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Travis Batten (left) and Kevin Peck (right) of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association repair a gravestone at the old Tucker Hill Road cemetery in Thetford on Saturday. The Thetford Cemetery Commission coordinated the event to clean and repair stones throughout the cemetery.

JO PHOTO BY CYNTHIA SHELTON

Man accused of taking hostage in Groton

by Alex Nuti-de Biasi
ST. JOHNSBURY—A 26-year-old St. Johnsbury man pleaded not guilty on Monday to several charges after he allegedly threatened to kill everyone in the public library, pistol-whipped his mother and held her hostage with a handgun in Groton on July 17. Tristan Garcia pleaded not guilty to unlawful restraint, aggravated domestic assault, criminal threatening, unlawful mischief, disorderly conduct, two violations of conditions of

and resisting arrest. The defendant also denied violating probation conditions. Caledonia County Superior Court Judge Heather Gray ordered Garcia held in custody without bail after a brief hearing on Monday afternoon. The alleged assaults occurred at multiple locations in town, including at the Groton Free Public Library which is located in the village. Several residents of a nearby apartment building were

arrived and learned he was inside one apartment armed with a handgun and holding his mother against her will. At the hearing on Monday, Garcia was represented by attorney Jacob Staley. Garcia appeared via a remote connection from Northeast Regional Correctional Facility. After entering a plea, Staley asked Gray to release his client on home confinement. He also said his client consented to wearing a

Ahead of land use hearing, critics find details lacking

by Cynthia Shelton
FAIRLEE—Tempers flared at the second of three informational presentations given by Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission on the night of July 16. Main complaints centered on the communication style of TRORC Chief Planner Kevin Geiger.

“You will talk only when I recognize you!” Geiger boomed several times over the protests of the crowd. Planning commission and selectboard members from Topsham, Vershire, Fairlee, Bradford, and Corinth jammed into a small room with insufficient seating.

The disdain from Geiger was palpable.

“Is this how you behave at town meeting?”

The analogy to town meeting fell short, as there was no objective moderator to keep the discussion on

track and fair to all. Geiger began with an insulting set of rules of conduct, to which he was clearly not subject and it went downhill from there.

There was no Zoom link available for the meeting. There was no recording of the meeting. When someone asked if anyone was taking notes, TRORC Municipal Assistance Specialist Paul Kowalski nodded, smiled, and pointed to his own head.

Overflow audience stood against the walls and in the doorway for 90 minutes. Sporadic group muttering, applause for public comments, and a mid-meeting walkout by several people fed up with the “waste of time” punctuated the event.

No one goes to meetings like this on a lark. Planning is wonky business with reams of verbose detail to absorb and understand. The firehose information stream technique will discourage most people

from asking questions until it is too late and consequences happen.

A majority of people just trying to live their lives probably do not have a clue what TRORC is or does and so have no opinion about it. It is very difficult to engage the public with data that Geiger described as “stultifyingly boring.”

TRORC has made every legal effort to keep Vermonters informed about their work with an extensive website and a well-documented series of meetings about the changes. And yet, an in-person clear articulation of the issues and options eluded attendees.

TRORC is one of 11 regional planning commissions established in 1970 as a liaison between the state and towns. In East Central Vermont, there are 30 towns which pay dues to

See Critics on page A2



Area selectboard members and planning commission members were among those who turned out for a Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission informational session in Fairlee on July 16. There will be a formal public hearing on the regional plan update at the Bradford Academy on July 29.