon singer releases debut EP

By Alison Rooney

At a certain juncture, songwriter and singer Rose Stoller knew she had to confront what was becoming a looming stumbling block: learning to play the guitar. Though she was crafting songs, she lacked the ability to perform them for others.

"Many people took guitar lessons when they were 7 years old, or even 14, while here I was trying to learn guitar, write songs and jump-start performing them," says the Beacon resident. "I wanted to share the songs I was writing and inflections — her Instagram handle, chosen a while back, she notes, unsure that it still reflects her music, is @WeirdSoundGirl. The EP is accompanied by videos of live performances of each song.

"I don't think I sound very conventional and I was playing on that when I chose that name," she explains. "The sounds I make are super-organic and always changing. I open my mouth and see what happens, and there's something fun about that."

Stoller, 26, grew up in New York City, in a household where her father wrote songs as a hobby. "My dad is an undiscovered talent and his songwriting was a big inspiration to me, though I didn't participate in it growing up — I was shy," Stoller recalls. "I went to a competitive arts high school, which I found detrimental to the growing brain. Art is supposed to help you express yourself, but for me it was the opposite because I wasn't expressive in theater spaces.

That gave me some faith that maybe this is a muscle I can sit with and keep growing."
**KIDS & FAMILY**

**TUES 12**

**Arctic Animals**

**BEACON**

4:15 p.m. Howland Library

313 Main St. | 845-831-1134

beaconlibrary.org

Children ages 4 to 7 are invited to enjoy stories and a craft. Registration required.

**THURS 14**

**Retro Candy and Board Games**

**BEACON**

3:45 p.m. Howland Library

313 Main St. | 845-831-1134

beaconlibrary.org

Children and teens ages 11 and older can sample candy from the 1970s to 1990s and play classic board games. Registration required.

**FRI 15**

**Cinnamon Salt Dough Decorations**

**GARRISON**

3:30 p.m. Desmond-Fish Library

472 Route 403 | 845-424-3020
desmondfishlibrary.org

Learn how to make ornaments using fragrant gingerbread. Registration required.

**FRI 15**

**DIY Ugly Sweater**

**COLD SPRING**

6 p.m. Butterfield Library

10 Morris Ave. | 845-265-3040

butterfieldlibrary.org

Students in grades 6 and up are invited to bring a sweater or sweatshirt to decorate. Registration required.

**SAT 16**

**Teen Hike**

**COLD SPRING**

10 a.m. Butterfield Library

10 Morris Ave. | 845-265-3040

butterfieldlibrary.org

Students in grades 8 to 12 can take a guided hike on the short loop of Bull Hill. Registration required.

**STAGE & SCREEN**

**SAT 9**

**Carnival of the Animals**

**COLD SPRING**

11 a.m. & 1 & 3 p.m. Chapel Restoration

45 Market St. | chapelrestoration.org

For this children's concert of Camille Saint-Saens' musical suite, violinist Rachel Evans and eight other musicians will be accompanied by a "crankie" with hand-drawn illustrations projected on the wall. Cost: $25 ($10 children)

**SAT 9**

**Fools Mass**

**BEACON**

8 p.m. Howland Cultural Center

477 Main St. | howlandculturalcenter.org

Now in its 25th season, the Dzieci Theatre's seasonal performance is set in the 14th century during the plague; the village idiots must create their own Mass because the priest is dead. Cost: $20 ($25 door)

**SUN 10**

**Sherry Vine: Oy to the World**

**BEACON**

Noon & 6 p.m. Reserva Wine Bar

173 Main St. | reservabeacon.com

The half-Jewish drag performer's show includes naughty humor, parodies and costumes. Cost: $50

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**REAL ESTATE MARKET**

**HOME SALES IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE LAST 30 DAYS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROPERTIES</th>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>BEDS</th>
<th>BATHS</th>
<th>SQ FT</th>
<th>SOLD!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79 Old Glenham Rd.</td>
<td>Fishkill</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>$275,000</td>
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<td>61 Howland Ave.</td>
<td>Beacon</td>
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<td>3/1</td>
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<td>30-32 Cobblestone Rd.</td>
<td>Weapping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/0</td>
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<td>$930,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OFFICE LISTINGS**

**14 Green Street, Beacon**

3 Bed | 1 Bath | 972 Sq Ft | $625,000

**12 Monell Place, Beacon**

5 Bed | 3 Bath | 5,016 Sq Ft | $2,190,000

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**THE WEEK AHEAD**

Edited by Pamela Doan (calendar@highlandscurrent.org)

For a complete listing of events, see highlandscurrent.org/calendar.

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**STAGE & SCREEN**

**SAT 9**

**Our Town**

**COLD SPRING**

7 p.m. Haldane | 15 Craigside Drive

haldaneschool.org

Haldane Drama presents Thornton Wilder’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Cost: $12 ($5 students, seniors)

---

Charlotte Guernsey
Team Leader, Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker
845.831.9560 | 490 Main Street, Beacon

@GateHouseCompass | gatehousecompass.com

The Gate House Team is a team of Licensed Associate Real Estate Brokers and Licensed Real Estate Salespersons associated with Compass. Compass is a licensed real estate broker and abides by Equal Housing Opportunity laws.
that take place on Rita McBride’s modular Arena (1997), a facilitator will pose a question and act as an instigator, listener and moderator as participants create a new question for the next session. The second question is, “Where to facilitate energy to give life?” Free with admission. Cost: $20 ($18 seniors, $12 students, $5 children, free for Beacon residents). S A T 9 Visit from Santa GARRISON 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. Boscobel 1601 Route 90 | 845-265-3638 boscobel.org Santa will visit the back porch of the mansion to greet children and pose for photos. Free with grounds admission. Also SAT 16. Cost: $14 ($12 seniors, $8 ages 4 to 18). S A T 9 Gift Wrapped BEACON 5 – 9 p.m. Clutter 139 Main St. | clutter.co Work by more than 200 artists will be available for less than $350. Through Jan. 5. S A T 9 Animal Tales BEACON 6 – 9 p.m. Super Secret Projects 484 Main St. | supersecretprojects.com This exhibit will feature works by gallery members that isn’t usually exhibited because it’s experimental.S A T 9 Linda Lauro-Lazin | Forged in Fire BEACON 6 – 8 p.m. BAU Gallery 506 Main St. | bau.org In Gallery 1, Lauro-Lazin’s paintings in Desire Lines: Phantom Geographies respond to digital technology. In Gallery 2, works by ceramic artists Barbara Allen, Meg Beauclair, Sarah Fox and Eileen Sackman will be on display. Through Jan. 7. V I S U A L ARTS S A T 9 Hiding in Plain Sight GARRISON 5 – 7 p.m. Garrison Art Center 23 Garrison’s Landing | 845-424-3960 garrisonartcenter.org Jessica Brier was the juror and curator for the annual PHOTO|Ectric show. Sky Pape’s works on paper also will be on view. Through Jan. 7. M U S I C S A T 9 Mike LaRocco Trio BEACON 7:30 p.m. Reserve Wine Bar 173 Main St. | reservabeacon.com The group will play jazz from swing to ballads and blues. S A T 9 Sloan Wainwright & Friends BEACON 8 p.m. Towne Crier | 379 Main St. | 845-855-1300 | townecrier.com For her 23rd annual holiday show, Wainwright will be joined by the Sloan Flakes and others. Cost: $35 ($40 door). S A T 9 Holiday Sing and Fundraiser BEACON 5 p.m. Beacon Sloop Club 2 Red Fyre Drive | beaconsloopclub.org This community sing-a-long will include a potluck with appetizers and desserts. Donations welcome to benefit Common Ground Farm. H O L I D A Y EVENTS S A T 9 Bicycle Menorah Lighting BEACON 5:30 p.m. Beacon Hebrew Alliance 331 Verplanck Ave. beaconhebrewalliance.org Join the community for a nightly candle lighting at the menorah, made out of bicycles during the celebration of Hanukkah. Continues each evening through THURS 16. S A T 9 Christmas by Candlelight COLD SPRING 8 p.m. Chapel Restoration 45 Market St. | chapelrestoration.org Singer and songwriter Natalie Forteza will be accompanied by Aki Bermiiss (piano), Anthony Candullo (bass) and Erik Perez (drums). Cost: $25. S A T 9 John Tesh PEEKSKILL 8 p.m. Paramount Hudson Valley 1008 Brown St. | 845-739-0039 paramounthudsonvalley.com In A Jazzy Swinging’ Christmas, Tesh and his seven-piece band play hits from his holiday recordings. Cost: $45 to $75. H O L I D A Y FA S T 10 Holiday Gift Show & Sale BEACON Noon – 5 p.m. Hudson Beach Glass 162 Main St. | hudsonbeachglassshop.com Alison Palmer will exhibit her stoneware clay. Also SUN 10. S A T 10 The Nutacker POUGHKEEPSIE 2 & 7:30 p.m. Bardavon 35 Market St. | bardavon.org The New Paltz Ballet Theatre will perform the classic tale. Also SUN 10. Cost: $36 ($31 member, $30 children). H O L I D A Y TOURS S A T 10 Holiday Tours BEACON Noon & 1 & 2 p.m. Mount Gulian 145 Sterling St. | mountgulian.org Tour the historic mansion, which has been decorated for the holidays. Also WED 13 to SUN 17. Cost: $12 ($10 seniors, $6 children). N U T A C K E R S A T 10 Nutacker, Short and Sweet PEEKSKILL 3 p.m. Paramount Hudson Valley 1008 Brown St. | 845-739-0039 paramounthudsonvalley.com This one-hour production features dancers from the Hudson Valley. Cost: $20. C R I S T M A S S A T 10 Christmas Concert COLD SPRING 4 p.m. Methodist Church 216 Main St. | highlandschapel.org This Highlands Choral Society concert will include Saint-Saëns’ Christmas Oratorio. Donations welcome. Free. S A T 10 Cirque Dreams Holiday West POINT 4 p.m. Ipe Hall | 655 Pitcher Road | 845-938-4159 | ipehall.com These circus artists will combine storytelling and choreography for this holiday performance. Cost: $48.
FRI 15
Lotus
BEACON
8 p.m. Towne Crier | 379 Main St.
845-855-1300 | townecrier.com
The tribute band will play the hits of Santana. Cost: $25 ($30 door)

SAT 16
A Celtic Christmas
POUGHKEEPSIE
7:30 p.m. Bardavon
35 Market St. | baradavon.org
A Taste of Ireland’s tour includes music and dancing as star-crossed lovers find their way to each other. Also SUN 17. Cost: $45 to $65

SAT 16
A Very Slambovian Christmas
BEACON
8 p.m. Towne Crier | 379 Main St.
845-855-1300 | townecrier.com
The Slambovian Circus of Dreams will perform its annual holiday show. Cost: $35 ($40 door)

SAT 16
Joe Fiedler
POUGHKEEPSIE
8 p.m. Cunneen-Hackett Arts Center
12 Vassar St. | joefiedler.eventbrite.com
The trombonist and composer will play music from his latest recording, The Howland Sessions.

SUN 17
The Costellos
BEACON
8 p.m. Towne Crier | 379 Main St.
845-855-1300 | townecrier.com
Lynn and Bob will be joined by Scott Ramsey, The Flurries and Dimitri Archip for their annual Christmas show. Cost: $20 ($25 door)

CIVIC
MON 11
School Board
BEACON
7 p.m. Beacon High School
101 Matteawan Road
845-838-6900 | beaconk12.org
The meeting will include a public hearing on the 2024 budget. See Page 8.

WED 13
Village Board
COLD SPRING
7 p.m. Village Hall | 85 Main St.
845-265-3611 | coldspringny.gov
Kirk Moldoff will discuss Snow, who served for eight years in the Hudson Valley during the Revolutionary War. Cost: $10 (members free)

SAT 9
An In-Depth Look at the Hudson River
GARRISON
3 p.m. Desmond-Fish Library
472 Route 403 | desmondfishlibrary.org
Science educator Steve Stanne will discuss life in the river, tides, food webs and issues of concern during this presentation hosted by the library and the Putnam Highlands Audubon Society.

TUES 12
Pet First Aid Training
POUGHKEEPSIE
6 p.m. Dept. of Emergency Response
392 Creek Road | dutchessny.gov/mrc
Members of the Dutchess County Medical Reserve Corps will teach skills that can save the lives of pets and livestock. Register online.

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS AT ST. PHILIP’S

Saturday, December 16:
12:00 PM - Wreaths Across America
Please join us for a short ceremony followed by the laying of wreaths on the gravesites of those who served in our nation’s Armed Forces.

Wednesday, December 20:
7:00 PM - Longest Night service
A service to mark the longest night of the year.

Sunday, December 24, Christmas Eve:
8:00 AM - Spoken Holy Eucharist
10:00 AM - Spoken Holy Eucharist
4:30 PM - Christmas Pageant with carols
9:00 PM - Christmas Eve Eucharist with carols

Monday, December 25, Christmas Day:
10:00 AM - Christmas Holy Eucharist with carols

ST. PHILIP’S CHURCH
IN THE HIGHLANDS
1101 Route 9D, Garrison, NY 10524
845-424-3020 | stphilipshighlands.org
THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH WELCOMES YOU

Penelope
with Christine Bokhour
December 17 at 4pm

CINEMA DEPOT
Irving Berlin’s White Christmas
December 22 at 7:30pm

DEPOT DOCS
After the Bite
January 5 at 7:30
reception at Dolly’s

All tickets available at www.philipstowndepottheatre.org

THE WEEK AHEAD
(Continued from Page 13)
Fred Astaire Cold Spring
3182 Route 9 Cold Spring, NY 10516
(845) 424-6353 | www.fredastaire.com/cold-spring

Two private lessons for $99.

Hudson Beach Glass
Locally Blown
162 Main St, Beacon, NY 12508  (845) 440-0068
Open daily 10am - 6pm, Sunday 11am - 6pm
www.hudsonbeachglass.com

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www.TuscanGrill.com

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Facebook @UniqueFamilyGifts.Toys
Let each candle glow in tribute

As part of Cold Spring Aglow, taking place today, December 8, from 4–8pm, residents lit up Main St. with candles and tributes, some of which are shared here.

In memory of my Dad, Brian Stachitus. Let your wisdom shine on.

Michael ‘Daddio’ Panasci

In loving memory of Jane St. Aubin and Muriel Stanley

My sister Emily, we miss you

In honor of our Dad, Grandfather and Great Grandfather; James Helbock

In memory of our beloved frenchie, best boy, Hamilton

In loving memory of my grandmother Elsie Cornwell

In memory of Jim Farnototto

A light for refugees, near and far

Grandma Kay, we love you

In honor of our Philipstown veterans

Melissa Santas, remembering your beautiful smile and indomitable spirit. You were, and continue to be, an inspiration for us all. Rest in peace, my friend.

Honoring this community and the people that make it

In loving memory of Lisa Pitre, aka Gramms

Thank you to our town board and village trustees for doing the often thankless work and for caring for this special place we call home

Jack Goldstein

For all the volunteers that make our community glow

The Late Ernest Forcello

In loving memory of Angie and Tony D’Amato and Maria and Philip Percacciole

In memory of the most incredible mother, and Nanniebug — Joan Murphy Walsh. Never a love could glow brighter than the one you shined upon us. You are dearly missed.

Philipstown Food Pantry

Peace for this world

Our teachers
Dining in certain high-end restaurants, beautifully made food is just one small part. Gotten, the more I’ve realized that delicious, Michelin’s restaurant stars. The older I’ve there, for more than 100 years.

It’s wise to approach the month with a strategy in mind. Otherwise, you could wind up wandering from cookie to candy to brownie to bar, from eggnog to toddy to glogg and back again, and find yourself light-headed before you’re halfway to the big jamboree.

Yesterday, while contemplating my own need for a plan, I remembered the Michelin Guides. They have been helping people to plot courses through unfamiliar regions, and to plan and prioritize what to eat while there, for more than 100 years. These days, I hardly pay attention to Michelin’s restaurant stars. The older I’ve gotten, the more I’ve realized that delicious, beautifully made food is just one small part of what makes a meal great — and that dining in certain high-end restaurants simply isn’t very fun.

I do, however, love the way that the Michelin system rates things according to whether they are worth it. “Worth a trip,” “worth a detour” and “worth a stop” are their descriptors for their three-, two- and one-star ratings. Should you book a trip to Kyoto just to eat in a certain restaurant? Yes, absolutely in the case of a three-star recipient, they claim. But, for the two-star restaurants, that’s if you’re already in Kyoto, and only if you happen to be down the block, for the one-stars.

“Worth it” is a wonderful yardstick, more relevant to how we humans actually value things than price. It acknowledges that the same thing can be a rip-off or a bargain depending on context; that $2 is too much to pay for a dud while $100 can be a steal for something that will make you happy for decades to come.

When it comes to navigating holiday food, perhaps the secret is to focus our inner Michelin star system. But instead of rating dishes in terms of trips and detours, we consider things like: Is it worth the calories and/or regret? Is it worth the time and trouble to cook it? Is it worth the effort if no one raves? And — for some of us, when it comes to certain ingredients — is it worth the subsequent tummy ache?

This week’s recipe has already proved its three-star worthiness on all counts. It has been one of my mother’s go-to autumn and winter holiday recipes for nearly four decades, and it’s the thing my husband, kids and in-laws ask after when they know she’ll be coming to a gathering: “Will she be bringing her pecan bars?” They disappear first at dessert-time, usually soundtracked by a chorus of “I-really-shouldn’t, ts, folks help themselves to seconds and thirds before cutting the bars in half for their fourths and fifths. Clearly, they showed up at the cookie plate without a strategy.

December may be a tricky month when it comes to eating wisely, but it’s also full of guiding stars, of all kinds.

**Pecan Bars**

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter an 8x12-inch brownie pan, line the bottom with parchment paper, then butter the parchment.

Sift together the flour and confectioner’s sugar, transfer to the bowl of a food processor and pulse to blend. Cut two sticks of butter into pieces, add to the food processor and blend about 10 seconds, until crumbly.

Turn the mixture into the prepared pan (don’t worry; it will look dry) and press gently into place. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, then remove from oven.

Meanwhile, prepare the topping: In a medium-large saucepan, melt the remaining 11 tablespoons butter. Add the maple syrup, honey, brown sugar and cream and whisk until evenly blended. Heat the mixture over medium-low until it is hot, though not bubbling, about 3 minutes. Add the chopped pecans and stir until well coated.

When the crust is pre-baked, spread the pecan mixture over the surface. Return to the oven and bake an additional 25 minutes. Cool completely in the pan before cutting into bars.

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**Holiday Stars**

By Celia Barbour

December is a sweet, strange land, full of unforeseen temptations. It’s wise to approach the month with a strategy in mind. Otherwise, you could wind up wandering from cookie to candy to brownie to bar, from eggnog to toddy to glogg and back again, and find yourself light-headed before you’re halfway to the big jamboree.

Yesterday, while contemplating my own need for a plan, I remembered the Michelin Guides. They have been helping people to plot courses through unfamiliar regions, and to plan and prioritize what to eat while there, for more than 100 years. These days, I hardly pay attention to Michelin’s restaurant stars. The older I’ve gotten, the more I’ve realized that delicious, beautifully made food is just one small part of what makes a meal great — and that dining in certain high-end restaurants simply isn’t very fun.

I do, however, love the way that the Michelin system rates things according to whether they are worth it. “Worth a trip,” “worth a detour” and “worth a stop” are their descriptors for their three-, two- and one-star ratings. Should you book a trip to Kyoto just to eat in a certain restaurant? Yes, absolutely in the case of a three-star recipient, they claim. But, for the two-star restaurants, that’s if you’re already in Kyoto, and only if you happen to be down the block, for the one-stars.

“Worth it” is a wonderful yardstick, more relevant to how we humans actually value things than price. It acknowledges that the same thing can be a rip-off or a bargain depending on context; that $2 is too much to pay for a dud while $100 can be a steal for something that will make you happy for decades to come.

When it comes to navigating holiday food, perhaps the secret is to focus our inner Michelin star system. But instead of rating dishes in terms of trips and detours, we consider things like: Is it worth the calories and/or regret? Is it worth the time and trouble to cook it? Is it worth the effort if no one raves? And — for some of us, when it comes to certain ingredients — is it worth the subsequent tummy ache?

This week’s recipe has already proved its three-star worthiness on all counts. It has been one of my mother’s go-to autumn and winter holiday recipes for nearly four decades, and it’s the thing my husband, kids and in-laws ask after when they know she’ll be coming to a gathering: “Will she be bringing her pecan bars?” They disappear first at dessert-time, usually soundtracked by a chorus of “I-really-shouldn’t, ts, folks help themselves to seconds and thirds before cutting the bars in half for their fourths and fifths. Clearly, they showed up at the cookie plate without a strategy.

December may be a tricky month when it comes to eating wisely, but it’s also full of guiding stars, of all kinds.

**Pecan Bars**

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Butter an 8x12-inch brownie pan, line the bottom with parchment paper, then butter the parchment.

Sift together the flour and confectioner’s sugar, transfer to the bowl of a food processor and pulse to blend. Cut two sticks of butter into pieces, add to the food processor and blend about 10 seconds, until crumbly.

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When the crust is pre-baked, spread the pecan mixture over the surface. Return to the oven and bake an additional 25 minutes. Cool completely in the pan before cutting into bars.
Most of the Highlands are in Hardiness Zone 6b, which indicates the coldest expected winter temperatures are just below zero, although some spots are in the slightly milder 7a (light green).

 USDA
Puzzles

**CrossCurrent**

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**WordLadder**

Can you go from STORE to AMONG in 6 words?

Change one letter for each rung in the ladder.

STORE

AMONG

**MicroCrossWord**

ACROSS
1. — Anthony (Season 20 winner of *The Voice*)
4. Underground explorer
6. Group of lions
7. Big-ticket watch brand
8. Call to a shepherd

DOWN
1. Chocolate substitute
2. Teresa of (Spanish saint)
3. Tragedy by Euripides

Answers for Dec. 1 Puzzles

For interactive sudoku and crossword answers, see highlandscurrent.org/puzzles.
BEACON
By Nick Robbins

BOYS’ BASKETBALL — The Bulldogs kicked off their 2023-24 campaign under second-year coach Patrick Schetter on Monday (Dec. 4) with a 67-59 win over Washingtonville but followed that on Wednesday with a hard-fought 95-33 loss at Lourdes. Beacon (1-1) travels to New Paltz today (Dec. 8) and to Port Jervis on Tuesday. The team was 15-7 last season, losing in the Section IX, Class A semifinals to Goshen, but lost nine seniors to graduation.

GIRLS’ BASKETBALL — Beacon hopes to improve upon its 15-5 record from last season, when it finished as the No. 1 seed in the Section IX, Class A tournament before being upset in the first round by Franklin Roosevelt. The team is led by juniors Reilly Supple and Mercer Jordan were named to the Section IX, Class B team and received honorable mentions. The Bulldogs finished 14-4 and won the league title.

FOOTBALL — Mason Supple of Beacon was named to the Section IX, Class B team and Supple and Mercer Jordan were named all-league.

HALDANE
By Jacob Aframian

GIRLS’ BASKETBALL — After going 3-18 last season, the Blue Devils look to start anew under first-year Coach Carlos Martinez. The team lost seven seniors to graduation; this year’s squad has only nine players on the roster, including two seniors, Camilla McDaniel and Ruby Poses. The Blue Devils began the season Nov. 30 with a win in a tournament in Rye Neck over Keio Academy, 59-28, behind 23 points and seven steals from Kayla Ruggiero. Marisa Peters added 13 points and five steals and McDaniel scored 11 points.

Against host Rye Neck, the Blue Devils fell, 47-40. McDaniel led the way with 18 points and Peters had 11 points, five rebounds, five steals and four assists. Ruggiero contributed nine points.

On Tuesday (Dec. 5), Haldane hosted Woodlands; Peters and McDaniel hit three-pointers to start the game with a 6-0 lead before the Falcons went on a 9-0 run behind a swarming defense. The first quarter ended in a 16-16 tie and Woodlands took a 27-20 lead into halftime.

Thanks to three-pointers by McDaniel and Peters, the Blue Devils claimed a 39-38 lead in the fourth quarter before Woodlands went on another run to secure a 59-48 win.

Peters ended with a career-high 19 points, and McDaniel had 15, Poes added six points and eight rebounds.

“They kept fighting,” Martinez said of his team. “They kept playing well, they found their rhythm, they started running our offense. We did a better job in the second half of boxing out” on rebounds.

Haldane (1-2) travels today (Dec. 8) and tomorrow to Carmel for a tournament before hosting Briarcliff on Tuesday and taking on Rye Neck again in a tournament at Croton-Harmon on Thursday.

BOYS’ BASKETBALL — Coming off a 21-5 season in which they reached the state Class C title game, the Blue Devils return with a team that is battle-tested and experienced. Ten of the 13 players on the roster are seniors, and seven are 6 feet or taller, including 6-foot-6 senior Matt Nachamkin, who will play next year for Williams College.

The season began on Thursday (Dec. 7) when Haldane hosted Pleasantville. The Blue Devils host Blind Brook at 6:15 p.m. on Monday and travel to Briarcliff on Wednesday.

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