

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES

6:00 PM, JANUARY 31, 2024

TOWN HALL, 557 MAIN ST. BECKET

Attendees:

Select Board (SB): William Elovirta (BE), *Chair*; Chris Swindlehurst (CS), *Vice-Chair*; and Jeff Piemont (JP), *Clerk*

Staff: Katherine A. Warden (KW), Town Administrator; Beverly Gilbert (BG), Administrative Assistant

Finance Committee: Dan Parnell (DP), Chuck Garman (CG), Ellen Manley (EM), and Ron DeFoe (RF). Absent: Ann Spadafora

1. **The Select Board Chairperson will call the Select Board meeting to order. The Finance Committee Chairperson will call the Finance Committee Meeting to order.**
BE called the meeting to order at 6:04pm. DP called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.
2. **Determine Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Guidelines**
KW initiated this meeting to seek Select Board and Finance Committee input toward generating the Fiscal Year 2025 budget. During the meeting, she discussed handouts: 1) draft operating budget 2) Central Berkshire Regional School District Official student count in regional schools by towns 3) Central Berkshire Regional School District Official student count – school only 4) Draft Becket FY2025 Capital Requests. The SB and Finance Committee want to continue listing the budget line items on the Annual Town Warrant.
3. **Fiscal Year 2025 Budget discussion and possible votes.**
A discussion ensued regarding the fiscal year 2025 budget. KW fielded questions regarding the categories. Other points of discussion:
 - The SB and Finance Committee directed KW to provide a 4 percent COLA to town employees. KW originally suggested a 5 percent increase to remain competitive and she would like to build a foundation to ensure the town will be in a strong position to successfully recruit competent staffing when those in key long-time positions retire. The Highway Department continues to lose employees to MassDOT. However, the town is not able to compete with the state. Those with employment contracts will receive the agreed upon compensation. Ambulance Department employees will receive 10 percent COLA to make it possible to operate. After the wage increase, the Ambulance Department will be slightly below what other city Ambulance Departments receive. However, the Ambulance Directors and KW think the 10 percent increase coupled with working conditions (offering a 48 hour shift) will make it attractive for Per Diem employees to work for Becket. KW advised the Becket Ambulance Department achieved a required Police Dog certification which qualifies the Becket Ambulance Department to administer aid/transport Police Dogs (K-9 Unit) injured in the line of duty.
 - During FY2025, the Town Treasurer will increase to a 40-hour week (from a 36 hour week) to spend additional time on Tax Title.

- KW will discuss the Auditing firm's recommendation for additional in-house hours with the Town Accountant.
- There are additional election activities in the upcoming year.
- Administrative Assistant's wage increase tied-in with Board of Assessor certification will be charged to the Assessors Salary.
- Conservation Commission – currently level funded (may need to be revised)
- Zoning Board of Appeals – currently level funded (may need to be revised)
- KW will remove WiredWest from the town's operating budget
- Otis reimburses the town for ½ the Police Chief's salary
- The Police Dept. expenses includes Tasers.
- Constable Stipend – to purchase uniforms/badges
- KW will ask the Police Dept. about dog expenses
- Education line items – the town awaits the budget from the school district.
- Cemetery – KW combined the three cemeteries into one category.
- Board of Health expenses – may need revision. KW questions if nursing services was included twice.
- Athenaeum – The increase from FY2024 to FY2025 will be 2.5 percent.
- Health/Life Insurance – figures will be tweaked for the next meeting
- JP asked KW to confirm insurance coverage of the Broadband system.
- BE brought up Fire Department staffing/coverage/shared services.
- There was discussion about funding a separate Zoning Enforcement Officer position.
- The Building Inspector's stipend will be level funded.
- KW will move the Cultural Council's funding from Capital Requests to Operating budget
- Discussion ensued about Police Department vehicles. It the town's practice to replace them on a schedule. KW will ask the Police Chief if the Police Department can wait another year before replacing one of its cruisers if the USDA Grant does not come through. If needed for FY25, she will create alternative language to arrange funding.
- KW discussed upkeep of radio communications for public safety departments. She will meet with a supplier to obtain pricing on providing all departments with the same radios.
- BE brought up that he would like the town to consider charging a fee to those attending the Summer Camp programs.
- KW to look into two new billing firms for the Ambulance Dept.
- Discussion of ambulance free cash revenue to be placed into a stabilization fund for future purchase of a new ambulance.
- Discussion of establishing an OPEB Account. This topic warrants additional discussion and more research. Discussion included actuarial questions regarding the amount of our future post retirement obligations.

4. Discussion and possible vote regarding designation of the Commonwealth's July/August 2023 Flood Damage Funding

The Town received an e-mail (dated 2024.01.18) from the MA Department of Revenue indicating that the Healey-Driscoll administration, in partnership with the Legislature, released funding to support municipalities impacted by the July and August storms and Becket's allocation is \$315,000. KW suggested creating a financial policy stating when the

town receives road flood damage funding, it is used for road damages. JP moved to create a financial policy that any money the town receives from the Commonwealth for flood damage will be reserved for road repairs and engineering (road), BE 2nd: Motion carried unanimously.

During discussion, DP stated that to tackle the town's significant need to roads in poor condition, he would like to routinely place money into an account designated for big roadway projects. KW will ask the Highway Superintendent to provide a four year capital plan listing two to four paved road projects, and two to four gravel roads that require more than routine fall/spring maintenance. From this list, the town can create a funding mechanism plan.

The Select Board and Finance Committee tentatively scheduled the next joint meeting at 6pm on Monday, March 11, 2024.

5. The Finance Committee will adjourn.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 8:45pm.

6. Any other business to come before the Board

The SB looked at submittals of the 2023 Annual Town Report Cover Contest. Due to the late hour, it was agreed that BG will e-mail the SB a copy of the slide-show, and they will convey their choices to BG only.

7. Select Board to review and sign payable warrants

The SB reviewed and signed payable warrants.

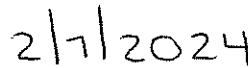
8. Select Board to adjourn the Meeting

CS moved to adjourn. JP 2nd: Motion carried unanimously. At 9:07pm, BE adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Beverly Gilbert, Administrative Assistant



William H. Elovirta, Chair



Date Approved