

## Auburn's Climate Survey, Successful Goddard Tribute, May Town Meeting Date

BY JANET STOICA  
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Auburn would like to hear from its residents about climate change and their comments through the use of a survey that is available online at [auburnma.gov/790/Energy-Management](http://auburnma.gov/790/Energy-Management) or residents are invited to stop by the Town Hall's second floor to obtain a paper copy. Questions include how involved residents are with climate change, concerns, harm to future generations, personal actions, whether the free Mass Save energy audits have been used, what actions the town should take, etc. Questions may be directed to 508-832-7703.

The town's Robert Goddard Centennial Celebration was held on Saturday, March 14, and included a re-dedication ceremony at Goddard Park honoring Goddard's extraordinary contributions to the science of modern-day rocketry, his strong ties to Auburn, and his role in pioneering space flight. A rocket launching was also held at the Pakachoag Golf Course.

The Auburn Public Library was fortunate to have Travis Wohlrab, Public Engagement Official from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, to greet and speak with visitors about Dr. Goddard's achievements.



The Auburn Historical Society located at 41 South Street will also have displays highlighting

Dr. Goddard's achievements. The Society building is typically open on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and will also open for group tours by appointment.

Auburn's Annual Town Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 5, at 6 p.m. and will be held in the high school auditorium. The town Finance Committee will be meeting every Wednesday to address the town budget in preparation for the May town meeting. The Selectboard will have voted on their warrant article positions at their March 23 meeting.

## Oxford Town Manager's Resignation Accepted at Selectboard Meeting

BY JANET STOICA  
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

At the March 3, 2026 Selectboard Meeting, Town Manager Jennifer Callahan's resignation from her position was accepted unanimously by the board members who ratified, validated, and confirmed Ms. Callahan's letter of resignation dated February 14, 2026. She was then placed on administrative leave through April 3, 2026. Ms. Callahan stated "I thank all the residents of the town for my eight years of service. I appreciate that immensely and I know that the town will continue to move on." She departed the meeting and Chairman John Eul continued with additional agenda items.

The next order of business was voting to appoint Justin Leduc, Assistant Town Manager, as acting Town Manager. The Board then held a public hearing about a dog, Simba, owned by Kristine Blair of Pratt Avenue in Oxford for the purposes of hearing evidence, deliberating, and voting regarding an incident with the dog. Witnesses came forward describing a severe attack by Simba that fractured the nose and orbital eye area of Ms. Blair's nephew, T.J. Blair. The mother of T.J. stated that she was never told about the aggressive dog



Jennifer Callahan, former Oxford Town Manager

attack but was given intentional misinformation as to how T.J.'s facial injuries had occurred. Kathleen Flynn, Oxford's Animal Control Officer, was asked to give her recommendation about the dog and stated that "the dog be deemed a dangerous animal due to the severity of the injuries to Mr. T.J. Blair and the permanent damage caused to his eye and his face and the fact that the dog attack was not provoked." Current law also states that a minimum of \$100,000 of liability insurance be kept, that the dog be contained in an alternate area when

**MANAGER**  
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## Oxford Board of Health Reviews Orchard Hill Housing Inspections

BY JANET STOICA  
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At the Oxford Board of Health's March meeting a presentation about the Orchard Hill Housing site was given by Regional Health Inspector Alexandra Walters. Ms. Walters stated that there have been many cases to review at the housing site as it pertained to structural damage to the property

often with water damage as relating to State Sanitary Code violations. "A lot of what we were seeing were cracks in the walls, broken windows, broken doors, damage to ceilings. A lot of damage is all encompassed under that." Ms. Walters was able to inspect 10 of the 18 units with these types of damages. She indicated that a common theme was lack of mechanical ventilation in the bathroom

areas. The problems centered on excessive dust and debris buildup (in the fan cover) or the mechanical ventilation was not working. The visibility of mold and peeling ceilings along with water on the ceiling indicated an obvious lack of ventilation. Other visible water damage included water leakage from upstairs tubs leaking into the downstairs apartment ceiling areas. It appeared that patches had been

applied to the water damage area but the cause of the water damage had not been rectified.

Mention was made of retaining maintenance workers who would be attentive to the root cause of the water damage problems. Ms. Walters stated that she had been working closely with a new Orchard Hill manager who was striving

**ORCHARD HILL**  
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## Effie Ward, the other woman behind Dr. Goddard

The month of March has been designated as Women's History Month, and the Auburn Historical Society & Museum chose to highlight Miss Effie Mary Ward, the other woman in Dr. Robert Goddard's life. Effie's grandmother, Climena Goddard, was the sister to Robert's great-grandmother, Elvira Goddard. This makes Effie and Robert third cousins.

Effie's parents were Asa William Ward and Mary Elizabeth Alton. Asa's parents were William Ward and Climena Goddard who were from Royalston. William married Ellen Elizabeth Young in 1856 and had two children, Luella Climena, Herbert William. Ellen died in 1861, Asa then married Mary

Alton in 1863 and had three more children, Edward Asa who only lived 5 years, Marcus who lived for 48 years and Effie. The 1870 census showed quite the household with 13 people ranging in age from 3 to 33, by 1889 it was down to 6 and all with the last name Ward.

Asa Ward bought the 13.89 acres of Pakachoag land from David M. Pitts in 1882. In the 1900 census, besides the brothers working the land, there were a nephew and several boarders helping out. The Auburn tax records for this time show the family had 7 horses, 2 cows, 123 fowls, carriage, boiler, engine, (windmill) house and 13 acres. The 1915 tax records also show that there were two parcels of land on Thayer St, lots 110-111 which were 5,000 feet, and lots 112-115 which measured 10,000 feet. The main house also listed 2 barns, celery house, windmill and pump shed.

In the list of draft cards of Auburn men in 1918, Irving Leander Acker listed being a farmer on Effie M. Ward's farm for employment. Effie's father passed away in 1915 and left the farm to her in his will. It seems that Effie had a green thumb and used some of that land to grow prize winning flowers and vegetables that were shown in many agricultural fairs in the county. She also generously presented flowers at town events and special occasions. Effie was civic minded and gave back to her community. She was a member of the Red Cross Chapter in town and was on the advisory committee. She was a member of the First Congregational Church and worked on the committee that



helped raise money for the church budget working alongside Miss Abbie Shute, former town librarian. Effie was even mentioned helping with a Parent Teachers group who were conducting a food sale at the store of Wallace Bulfinch on Maple Avenue in 1928.

Effie must have had a great belief in her cousin's dream of liquid-fueled rockets to let him shoot them off on her property then deal with the local farmers who didn't like the effect of the noise and debris that occurred with every launch. Newspapers describe how brush fires had to be extinguished, and every single piece of the rocket had to be retrieved. There was a barn or two that may have had embers land on them. It could be said that the commotion caused the cows to give sour milk and the chickens lay scrambled eggs.

This article is made possible by the Auburn Historical Society & Museum, 41 South Street. The museum is open Tuesday and Saturday mornings 9:30-12:30 and may be reached at [auburnmuseum@verizon.net](mailto:auburnmuseum@verizon.net) or 508-832-6856, [www.auburnhistoricalmuseum.org](http://www.auburnhistoricalmuseum.org) or follow us on Facebook at Auburn Historical.

*Submitted by Helen Poirier of Auburn Historical Society*

chipped by a licensed veterinarian. Based on credible evidence heard, the Selectboard voted unanimously to deem the animal as a dangerous dog. Simba's owners were not present at the meeting. The dog's owner, Kristine Blair, was given until March 16 to comply with the microchipping and additional restrictions. Chairman Eul stated that Ms. Flynn would be in charge of ensuring the dog's owner comply with the hearing results.

The Board also voted to accept two donations for the Oxford Community Center: a \$200 donation from the First Congregational Church's pancake breakfast and a \$400 donation from the Oxford Community Center's Friends to support their Youth Theater Program. Additionally, the Board voted to approve the Memorial Day Parade request from American Legion Post 58.



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 Second Monday of the Month  
 Caregiver Support Group 1-2:30 p.m. for caregivers of those with Alzheimers or dementia

## TUESDAYS

2nd Tuesday of the Month  
 9- 10 a.m. Dull Men's Club.  
 Drop-in  
 3rd Tuesday  
 1:30 – 2:30 Loss and Grief Support Group. Call to register

## WEDNESDAYS

1st Wed.  
 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. Sen. Michael Moore Office hour. Drop-in  
 3rd. Wed.  
 9-10 a.m. Veteran's Agent Coffee

Hour. Drop -in

## THURSDAYS

2nd Thurs of the month  
 12 p.m. Chat with Auburn Police Chief. Grab lunch and stay for a chat.

## TRANSPORTATION SERVICE

Auburn Senior Center and the WRTA offer shared-ride transportation for ages 60+ and those with disabilities.

Van provides home pick-up and may make addition stops for other riders. Call WRTA 508-752-9283

SHINE serving the health insurance needs of elders. Call for an appointment, 508-832-7799.

## ONGOING ACTIVITIES:

Senior Sweat – Mondays a t 10

a.m. \$3

Chair Dance – Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9:30 a.m. \$3  
 Gentle Flow Yoga - Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11 a.m. \$3  
 Classic Cardio Blast – Tuesdays at 1-1:45 p.m. \$3  
 Strength & Balance – Wednesdays and Fridays at 10 a.m. \$3  
 Pound – Wednesdays at 9 a.m. Cardio, strength and conditioning, \$3  
 iPad Club – Wednesdays at 1 p.m. No fee  
 Meditation – Fridays at 11 a.m. No fee  
 Quilting – Fridays at noon – No fee

## ORCHARD HILL

*continued from page 1*

for efficiency and better building management. "In the last two weeks I have seen more progress that I have since last July," she said, "they have done a lot of work here. In Unit No.78, for example, there was a hole in the ceiling and it was one of the units where the hole in the ceiling kept coming back year after year, just being patched up. In another unit they had discovered it was the bath tub joint leaking into

the downstairs apartment because the bath tub was right above that." They then determined if this situation was happening in that one unit it was likely the cause in the other units with the same problem. Once this was identified and fixed, the leakage ended. "They've been very responsive when occupants call them to report an issue. They've been working on getting qualified and capable maintenance personnel and it seems like they have a really good team now. We are moving in the right direction."

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Massachusetts waters; in conjunction with the Mass. Environmental Police. Approved by National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) it will also cover the requirements to operate a vessel in most other states & many countries where boating safety education is mandatory including RI and CT.

The Hanson-Milone Boater Safety Act, signed into Mass. Law, will now requires ALL Mass. motorboat operators to complete an approved Safe Boating Certificate course before April 1, 2026, for anyone born after 1/1/1998, and by April 1, 2028, for boaters born before 1/1/1998. Enforcement of the new law will begin on September 1, 2026. This course meets the new Mass. requirement. Most boating insurance companies offer a discount on premiums for successful completion of this course. Partici-

pants 16 years old and under must be accompanied, in person, by a registered parent/guardian. SPACE IS LIMITED so register soon:

Milford High School – Saturday – May 2, 2026 - 9 AM to 5 PM

Milford High School courses offered at 31 West Fountain Street, Milford, MA.

Registration is managed through the Milford Community School Use Program, [https://milfordcommunityprogram.activityreg.com/selectactivity\\_t2.wcs#](https://milfordcommunityprogram.activityreg.com/selectactivity_t2.wcs#)

Adult-Spring-2026 – Education - Boat America Certificate Class or call Laura Farrell (508) 478-1119, email [lfarrell@milfordma.com](mailto:lfarrell@milfordma.com);

The registration deadline is April 26.

For additional USCGAux. information: [phil.uscgaux@verizon.net](mailto:phil.uscgaux@verizon.net) or (508) 478-3778.



Webster Fire Department - Saturday May 16 - 9 AM to 5 PM

Webster Fire Department Classroom 55 Thompson Road, Webster, MA

The registration deadline is May 10.

Contact our Public Education Officer Phil Kubat for registration or additional information: email [phil.uscgaux@verizon.net](mailto:phil.uscgaux@verizon.net) or call (508) 478-3778.

To locate the BA meeting certification requirements, and other USCG Auxiliary courses offered go to: [https://www.cgaux.org/boating/class\\_finder/index.php](https://www.cgaux.org/boating/class_finder/index.php)

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## SOUR GRAPES

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# Oxford High School Honor Society Inductees

Principal Ms. Czernicki kicked off the evening by welcoming students, families, staff, and members of the Oxford School Committee. She reminded everyone that being inducted into the National Honor Society isn't just about good grades—it's also about leadership, character, and giving back to the community.

NHS Co-Advisors Mrs. Kristyn Aganis and Miss Emma Harper followed, calling the ceremony one of the chapter's most meaningful traditions and a chance to celebrate the school's future leaders.

The night began with the presentation of colors by the Oxford High School Naval Junior ROTC Color Guard, led by Lt. Junior Grade Taliah Valentin. Senior Rosy Krantz performed the National Anthem, setting a respect-

ful but celebratory tone.

Members of the NHS officer team then spoke about the group's four pillars. President Gwen Gustafson talked about leadership and inspiring positive change, while Vice President Veronica Griffin focused on scholarship and a love of learning. Treasurer Ethan White explained the importance of character, and Secretary Kate Mayo highlighted service and helping others. Historian Ava Benway lit the central candle, symbolizing unity and shared commitment.

New inductees were then called up to receive their pins, certificates, and candles, lighting them from the central flame before taking the NHS oath.

Among those inducted were senior Kaius Monson; juniors Makalieggh Boyle-Muniz and Marie Cosentino; and a large group

of sophomores, including Sabrina Adamiak, Travis Beaudette, Fedorisky Davi Fracalossi, Calleigh Furtado, Laura Grenier, Olivia Hammond, Caroline Harty, Noel Jandrow, Ella Kasprzycki, Keith Kirkpatrick, Beatriz Luna, Brooke Nitti, Adam Sliwoski, Krystiana Sobocinski, Lucas Staniunas, Mia Urbaz, and Keagan Vanarsdalen.

One of the most memorable parts of the night was the Senior Educator Recognition. Graduating seniors took time to thank teachers, coaches, and staff who

made a difference in their lives. Students shared personal stories about mentors who supported them, challenged them, and helped them grow—both in and out of the classroom.

The ceremony wrapped up with closing remarks from Mrs. Aganis, who thanked everyone who helped make the night possible, from school staff to the ROTC unit and music department. She praised the students for representing the very best of Oxford High School.

Honor Society inductees were: Senior: Kaius Monson; Juniors: Makalieggh Boyle-Muniz, Marie Cosentino; Sophomores: Sabrina Adamiak, Travis Beaudette, Andrew Collins, Kaeli Cordova Del Cid, Pietro Falsarella, Tyler Fedorisky, Davi Fracalossi, Laura Grenier, Olivia Hammond, Caroline Harty, Noel Jandrow, Ella Kasprzycki, Keith Kirkpatrick, Beatriz Luna, Brooke Nitti, Adam Sliwoski, Krystiana Sobocinski, Lucas Staniunas, Mia Urbaz, Keagan Vanardalen.

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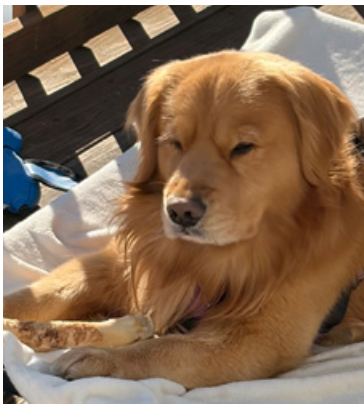
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# Zoomies in a Snow Globe

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Winter may seem overly long for New Englanders, but for Luke, the season is a built-in playground. He wholeheartedly loves the cold and the snow. Sometimes I can't help but

in extreme cold feels somehow abusive. What if a flying drone spots him and broadcasts a story about the poor dog who suffered frostbite because his owner neglected him? Did you hear about that dog hospitalized with hypothermia? Yes! He's the dog in the paper—and they're saying his owner had some kind of a—

I reach for his collar, but he slips away and flops dramatically onto his side, posing like a supermodel on a winter-themed magazine cover. "Luke," I sigh,

Luke digs furiously into a towering snowbank. His massive paws churn like a small motor while powder sprays into the air, crowning his head in a halo of white. Unlike his spring excavations, there are no consequences now—no shredded lawn, no muddy craters, no mess to clean up. Winter digging is pure and harmless, as natural as the snowfall itself.

"Are you having fun, Luke?"

He looks up, eyebrows and chin dusted in white, eyes spar-

rest.

We had just finished a neighborhood walk. My cheeks glowed from the sharp air, and my body felt energized enough to linger outside. My usual dance class had been canceled, bringing forth a rare pocket of unclaimed time, an intangible gift for the two of us. In the backyard, beneath the soft glow of string lights, a gentle snowfall drifted down around us.

Our backyard glistened, illuminating the oval racetrack that had been carved out with the snow-

grabbed his frisbee and shot me a look that clearly said, *Bet you can't catch me, Momma.*

I stomped once to signal that I was ready for a game.

That single stomp launched him into a frenzy of zoomies. He became the world's happiest golden retriever and its greatest show-off—galloping in powerful loops around the track, flinging snow behind him, reveling in speed, youth, and the simple thrill of being alive.

I stood there, laughing, breath-



wonder if he's part sled dog.

"Are you okay, Luke?"

I open the front door to find my pup, quite literally, chilling on the front step.

"Luke. It's three degrees out." Allowing my dog to sit outside

defeated.

Dogs, I've found, teach us about resilience, play, and good old-fashioned fun. Deep snow works wonders.

"I-gotta-get-to-the-bottom-of-this."

He resembles a canine Santa Claus—jolly, bright, utterly delighted with himself for choosing to be happy about the weather. We have shared more than a few magical moments this winter, but one stands above the

blower. I perched on a snowbank and breathed in winter-fresh air while Luke did the same. We were living inside our own snow globe, it seemed. I was tempted to stretch back into a snow angel, but Luke had other plans. He

visible in the air, watching my dog race joyfully through falling snow.

And it struck me then—Luke isn't just playing in winter. He's inhabiting it. Fully. Fearlessly. Without complaint or count-down.

While I measure winter in weeks until spring, he measures it in moments—one stomp, one sprint, one snowbank at a time.

Standing there in our glowing backyard, I realized the season doesn't have to be endured. It can be entered. It can be chased. It can be celebrated in wild, breathless laps around a snow-blown track.

Eventually, the snow will melt. The racetrack will disappear. The lights will come down. But the image of my dog—unrestrained and circling the yard like it's the greatest arena on earth—will stay with me.

Winter may be long.

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# SPRING HOME REVIEW



## Planning for the Future with Flexible Living

By TRACY LAROSA

The way we think about housing is changing—and flexibility is at the heart of it. Today’s buyers are no longer focused on the biggest home possible. Instead, they’re thinking ahead: how they want to live now, and how their needs may evolve over the next 10, 20, or even 30 years.

### Less space, but better

One of the most noticeable shifts is a desire for less space, but better space. Many homeowners are intentionally downsizing or choosing homes with smaller footprints that are easier to maintain. One-level living is especially popular, offering convenience, accessibility, and long-term comfort without the need for stairs. Ranch-style homes, first-floor primary suites, and layouts with minimal level

changes are in high demand—and for good reason. They support aging in place while remaining functional for all stages of life.

Equally important is the rise of multi-purpose rooms. Homes no longer need a formal dining room that’s used twice a year or a dedicated guest room that sits empty most of the time.

Instead, buyers are looking for rooms that can adapt:

- A guest bedroom that doubles as a home office
- A dining area that functions as a workspace or homework zone
- A den or bonus room that can serve as a playroom for young children now and a media room for teens later

This flexibility allows homeowners to make the most of

every square foot, adjusting how they use their space as their lifestyle changes.

### ADUs

Another major trend shaping future-focused housing is the growing interest in Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). An ADU offers incredible versatility. For many families, it’s a smart way to plan across generations. An ADU can house young adult children just starting out, potentially provide rental income to offset rising homeownership costs, and/or serve as a comfortable space for aging parents who want independence while remaining close to family.

Over time, the roles can reverse. Adult children may transition into the main home while older parents downsize into the ADU, maintaining proximity without sacrificing privacy.



**Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer incredible versatility – for many families, it’s a smart way to plan across generations.**

This kind of multigenerational living is becoming increasingly common, especially as Massachusetts ranks in the top 10% of the most expensive states in the country. With the cost of living continuing to rise, families are rethinking traditional housing models and embracing solutions that offer financial flexibility and long-term stability.

Ultimately, these housing trends reflect a smarter approach to homeownership—one that prioritizes adaptability, efficiency, and thoughtful planning. Flexible layouts, multi-purpose rooms, one-level living, and ADUs aren’t just trends; they’re practical tools for building a home that works for you now, and well into the future.

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# SPRING HOME REVIEW

## How Much Home Can I Afford?

By the third quarter of 2025, the tide seemingly began to turn in regard to a housing market that had been marked by limited inventory since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to market indicators from Redfin, the National Association of REALTORS® and Homes for Heroes, by the summer of 2025 things began to shift in regard to inventory (9.4 percent increase year-over-year). Prices also began to level off, as the median existing home price in the United States was \$435,300 in June 2025, which marked a 2 percent increase from the previous year. Price reductions also became more common compared to 2024, signaling a cooldown in some segments.

Although affordability concerns still persist, many people may finally be ready to enter the home-buying arena. When doing so, it's essential prospective home buyers recognize how much they can comfortably spend on a home. Most experts suggest buyers combine lender affordability guidelines with an assessment of one's personal budget. These

factors can help individuals determine a reliable budget when shopping for homes.

- **Debt-to-income ratio:** Lenders use various parameters to identify a borrower's creditworthiness. That includes figuring out a person's debt-to-income ratio (DTI). Wells Fargo says DTI can be calculated by adding up all of a person's monthly debt payments and dividing them by gross monthly income. That number is multiplied by 100 to get a percentage. The lower the DTI, the less risky one is to lenders.
- **The 28/36 rule:** Part of the DTI equation may include the 28/36 rule utilized by many mortgage lenders. This is a standard guideline that can help one see if it's possible to afford a home loan. The 28 percent is allotted housing costs. The monthly housing expenses (principal, interest, taxes, homeowners insurance, private mortgage insurance, and homeowners association fees) should be

no more than 28 percent of one's gross monthly income. One's total monthly debt payments, including housing, car, loans, student loans, and credit cards, should be no more than 36 percent of the gross monthly income. So if a prospective home buyer earns \$10,000 per month, or \$120,000 per year, the housing costs should not exceed \$2,800. Total debt payments, including housing, should not exceed \$3,600 per month.

- **Personal budget considerations:** Lenders may allow borrowers to borrow a certain amount of money, and buyers then go out and spend that much on a home. But to avoid living paycheck to paycheck and having all of one's money go toward a home, it is best to account for personal spending habits and savings goals. It's important to have an emergency funds account to pay for unexpected things like home repairs, or to account for instances when income may decline. Ongoing costs to manage the home also merit




consideration, as do utilities and future renovations.

- **Income-to-home price ratio:** Some people abide by another general guideline to shop for a home that costs no more than three to five times their annual household income. That means with an annual income of \$100,000, one should aim for a home priced between \$300,000 and \$500,000. The specific range will also depend on a person's existing debt.
- **Interest rates and other factors:** The interest rate on home mortgages as well as down payment also must be

considered. Resources like Bankrate and Zillow provide home affordability calculators that will factor in interest rates, terms of a loan, down payment, and property taxes. Buying a home when interest rates are high means spending more over the life of the loan. Also, how much one puts toward a down payment has a big impact. Aiming for 20 percent means avoiding paying for private mortgage insurance (PMI).

There is no fail-safe way to determine how much home you can afford. Many factors are in play and are exclusive to buyers in the market for a new home.




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## Did you know?

The market research experts at Business Research Insights report that the three-season sunroom market size is projected to nearly double between 2025 and 2035. BRI reports that 65 percent of homeowners prefer cost-effective sunrooms when seeking to extend their living space. The popularity of sunrooms can be traced to a number of variables, including year-round access to a home's surrounding landscape. That access might be hindered if the only spaces to experience nature is a patio, deck or another traditional type of outdoor living space. But sunrooms, particularly those equipped with heating and cooling, can bring homeowners in touch with nature during times of year when they might otherwise be compelled to steer clear of their outdoor living spaces due to less welcoming weather.



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# SPRING HOME REVIEW



## Expenses to expect upon buying a home

Homeownership is often characterized as a fulfillment of a dream. Indeed, many homeowners feel their ability to buy a home is a reflection of their discipline and commitment to saving money. That discipline and dedication can set homeowners up for long-term financial health, providing a unique sense of security along the way.



First-time home buyers may not know what to expect upon buying a home, and since each home is unique, it's impossible for even long-time homeowners to say with certainty exactly how things will unfold once those new to home ownership get the keys to their first house. Various expenses might be the only common variable when it comes to homeownership, and some of those expenses may surprise first-time buyers. With that in mind, the following are some expenses first-time buyers can expect once their offers are accepted.

- **Down payment:** Conventional wisdom long suggested home buyers should submit a down payment of at least 20 percent of the overall purchase price upon buying a home. Buyers who want to follow that advice would need a down payment of \$80,000 when buying a \$400,000 home. But many home buyers now submit down payments considerably less than 20 percent, particularly in the modern real estate market, which is characterized by high prices and low inventory. The lower the down payment, the higher your monthly mortgage payment will be, so it's best to save as much as possible toward a down payment.
- **Primary mortgage insurance (PMI):** Buyers who cannot come up with a down pay-

ment of 20 percent or more will have to pay for primary mortgage insurance, which is typically a set fee that is incorporated into the mortgage payment each month. PMI fees are typically waived once the balance on the mortgage reaches 79 percent or less of the purchase price, though

some lenders may waive PMI prior to that if the value of the home increases considerably before the loan balance reaches the predetermined marker.

- **Closing costs:** The amount of closing costs varies widely depending on a host of variables, but Bankrate.com notes it's not uncommon for these costs to come in at somewhere between 2 and 5 percent of the loan principal. Closing costs must be paid no later than when the sale becomes official and buyers sign on the (many) dotted lines. Application and credit fees, title fees, underwriting fees, appraisal fees, and transfer tax are among the various fees that fall under the umbrella of closing costs.

- **Moving:** It's also important that first-time home buyers budget for moving costs. Moving costs vary and may depend on how much buyers already own and how far they're moving. The home renovation experts at Angi estimate that local moves typi-

cally cost somewhere between \$883 and \$2,568, while long-distance moves may run buyers anywhere from \$2,700 to \$10,000 or more.

These costs are some of the upfront fees aspiring homeowners can expect when buying a home. Long-term costs, including

homeowners insurance (which is separate from PMI), property taxes, homeowners' association fees, and maintenance are some additional expenses buyers can plan for as they try to determine their home buying budgets.

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# SPRING HOME REVIEW

## Pros and cons of open concept floor plans

Open floor plans that make it easy to move through primary living and entertaining areas have been popular for decades. Open concept floor plans join the dining room, kitchen and living (great) room into a communal space where sight lines are maximized and walls are minimal.

According to JJones Design Co., the origins of open concept floor plans may be traced to the deaf community. An open layout allows for better visual communication and awareness of one's surroundings, and some deaf individuals modified their kitchen and living spaces to facilitate more room for social gatherings and signing. Nowa-



days, it's nearly impossible to find a new construction with closed-off rooms. Here's a look

at some of the pros and cons of having an open-concept home.

**Benefit:** Open concept plans make small spaces feel bigger. When smaller homes are broken up by walls, they can seem even smaller. By tearing down walls, one can trick the mind into thinking there is more square footage.

**Drawback:** The space may feel too large. An open concept floor plan in a large home can make interior spaces feel cavernous. A cozy home can be

difficult to achieve with fewer walls.

**Benefit:** Open concept plans facilitate the flow of natural light. Without walls to break up rooms, homeowners can maximize light coming in through their windows. This also may help to brighten darker rooms that do not get as much natural light.

**Drawback:** Privacy can be hard to achieve. Unobstructed views from windows and doors can make it more challenging to create privacy when desired. When window shades are open, passersby can see into a home. Also, sunlight may end up wearing out flooring and furniture throughout the home.

**Benefit:** Open floor plans allow more space to spread out when entertaining. One of the biggest pluses of open floor plans is that it makes it easier to host crowds. Guests can enjoy the communal space, while hosts can still interact with friends and family even while preparing meals in the kitchen.

**Drawback:** Homeowners will likely need to do more

cleaning ahead of hosting guests, as multiple rooms will be on display. Also, cleanup afterwards may be more arduous since guests have spent time in multiple spaces.

**Benefit:** Open concept plans can improve property value. The home renovation experts at The Spruce note open floor plans are desirable and increase the value of a home by up to 7.4 percent a year.

**Drawback:** Some home buyers are beginning to shy away from open floor plans. This may have been prompted by stay-at-home requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, when multiple family members were working and doing school work at home. In that environment, an open-concept layout didn't provide the privacy or distraction-free spaces residents may have needed.

Open floor plans have been around for more than 30 years, but they aren't everyone's cup of tea. The pros and cons of this design style merit consideration when renovating or shopping for a home.

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## Did you know?

Outdoor living spaces are a good investment for homeowners seeking to enjoy their home exteriors to the fullest, and that investment continues to pay dividends when homes are put on the market. According to Remodeling magazine's Cost vs. Value report, a number of outdoor



living upgrades provide a sizable return on investment (ROI) when homeowners put their properties up for sale. According to the report, a wood deck could recoup up to 82 percent of the original cost at resale, meaning a job that comes in around the national average price of \$17,000 could net \$14,000 at resale. An outdoor kitchen could prove an even better investment in terms of ROI, as Remodeling magazine indicates such a feature nets a return between 55 percent and 200 percent at resale depending on the location of the home and the materials used for the project.



# SPRING HOME REVIEW

## Renting vs. buying: Know the pros and cons

People typically have two options when they need a place to live: rent or buy. There are pros and cons to each option, and what is best depends on the person and the situation.

Choosing to rent or buy is a decision with many moving parts, says NerdWallet. Although buying a home is often

Home ownership has some disadvantages. It's a large financial investment that requires a potentially sizable down payment up front. Owning comes with an inherent, though not ironclad, lack of flexibility, as a person cannot simply move to a new geographic location on a whim. There's also responsibility

involved in home ownership. Homeowners are required to pay for all maintenance and handle any additional issues that arise.

There's no clear-cut answer as to which is better, renting or buying. People must identify their own priorities and needs

during the decision-making process.



presented as a fulfillment of the "American Dream," home ownership is not the right fit for everyone. A careful consideration of owning versus renting can help people decide which option is best for them.

### Homeownership

Purchasing a home is a large undertaking that requires a significant financial investment. People often buy a home because they want stability and an asset that maintains value and even appreciates in the long run. There's also more freedom over the living situation when a person buys, as he or she is not beholden to the rules of the landlord. This affords more freedom to decorate and fewer restrictions regarding noise. Homeowners also may not be restricted by rules regarding pets. People may be drawn to buying because they know precisely what they will pay each month in living expenses, provided taxes remain relatively stable. Furthermore, setting down roots can help a person feel like part of a community.

### Renting

Renting can be a more affordable short-term option than buying. Renting enables a person to get a residence at a lower monthly expense and with no down payment. Those who rent have more flexibility if they want to change homes frequently. There's much less responsibility required to rent, as landlords will handle repairs and other concerns. Expenses may be less because there's no need to pay property taxes, and some utilities may be covered by the property owner.

There is a sentiment that renters are throwing away money each month because they are not getting any equity with each monthly rental payment. Rental costs also may not be fixed, as a landlord can increase rent with each lease renewal. Renters also must abide by the rules and regulations of the landlord while renting. This may mean restrictions on parties, noise after a certain time, pets, and more.

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# SPRING HOME REVIEW

## How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.



Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as “money rooms” that add the most value to a home.

### Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul.

### Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves liv-

ing there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

### Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

### Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

### Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



## Simple tips to improve your status with mortgage lenders

Owning a home is a dream shared by millions of people. Investing in property that can be owned within 15 to 30 years of closing on the home makes more financial sense to many than continuing to rent and having little to show for it over time.

The first step to take when planning to enter the real estate market is to ensure that your finances are in order. Various factors will influence individuals' ability to secure a mortgage, and these are some ways to make yourself more attractive to prospective lenders.

down credit card balances to reduce your credit utilization ratio. A high utilization occurs when there is a high balance in relation to the credit limit, says Business Insider. Also, it may be wise to avoid any credit inquiries through new credit card applications for several months before applying for a loan, as these inquiries can affect your score.

- Check your credit report. Lenders will check your credit report before deciding if you are a risk or a safe bet for a mortgage. So it makes sense to check your credit report prior to speaking with a lender. The Federal Trade Commission says everyone can get one free credit report a year from each of the three credit reporting bureaus. If you split it up, you can get a credit report every four months so you are aware of anything that may adversely affect your ability to get a mortgage loan. A credit (FICO) score that's too low may disqualify you from a mortgage. Each lender sets its own thresholds when they price and approve loans, but the higher your credit score, the better.

- Be realistic about what you can afford. Do your homework and determine your target interest rate and monthly payment as well as what down payment you can afford. It will help you research potential lenders and provide an idea of what may be offered to you.
- Pay bills on time. Paying bills promptly not only helps you avoid late fees, but also positively affects your credit. The financial resource *The Mortgage Reports* urges diligence when paying rent, as late rent payments can bar you from getting a mortgage. Lenders look at rent history as the biggest indicator of whether you'll make mortgage payments on time.

These are some of the ways to make a prospective home buyer look better in the eyes of mortgage lenders. Individuals can speak with financial professionals about what else they can do to improve the possibility of securing mortgages at the best rates possible.

- Improve credit standing. One way to improve your status in the eyes of lenders is to pay

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# SPRING HOME REVIEW

## The basics of home inspections

The process of buying a home involves a number of variables that present at various times throughout buyers' search for a home. For instance, real estate professionals typically advise buyers to receive a mortgage preapproval prior to beginning their search for a new home. Once such preliminary measures have been taken care of, buyers can then search for a home and ultimately make an offer.

One of the more critical steps buyers can take when making an offer is insisting that the offer is contingent upon a home inspection. Home inspections offer a measure of protection that can save buyers from investing in properties that may look nice to the naked eye, but feature a host of costly problems beneath the surface. Individuals new to home buying may not know what to expect of the inspection process. In such instances, the following rundown can shed light on home inspections.

- Recognize inspection may be mandatory. Though it's not always the case, home inspections may be required

by mortgage lenders. Lenders want to ensure borrowers can repay their loans, which might prove difficult if a home is in need of considerable repairs. That's why home inspections tend to be mandated by lenders, even if they're paid for by buyers. Estimates from HomeAdvisor indicate home inspections cost between \$279 and \$400 on average, but that cost is well worth the peace of mind of knowing you won't unknowingly be buying a money pit.

- You choose your own inspector. Buyers will choose their own home inspector, so it can pay dividends to start asking people you trust for recommendations even before you begin searching for a new home. Realtors also may recommend inspectors they've worked with in the past. The International Association of Certified Home Inspectors® (nachi.org) also can help buyers find a home inspector.
- You can, and should, attend a home inspection. It's wise for buyers to attend a home

inspection. Doing so allows them to see potential issues firsthand. Some seasoned home inspectors even prefer clients to attend an inspection so they can point out issues as they go through the house and answer questions directly rather than later on over the phone or via text or email. Though inspectors typically will answer questions off-site, it's easier for both buyer and inspector to discuss issues in person on the day of the inspection. And for buyers, this can be a great way to become more informed about the home inspection process.

- Expect to spend a good deal of time at the inspection, and not necessarily with the sellers present. The National Association of Realtors indicates inspections can take as long as three hours, so this won't be an in-and-out excursion. Buyers don't want to rush the process, so block out ample time on your schedule to attend the inspection. In addition, sellers typically are not home during an inspection,

though it can happen. Buyers who don't want sellers present can request that they are not on the premises while the inspection takes place. There may not be anything to compel sellers to be off-site, but it can't hurt to ask.

Home inspections are a vital component of the home buying process. It's imperative that buyers take inspections seriously so they can feel confident they are not investing in a flawed property.

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### Did you know?

A well-manicured lawn appeals to homeowners when they look out their windows. But such a view also can look nice when homeowners peruse their bank statements after selling a property. According to the "2023 Remodeling Impact Report: Outdoor Features" from the National Association of Realtors®, standard lawn care service yields an estimated cost recovery of 217



percent. Landscape maintenance, with an estimated cost recovery of 104 percent, and an overall landscape upgrade (100 percent) also yield great returns for homeowners. The NAR® report also noted the effects of such projects related to homeowners' desire to spend time on their property. Among homeowners who participated in the NAR® report and committed to standard lawn care service, 58 percent indicated they had a greater desire to be at home since completing the project, while 46 percent indicated they have an increased sense of enjoyment when spending time at home.



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REAL ESTATE

# The #1 Regret Sellers Have When They Don't Use an Agent

**W**ant to know the number one thing homeowners regret when they sell without an agent? It's that they didn't price their house correctly for their



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

current market. According to the latest data from the National Association of Realtors (NAR), those sellers agree pricing

their home effectively was the hardest part of the process.

Top Five Most Difficult Task for Sellers Who Didn't Use an Agent: Getting the price right; Preparing or fixing up the house; Selling within the desired time frame; Handling all the legal documents; Finding the time to manage all aspects of the sale and that makes sense. Pricing isn't as simple as picking a number from an online estimate or copying what your neighbor got last year. It takes real insight into: What buyers are actually willing to pay today! How much competition you have in your area? What similar

homes nearby are really selling for? How desirable your area or neighborhood is! And finally, the condition of your house Without that context, it's easy to be wrong about price, especially now that buyers can be more selective and in today's market, that'll backfire.

Overpricing Isn't a Small Mistake, It Snowballs. Your price is part of what shapes a buyer's first impression and when it's too high, a chain reaction begins. If buyers think you're asking too much, they're going to turn the other way and when buyers bypass your house, you'll get fewer showings. Fewer showings lead to fewer offers and fewer offers usually mean making a price cut to try to draw buyers back in. That's happening a lot lately, especially on homes sold without a pro. The same NAR report shows most homes sold without an agent (59 percent) had to reduce their asking price at least once. The trouble is, price cuts don't always fix the problem. They can attract bargain hunters rather than strong, confident buyers. That's because many buyers see a price drop as a sign there's something wrong with the house and that assumption can turn buyers away too. By the time your house finally sells, you may net less than if you'd priced it cor-

rectly from the start. Again, the data backs this up.

NAR shows that homes sold with an agent sell for nearly 8 percent more than homes sold without one, not because agents magically add value, it's because they have the expertise needed to get it right. The price. The prep. The presentation and the paperwork. Nail all of that from day one, and you'll be set up to get as much money as you can out of your sale.

So, even though you thought selling without an agent meant saving money, that's not necessarily true. The facts show selling on your own can mean selling for less in the long run and that may be enough to totally change your perspective. Today, the biggest risk of selling without an agent isn't the paperwork or the hassle. It's the price and once pricing goes wrong, it's hard to course correct. So, if you're thinking about selling and want to understand what your home would realistically go for in today's market, connect with a member of The Marzeotti Group at Lamacchia or a local trusted Real Estate Professional. A quick pricing conversation now can save you from much bigger regrets later.

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## State Water Ski Championships at Buffumville Lake on July 15

The New England Water Ski Collective (formerly known as the Webster Water Ski Collective) will host the Massachusetts State Slalom Championships on July 15 at Buffumville Lake, located on the Oxford/Charlton town line. A competitors' practice session will take place on July 14 for this event.

This event marks the first time in many years that a Massachusetts State Slalom Championship tournament will be held in the Commonwealth. The New England Water Ski Collective is honored to bring this prestigious competition back to Central Massachusetts, where it will showcase the best water skiers from across the state and surrounding regional area.

### How Slalom Works

Slalom skiing is one of the most popular and recognizable

disciplines in water skiing. Performed on a single ski, it is the skill that many beginners aspire to master - and what elite skiers make look effortless.

In competition, a slalom course is comprised of six fixed buoys positioned 11.5 meters (37.73 feet) to the left and right of the boat's centerline. The centerline itself is marked by boat guide buoys spaced 2.1 meters (6.89 feet) apart to ensure precise boat path alignment.

A successful pass requires the skier to enter through the starting gates; pass around the outside of all six buoys; exit cleanly through the end gates.

Only after clearing the exit gates is the pass considered complete.

### WATER SKI

*continued on page 17*

**TOPOGRAPH**

## Affordable Housing Opportunity

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2 BR	\$1728	\$51,600
3 BR	\$1851	\$55,400

\*Rent may be adjusted based on annual income limits provided by HUD.  
\*\*Minimum Income Requirement does not apply to households receiving housing assistance such as Section 8 or MRVP.

**Eligibility Requirements:**

- Must meet all income and background eligibility requirements under the Tenant Selection Plan approved by EOHLIC.
- Minimum 1 person per BR

*Maximum Income per Person/People Household Size (2024 limits, provided by Worcester MA, HUD Metro Area)*

1 person	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people
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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

# Reason for Sudden Engine Failure

**Q.** I have a 2018 Hyundai Tucson, with 60,000 miles and was driving on the highway going the speed limit when suddenly I gradually lost power with my engine light blinking. Fortunately, I was able to pull over to the side of the highway. I had my vehicle towed to the Hyundai dealership and had my engine totally replaced because of the 100,000-mile warranty. There was no cost to me that was the good point, the bad and scary point is I could have been hurt or even killed under the circumstances. My question is whether this is a common or not so common occurrence with this particular vehicle. By the way, I love your column, I look for it every week.

**A.** This problem is more common than you would think. In many Hyundai/Kia models the bearings were not machined correctly and a combination of things happen, engine knock, check engine light, the engine loses power and sometimes has a connecting rod go through the engine block. Toyota and Chevrolet are

also having a similar issue. Toyota is recalling hundreds of thousands of Tundra/Lexus vehicles due to debris causing bearing failure. General Motors is recalling trucks/SUVs for potential engine failure related to manufacturing defects. So, this is not just Hyundai and Kia issue. Typically, what happens is the check engine light comes on because a sensor detects knocking, and the engine goes into limp mode (reduced power), and you can get "safely" off the road.

**Q.** I need to know if I can upgrade the battery in my 1999 Ford Mustang GT. The car uses a group 59 battery. I want to replace it with an AGM (Absorbed Glass Mat) Yellow Top battery. Do you know which equivalent one I can replace it with?

**A.** Yes you can but not without modifying the car and battery placement. The group 59 conventional battery is the only option for an exact replacement. Optima (the battery I believe you are researching, does

not list a Yellow or Red top battery for your car. Even here at AAA we don't show an AGM battery, just conventional flooded lead acid battery.

**Q.** Now that we've been experiencing some of the coldest weather I can remember, I've been using the heat more frequently in my 2019 Toyota Highlander Hybrid. The seat warmer and steering wheel heater were, in the past, all I needed to be warm. Now that my wife is sometimes with me in the car, she requests heat. I do set the temperature pretty high, but it seems to take forever to get warm air flowing from the vents. Is that due to the car heater needing hot water from the engine and the engine is not on all the time? I don't think the heat source is electrical. Is there any way to get heat into the cabin quicker?

**A.** Some hybrids will use a combination of a ceramic electric heater and engine heat. Although in 2019 the electric

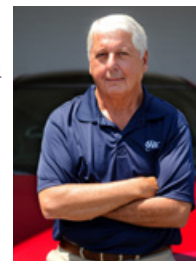
heat seems to be an option. Unless there was an upgrade, the heater in your Highlander is pretty conventional. The 2019 Highlander Hybrid uses a traditional coolant-based heater combined with technology which runs the engine automatically to generate heat when needed. To maintain cabin warmth in cold weather or EV mode, the gasoline engine cycles on and off, utilizing engine coolant heat. To see if your vehicle uses auxiliary heat, look in the fuse box for a fuse and relay labeled PTC (Positive Temperature Coefficient).

**Q.** My husband and I have a disagreement about gasoline. Is there a difference (as he claims) between top-tier brands and the "lower-tier" as he calls them. I feel all brands are the same and I will stop at any station to fill the tank. So, who will you side with?

**A.** Yes there is a difference with TopTier fuel and non-TopTier fuel. TopTier gas (which is all grades 87 octane on up) has more additives which keep the engine combustion chambers clean and free of carbon build up. TopTier fuel has a cleaning effect, so even if you did not use it all the time, it has a benefit. As an example near me there are no TopTier stations, so I use what is available, but once a month or so I make a trip to fill up with TopTier fuel. So, in this case, it looks like I am siding with your husband.

**Q.** I am a car geek but only in that I love all things powered by motors (just witnessing and reading about them, as in your column, not building or maintaining them). I am leasing a 2024 Alfa Romeo Tonale Veloce hybrid (my first luxury car ever and I love it!). I see that it has very small, hardly discernible orange spots all over the body, only visible because the car is white. I buffed them out until they were gone but, a few weeks, maybe months, later, they were back again. The dealership's service center guy said that they are from brake dust coming from other cars on the road and recommended Iron-X and or a clay bar but that the spots cannot be removed permanently. Any thoughts on this?

**A.** I'm not sure how the Alfa Tonale is transported, but it sounds like "rail dust". Rail dust is essentially hot metal dust from train wheels which appears as tiny rust-colored, iron-based spots on the paint from rail transport. These particles can be embedded in the clear coat, especially on white or light-colored cars. Detail shops will usually use, Iron X or Sonax Iron and Fallout Remover. The idea that it is brake dust from other cars sounds improbable, at least to me.



BY JOHN PAUL



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**TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING** *dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com*

# New tax laws for 2026 that you should know

The new year brings more than resolutions and fresh starts; it also ushers in several tax changes that could affect your wallet. Whether you're saving for retirement, funding your child's education, or supporting your favorite charity, here's a few things you need to know about the tax landscape in 2026.



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

More room to save for retirement and healthcare. There's good news for savers: Contribution limits for retirement accounts are going up. If you're under 50, you can now contribute up to \$7,500 to an IRA, which is up from \$7,000 in 2025. Those 50 and older can contribute an additional \$1,100, for a total of \$8,600.

The limits for 401(k), 403(b) and governmental 457(b) plans are also increasing, with workers younger than 50 able to defer up to \$24,500. Visit IRS.gov and search "401k limit increases" for an article outlining the details.

Health savings account limits are rising too. In 2026, individual coverage increased to \$4,400 and family coverage to \$8,750. If you are age 55 or older and are not enrolled in Medicare, you can

contribute an additional \$1,000 as a catch-up contribution.

The start of the year is an ideal time to review your contributions and consider increasing them, even by small amounts which can add up over time.

**A catch-up rule for high earners.** If you're 50 or older and earned more than \$150,000 last year, there's a new wrinkle in your retirement planning. You can still make catch-up contributions to your workplace retirement plan, but they must now be Roth contributions rather than traditional pre-tax contributions. This includes 401(k), 403(b) and 457(b) plans.

While you won't get an immediate tax break, Roth contributions offer tax-free income in retirement and can provide a tax-free legacy for your heirs.

**Expanded benefits for 529 education plans.** Families using 529 plans to cover K-12 expenses will see the annual federal distribution limit double from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per student. The definition of qualifying expenses has also expanded to include curriculum, books, certain tutoring expenses and testing fees.

This change provides more flexibility for families with overfunded plans and increases options for managing education costs across multiple children or beneficiaries.

**New charitable giving provisions.** The rules around charitable deductions are shifting in two

directions. Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can now deduct up to \$1,000 in cash donations (\$2,000 for joint filers) to qualified organizations.

However, those who itemize deductions face a new threshold: only charitable contributions exceeding 0.5% of adjusted gross income are now deductible. Donors may want to consider bunching strategies or using donor-advised funds to maximize their tax benefits.

Getting help. Navigating these tax changes can be challenging, but you don't have to go it them alone. A qualified financial advisor and tax professional can help you understand how these and other changes affect your specific situation. Together, you can develop strategies to make the most of new opportunities while minimizing your tax burden.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Please contact Dennis Antonopoulos, your local Edward Jones Advisor at 5 Albert Street, Auburn, MA 01501 Tel: 508-832-5385 or [dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com](mailto:dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com). Edward Jones, Member SIPC

Edward Jones, its employees and financial advisors cannot provide tax or legal advice. You should consult your attorney or qualified tax advisor regarding your situation.

## WATER SKI

*continued from page 15*

Depending on a skier's category and ability level, rope length begins as long as 18.25 meters (60 feet) and can shorten to an incredibly challenging 9.75 meters (32 feet). After each successful pass, the rope is shortened - increasing the difficulty - while boat speeds can increase up to a maximum of 36 mph depending on division.

As rope lengths shorten and speeds increase, the physical demands grow dramatically. Professional skiers are known to generate cross-course speeds between 60-75 m.p.h. across the wake as they accelerate from one buoy to the next.

Final scores are recorded based on boat speed, rope length, and the number of completed buoys. The skier who can complete the most buoys at the shortest rope

length and highest speed earns the victory.

Competition will be conducted under the standards of the American Water Ski Association (AWSA), whose official rules govern sanctioned tournament slalom events.

### Supporting Conservation and Accessibility

Tournament profits will be donated to support conservation efforts and improvements to the grounds at Buffumville Dam, maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition, the New England Water Ski Collective plans to install accessible beach mats at Buffumville Beach this summer to improve shoreline access for individuals with mobility challenges — ensuring more members of the community can safely enjoy the lake.

For more information about the Massachusetts State Slalom

Championships or the New England Water Ski Collective, please contact: New England Water Ski Collective or call (774) 495-0165 or visit [comp@newenglandwaterski.org](http://comp@newenglandwaterski.org).

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**NOTE:** Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the *Happenings!* section of the Xpress newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to [news@theyankeeexpress.com](mailto:news@theyankeeexpress.com).

**SATURDAY, MARCH 28**

• The Whitin Community Center is hosting a free Kids Fair from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Explore health and wellness in a fun and

engaging way. 60 Main Street, Whitinsville.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 31**

• At 6 p.m. author and economic policy expert Chuck Collins will speak about his latest book "Burned by Billionaires: How Concentrated Wealth and Power Are Ruining Our Lives and Planet" at Charlton Public Library, 40 Main Street, Charlton. He is a senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC., and a co-founder of Wealth for Common Good. This event is in collaboration with: Merrick Public Library in Brookfield, Charlton Public Library, Pearle L. Crawford Library in Dudley, Oxford Public Library, Joshua Hyde Library in Sturbridge, and Merriam-Gilbert Public Library in West Brookfield. Charlton Library will hold a book discussion on Tuesday, March 10 at 6 pm for anyone interested in reading and discussing the

book before the author talk. Everyone is welcome, no registration is required. Additional parking is available at the Charlton Town Hall and at Charlton Elementary School on Burlingame Road.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 2**

• St. Peter's Parish, 39 Church Avenue, Northbridge invites all to the parish during Holy Week and Easter. Holy Thursday Mass, "Mass of the Lord's Supper, 7 p.m.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 4**

• St. Peter's Northbridge will hold its Easter Vigil for the "Resurrection of the Lord" at 7 p.m.

**SUNDAY, APRIL 5**

• Easter Sunrise Service at Millbury Federated Church, 20 Main Street, Millbury. We hold a 6:45 am sunrise service outside

the church on the front lawn. At 9 a.m. Coffee Fellowship is held with 10 a.m. worship service to follow.

• St. Peter's Northbridge Easter Sunday Masses will be held at 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8**

• "Road Trip 1927 – 18,000 Miles in a Model T Ford" a presentation by Bob Arnold will take place from 6-7 p.m. in the Grafton Public Library Community Room. (see article)

**SATURDAY, APRIL 11**

• Shouts of "Bingo!" followed by laughter and groans will be heard at the 50's Rock 'n' Roll Bingo Party, Saturday, April 11, sponsored by the Uxbridge Lions Club. The fundraiser benefiting the club's local and other Lions' charities will be held at the Uxbridge Progressive Club, 18 Whitin Street, Uxbridge. Doors will open at 1:00 pm with Bingo starting at 2:00 pm. Grooving to the Oldies and sporting 50's themed outfits, the Lions members encourage participants to play along and play dress up as well. Bingo Cards with ten games will be sold for \$20 each with a coverall for \$5.00. Additional cards will cost \$10. In addition to cash prizes for Bingo winners, refreshments will be available to purchase with a cash bar on site. So slick back your hair, pull up that ponytail, or bust out those bobby sox, and spend an afternoon with the Lions at the Progressive Club and rock on! For more information, contact Diane at 508-450-2451.

The Uxbridge Lions provide scholarships, donations to various local sports teams and organizations, and perform projects to benefit the community and individuals. The club meets every third Wednesday of the month at 6:15 pm at the Uxbridge Senior Center.

library titled "Herbs and the Art of Healing in the Middle Ages" presented by Professor Giovanni Spani, Professor of Italian and Medieval Studies in the Department of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the College of the Holy Cross. This presentation examines medieval healing techniques for the cure of multiple diseases. 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm at The Pakachoag Center, 203 Pakachoag St., Auburn, MA. Doors open at 6 pm and admission is \$20 (Cash, Check, PayPal). Seating is limited so Pre-registration is required by emailing [friendsofauburnpubliclibrary@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofauburnpubliclibrary@gmail.com)

**SATURDAY, APRIL 18**

• St. Peter's Parish, Northbridge is holding a baked haddock dinner at 5:30 p.m. in the parish hall. Bring your family and friends and meet new friends. Tickets are \$17 per meal and include salad and dessert. To-go meals will be available for pick-up at 5 p.m. All orders must be placed in advance by Tuesday, April 14. Call 508-234-2156 or email the parish office: [parishoffice@stpeterrochdale.org](mailto:parishoffice@stpeterrochdale.org) for tickets.

• The Uxbridge Congregational Church will host a Home Baked Ham & Bean Supper at 5 p.m. in the Community House, 8 Court Street, Uxbridge, located behind the Uxbridge Common. Menu includes baked ham, home made baked beans, potato salad, coleslaw, brown bread, beverages & dessert. Donation of \$15 per adult, children under 6 are free. Raffles will also be available. For reservations call 508-244-7849 or 818-430-3731. Limited tickets will be sold at the door. Come enjoy great food and fellowship.

**SATURDAY, APRIL 25**

• The museum of the Millbury Historical Society in the Asa Waters Mansion will be open from 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Some of the museum's holdings are: 100 years of

**FRIDAY, APRIL 17**

• Join the Friends of the Auburn Public Library at a Fundraiser to support the

**HAPPENINGS!**  
*continued on page 19*

# FREELANCE WRITERS NEEDED!

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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# Midnight Mary

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

One of the most endearing Connecticut legends is that of Midnight Mary. Very little is known of the life of Mary E. Hart. One small line is printed in the New Haven Register on October 17, 1872 under deaths. It simply reads, "In this city, Oct 16th, Mary E. Hart, aged 47. She may have not been known much in life, but in death, her legend endures.

In New Haven, Connecticut's Evergreen Cemetery, just beyond the wrought iron spiked fence, the grave of Mary E. Hart can be seen. It is a modern looking pink granite gravestone, not too uncommon at first glance until the beholder reads what is written on the stone.

*"AT HIGH NOON/JUST FROM, AND ABOUT TO RENEW/HER DAILY WORK, IN HER FULL STRENGTH OF/ BODY AND MIND/MARY E. HART/HAV-*

*ING FALLEN PROSTRATE:/REMAINED UNCONSCIOUS, UNTIL SHE DIED AT MIDNIGHT,/OCTOBER 15, 1872/BORN DECEMBER 16, 1824."*

If that is not enough to make one wonder, the line above reads, *"THE PEOPLE SHALL BE TROUBLED AT MIDNIGHT AND PASS AWAY."*

Because of the above inscription, many legends and stories have surfaced in regard to Mary, her demise and a subsequent curse that now affects all who trespass upon her grave. The above inscription is actually part of a biblical passage from the book of Job, chapter 34, verse 20 of the King James version.

Somehow the passage became urban legend and thought to be a curse. One of the legends is that Mary was buried alive and her ghost haunts the grave looking for revenge. According to the tale, after Mary was committed to

the earth, one of her aunts had a nightmare that Mary was not dead, but instead woke up in her coffin frantically screaming for help. The family had Mary's body exhumed. When they opened the coffin, Mary's face was horribly contorted and her fingernails bloody and broken. Deep grooves were ripped into the lid where she desperately tried to claw her way out. Mary had suffered a stroke which caused her death at midnight. The legend, however, states that she did not actually die, but was in a state of suspended animation at the time of her burial.

The curse is simple, anyone who ventures to Mary's grave at midnight and slaps it or stands upon it will die an untimely, horrible death. The stories are abound. One tells of three friends who visited the grave at midnight and decided to strike her grave at the stroke of midnight. Seven years to the day, one of the friends was found with

his throat ripped out. Seven years later the same happened to another and the last seven years after that.

Another tale tells of three sailors who went missing and their hats were later discovered at Mary's Grave. The three were found impaled by the pickets on the iron fence surrounding the cemetery. It appears they somehow became spooked and ran in haste, trying to leap the fence, only to get caught in the deadly spikes. Or, did something else more supernatural bring upon them their demise?

Two teenagers decided to visit the grave at midnight and defy the curse. The next day one was killed in a traffic accident and the other was gravely injured in a fall down a flight of stairs. Two other brave souls decided to spend the night at the grave. One of them became so afraid, he flew from the cemetery never looking back. The other was found the next day near the grave looking as if he had been fright-

ened to death. Perhaps it was his imagination that got the best of him when his pant leg got caught on a thorn bush, thinking Mary had risen from the grave to fulfill the curse.

A horse and carriage had the unfortunate fate of passing by the grave at exactly midnight. The horse, carriage, and driver were never seen again.

A man driving down Davenport Ave picked up a female hitchhiker who looked rather disheveled and desperate. When asked, she gave the name Mary. He dropped her off at the address she gave and drove off. The next day he visited the house to see if the woman had gotten inside safe. The residents of the house had never heard of a Mary. Confused, the man looked around him, making sure it was the right address. He then noticed the Evergreen Cemetery across the street and the grave of Mary E. Hart just inside the gate.

## HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 18

Aftermath year books; photos of churches, schools, downtown and sports. Also, scrapbooks, research books, and the histories of Millbury and Sutton going back to colonial times. President Taft photo memorabilia, military uniforms, guns and flags.

### SATURDAY, MAY 16

• The 11th Annual Family Fun Fishing Day at River Ben Farm, 287 Oak Street, Uxbridge will be held from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. with a rain date on Sunday. Fishing will take place until 1 p.m. with awards at 1:30 p.m. There

will be activities for the whole family with food and ice cream available for purchase. All ages and ability levels are welcome. Fishing poles, bait and instruction will be available with pre-registration and participants are welcome to bring their own. Pre-registration will open on April 15 at openskycs.org/fishingday2026. This is a free event, but pre-registration is hosted by Open Sky Community Services and Blackstone River Watershed Association.

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