

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**7:00pm, February 21, 2024**  
**Town Hall, 557 Main Street, Becket**

**Attendees**

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

**Staff:** Katherine A. Warden, *Town Administrator*; Beverly Gilbert (BG), *Administrative Assistant* Joseph Haskell, Sr., Ed Pickert, Highway Superintendent

**Remote:** R. Ellis, Al Blake, Robin Mathiesen, Laura/Rich Fredericks, Joe McCarthy (TRC), Gale Labelle

**Others:** Lei-Anne Ellis, Maurice “Mo” Vandesteene, John Wing, Rita Furlong, Mary Latham, Bob Ronzio, Patricia Mullins, Christie Lewis, Bob Alarie,

**1. The Select Board Chairperson will call the Select Board meeting to order.**

BE called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. He indicated the SB was recording the meeting.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

BE led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**3. Select Board to approve the Town Administrator’s recommendation to employ Joseph Haskell, Sr. - Highway Department - Equipment Operator / Truck Driver effective 2/20/2024**

KW introduced Joseph Haskell, Sr., and indicated that the Highway Superintendent and she agreed Mr. Haskell would be a good fit for the Highway Crew. She indicated that he has a CDL: Once he obtains his hoisting license, his payrate will increase to the same hourly payrate as the other Highway Department Equipment Operator / Truck Drivers. CS moved to approve the Town Administrator’s recommendation to hire Joseph Haskell, Sr. to work as an Equipment Operator / Truck Driver - Highway Department effective 2/20/2024. JP 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion carried unanimously.

**4. Continuation of Public Hearing In accordance with MGL Chapter 166, Section 22, regarding NSTAR ELECTRIC COMPANY DBA EVERSOURCE, AND VERIZON NEW ENGLAND, INC.’S petition November 9, 2023 for permission to erect a line of poles (install underground conduits and cables) on Bonny Rigg Hill Road, Becket, MA 01223 as specified in the accompanying plan marked 13799544.**

The Select Board tabled the hearing (date TBA) due to that a representative of Eversource was not present.

**5. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to provide Fiscal Year 2024 CDBG Grant Application Update**

Patricia Mullins, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Community Development & Housing (BRPC) Program Manager, and Christie Lewis, BRPC Grant & Procurement Specialist, provided an update on the 2024 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Grant Application. BRPC is preparing the application (due 3/25/2024) and is contracted to administer this inter-local grant for Becket (lead community) and Dalton. Ms. Lewis will conduct a community outreach with the

Council on Aging. The recent announcement (town website) generated interest. They are collecting names of those interested in participating in this housing rehabilitation grant (maximum \$60,000 per unit, maximum amount of Grant \$1M). There will be a public hearing at the Select Board's 3/6/2024 meeting. They discussed a handout outlining important dates, public participation, fiscal responsibility of lead community, and timelines. Ms. Mullins indicated that this grant is not designed for emergencies. It is anticipated that the grant awards will be announced approximately 8/1/2024, and the first five projects approved and out to bid may occur by mid Dec. 2024.

**6. Select Board to discuss assessing/structuring registration fees for the Children's 2024 Summer Camp**

Parks & Recreation Committee members Rita Furlong (Chair) and Moe Vandesteene were present during this discussion. BE indicated that the SB wished to discuss the possibility of charging a nominal fee for children attending the town's six-week (Monday through Thursday) Becket/Washington Summer Day Camp (ages 5 till 12 years old). BE suggested charging \$5 per day to offset some of the expenses, and when families are charged a fee, they may be less inclined for their children to skip days. He indicated the SB is exploring avenues to control the town's overall rising budget. Rita Furlong stated that she opposes charging fees to families of those who attend the Summer Camp. She stated that she thinks it is important to continue offering this children's program free of charge and she does not want anything to discourage sign-ups for those who may not have the means to pay fees. JP suggested, as a compromise, that the town request voluntary contributions from participants on the registration form. Rita stated that the Parks & Recreation Committee will not include requests for fees on their registration form, and if the Select Board votes to create a fee or ask for donations, the Select Board would need to send its own communication and arrange for collection. The Select Board tabled this matter.

**7. Mary Latham to present the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee's 2023 Annual Report**

Mary Latham, Becket's Representative for the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee (W&SWRC), presented the WSWRC's 2023 Report. A copy of the report will appear in Becket's 2023 Annual Town Report. A great deal of information may be accessed on <https://westfieldriverwildscenic.org/>. Ms. Latham announced the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee invites the SB to schedule a time to attend a W&SWRC 30th Anniversary Presentation (estimated 1 hour slide show, 30 minutes Discussion).

**8. Bylaw Review Committee: Procedure Clarification**

BE moved that the Bylaw Review Committee will examine the proposed Dark Skies Bylaw (and may assign it to another town board/committee if it determines appropriate). CS 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion carried unanimously. During discussion the Select Board and KW indicated that this vote was needed because the town's general bylaws do not address the initial intake review process: What committee/official is authorized to assign a proposed bylaw?

**9. Public Input (limited to 3 minutes per person, 20 minutes total for this agenda item).**

Bob Conry asked for the town to place YMCA on the schedule of roads for repair. BE indicated that for budgeting, the Highway Superintendent has been asked to provide a list of roads/maintenance costs.

**10. Discussion with Board of Health regarding the status of the Food Establishment permit for the Route 8 Pub, 3235 Main Street**

Board of Health Members Gale Labelle (Chair) and Bob Ronzio (Vice Chair) discussed the disposition of the Route 8 Pub, 3235 Main Street, Food Establishment permits. Moe Vandesteene, the owner of the business, indicated that he has posted required food establishment permit documents: 1) Food Manager 2) Chokesaver 3) Allergen Testing, and he has entered these document numbers into the on-line permitting system. Mr. Ronzio advised that Mr. Vandesteene must upload a copy of the documents onto the online permitting system. He agreed he will see the Board of Health's Administrative Assistant if he needs assistance to upload the documents.

Mr. Vandesteene stated that he has complied with DEP water testing requirements/standards. Today he submitted a copy of water testing results to the Board of Health. Mr. Vandesteene indicated that he contracted a certified water testing facility in Deerfield, MA to conduct his monthly water tests and to work with the Department of Environmental Protection.

Ms. Labelle advised that she will arrange for an inspection with Berkshire Health Alliance.

JP suggested to Mr. Vandesteene that he read the Board of Health minutes to be more informed. CS stated that it appears that Mr. Vandesteene is aware of what he needs to do in the future.

**11. Select Board to review and vote on the Cemetery Commission's recommendation to update the Cemetery Fees effective March 1, 2024**

BE read the Cemetery Commission's proposed list of Cemetery Fees effective March 1, 2024.

JP moved to approve the Cemetery Commission's recommended Cemetery fees effective March 1, 2024. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously. BG will post the fees on the Cemetery Commissioner's section of the town website.

**12. Select Board to review and vote to send a letter to the legislative leaders to affirm STAM's (Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts) 2024 Legislative Priorities**

CS moved to send a letter to the legislative leaders to affirm STAM's 2024 Legislative Priorities. JP 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

**13. Select Board to review Departmental Reports: Ambulance Dept. – January 2024; Building Inspector – January 2024**

In addition to the above captioned reports, the SB reviewed the Police Department's January 2024 report. Per BE's request, KW will ask the Police Chief to provide statistics on false alarms. The SB followed up on the Fire Department reports. KW will schedule a meeting with the Fire Chief.

**14. Approval of the February 7, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

JP moved to approve the 2/7/2024 minutes as revised, BE 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried. CS abstained because he did not attend this meeting.

**15. Town Administrator's Report**

KW provided the following update:

- The state's storm money was wired into the town's general funds. KW had asked to designate this for engineering of Leonhardt Road. Because the storm funds were not placed in Chapter 90, the town will wait for Free Cash certification before this money will be accessible. Next meeting, KW will bring paperwork so that the town can use the town's fair share apportionment that went into Chapter 90 to embark on the Leonhardt Road project.
- KW filled out an Expression of Interest with One Stop for a MassWorks Grant for County Road/Yokum Pond and a STRAP grant for Leonhardt Road. She was encouraged to provide photographs with the applications.
- KW met with the MVP Programs Coordinator re: Benton Hill Road. The town must obtain Army Corp. of Engineers permitting. KW approached the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee to assist with that permitting. The Coordinator recommended applying for funding to assist with engineering costs. CS brought up that the Wild & Scenic Group had originally recommended a simpler plan. KW advised that the Army Corp of Engineering did not agree with the Wild & Scenic plan. The Army Corp of Engineers requires greater depth and possibly other parameters for animal crossing. The SB and KW expressed frustration re: the added burden and cost when it would be more efficient and cost effective if the state maintained a library of plans that might be slightly tweaked. JP speculated that the Army Corp of Engineers is required for the Benton Hill Road project due to that the river flows into a federal body of water.
- The Highway Superintendent is putting together a 4-year plan for paved road maintenance and 2-year plan for gravel road (4 years too long due to the unpredictable nature of weather).

#### **16. Select Board's Comments and Announcements**

JP discussed a resident's complaint that the Highway Department is using too much road salt. The Highway Superintendent had advised that on average the town uses 800 tons per year. This winter, the town has used 350 tons. BE indicated that he does not agree that the town's usage is out of line. Discussion included factors that the town considers when using road salt, including weather predictions and state safety guidelines.

#### **17. Any other business to come before the Board**

The SB chose photos for the 2023 Annual Town Report front and back covers.

#### **18. Correspondence/announcements: 2024.02.13 e-mail from MA Dept. of Environmental Protection Waterways with attached draft Chapter 91 License for 293 Old Pond Road, Becket**

The SB reviewed the above captioned communication.

#### **19. Select Board to review and sign payable warrants**

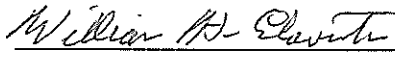
The SB reviewed and signed payable warrants.

#### **20. Select Board to adjourn the Meeting**

JP moved to adjourn. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously, and the SB disbanded at 9:07pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beverly Gilbert, *Administrative Assistant*

Signed by:

 / February 21, 2023  
William H. Elovirta, *Chairperson*      Date Approved

**Meeting documents:**

- Agenda
- 2024.02.07 meeting minutes
- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to provide Fiscal Year 2024 CDBG Grant Application Update
- Correspondence – See Item 18
- Department reports – Item 13
- Cemetery's Recommended Fees
- Board of Health e-mail dated 2-21-2024
- STAMS priorities 2024, SB letter to State Reps.