

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
7:00pm, January 18, 2023
Town Hall, 557 Main Street, Becket

Attendees

Select Board (SB): William Elovirta (BE), *Chair*; Michael Lavery (ML), *Clerk*
Remote: Chris Swindlehurst (CS), *Vice-Chair*

Staff: Katherine A. Warden (KW), Town Administrator; Beverly Gilbert (BG), Administrative Assistant
Paul Greene, Building Inspector; Remote: Robin Mathiesen, Town Clerk

Others: Dan Parnell, Rita Furlong, Heather Foley, Joe Mitchell (Eversource), Esther Balardini (Eversource), Vincent Vigilante (Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival) Others via remote: Ann Krawet, John Henderson, Denise Mancini, unknown person, Kenneth Purington, Caitlyn Daren, Denise Mancini, Greg Brawders

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

BE called the meeting to order. He indicated that CS is attending tonight's meeting remotely. BE advised that the SB is recording the meeting.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

BE led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. 7:00PM – Opening of sealed bids and possible award on: "Town of Becket Highway Department, Preservation of Werden Road Bridge over Thomas Brook, Contract No. 2023-1"

BE read the bid notice (1st two paragraphs) and commenced opening the sealed bids for the above captioned:

- Western Earthworks \$203,299.75
- AJ Virgilio Construction \$330,000.00
- NJR Construction \$339,065.00
- Clayton Davenport Trucking \$345,996.75
- Rifenburg Contracting \$390,526.50
- Northern Construction \$397,065.00

All bidders are MassDOT prequalified and had submitted a bid bond, and a signed/dated addenda receipt form. KW will forward the three lowest bids to the Highway Superintendent and Engineering firm (BETA Group) for their review. The SB will award the bid to the lowest responsible bidder.

4. Discussion and possibly vote on the Building Inspector's recommendation for revised Building Permit Fees

Building Inspector Paul Greene presented his recommendation for revised Building Permit Fees. Becket's current fees, except for a few commonplace set fee items (for example: windows, roofs), are based on square footage. He explained that his proposed fee structure, except for set fee items, would change to a construction cost schedule and this aligns with the building permit fee structure in most surrounding communities. He stated that he thinks cost-based is more efficient and equitable. ML stated he would like to see reduced fees for affordable housing projects. Paul indicated that the Building Inspector has discretion to adjust the fees (he may double or half) when

he deems the costs are below market (for example: a permit application listing \$200,000 estimated construction cost for a home that Paul knows from his extensive construction experience would cost \$500,000 to build) or if he receives documentation that a project qualifies as an affordable housing unit under the Attorney General's Affordable Housing Program. CS stated he thinks the fees are reasonable as more complex/expensive projects will warrant additional inspection time, and he agrees there should be routine/common items that have a set fee.

ML moved to adopt the proposed Building Permit fees with ML's amendment to include fees for documented affordable housing, effective February 1, 2023. CS 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – Yes, Chris Swindlehurst – Yes, and Michael Lavery – Yes

5. Discussion with Eversource regarding Street Lights

KW, Joe Mitchell (Eversource), and Esther Balardini (Eversource) discussed Eversource's options regarding converting the streetlight bulbs to LEDs:

- Esther provided a rate sheet for 2023 that showed if the town converts to LEDs high pressure sodium bulb lights, the annual estimated savings will be \$2,156.20. Currently there are seventy eight street lights on the town's Eversource inventory list.
- Option S-1: The Town rents and pays for the electricity. Eversource owns and maintains the street lights. This includes replacing the lights, and taking care of the poles (vehicle crash) and wires.
- Option two S-2: The Town purchases the lights and pays for the electricity. It would be the town's responsibility to maintain the lights. This would require for the town to have a qualified contractor, and the town would assume responsibility for maintaining the poles and wires.

In the past Eversource had warehouses filled with high pressure sodium non LED lights. Because of this, Eversource did not offer a rental program for LED street lighting. Some towns with ambitious Green Community goals purchased and converted their street lighting to LEDs.

Al Blake, member of the Energy Committee, indicated that the Energy Committee supports Eversource Option S-1. The Energy Committee agrees with KW's idea during their meetings that it is more desirable that the town does not maintain its street lights. KW had suggested investigating other avenues rather than purchase its own street lights.

Esther mentioned that if the town signs on the S-1, Eversource anticipates conversion would occur by the summertime.

KW stated that many in Becket like the dark nights and would prefer not to have street lights. Esther advised it is possible to turn off (shuttered – red capped) a street light for a month for a trial basis before permanently removing the light. Lights on Routes 8 and 20 may not be turned off. Energy Committee Members Bob Gross and Al Blake will drive around town to look at the lights (not on Routes 8 and Routes 20) and will contact the neighbors to ask if they would be amenable to eliminating their street lights.

Esther advised that as a first step, the Town Administrator should send an e-mail to Eversource stating that the Select Board approves changing to the S-1 Eversource Street lighting program.

Vincent Vigilante (Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival) stated that Jacob's Pillow is interested in adding one or two street lights. The SB advised that JP would be financially responsible for adding lighting, and would need to make arrangements directly with Eversource.

CS moved for Eversource to convert the town's street lights to LEDs (Eversource will own/maintain the street lights), ML 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – Yes, Chris Swindlehurst – Yes, and Michael Lavery – Yes

6. Broadband Update and Select Board to discuss and possibly vote on policies and decisions relating to the Broadband Project

No report tonight.

7. Vote on Historical Commission Reappointment: Rita Furlong effective 7/1/2022 through 6/30/2025.

Due to that Rita Furlong's name was inadvertently left off the list of annual appointments presented to the Select Board in June 2022, CS moved to reappoint Rita Furlong effective 7/1/2022 through 6/30/2025, ML 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – yes; Chris Swindlehurst – yes, and Michael Lavery – yes.

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

Heather Foley, a twenty-year resident of Fred Snow Road, expressed distress and frustration about the condition of Fred Snow Road. She asked the Select Board to arrange to re-do the road in a similar manner as the town had done in 2010 (scrape it down, put in a new bed of stone, put new black paper, crown, and address drainage. She reported additional wear and tear and damage to her vehicles, concern about emergency vehicle access, and inconvenience for having to drive slower or needing to drive in the opposite direction from her usual route at times. The Select Board agreed that the past years unprecedented winter's spikes and dips in temperatures have presented challenges: the road freezes and then softens. BE, a retired Becket Highway Superintendent, pointed out that Fred Snow Road has become much more heavily traveled including truck traffic, re-doing the road would cost millions of dollars, the town has thirty miles of gravel roads, and the town is required to stay within its budget. BE indicated that the town has tried to discourage cut through travel on Fred Snow Road by placing cautionary speed limit signs: the state will not authorize the town to install regular speed limit signs because it is a gravel road. Heather expressed concern about the ability of emergency vehicles to respond to calls in a timely fashion on Fred Snow Road. BE stated that the town's emergency vehicles (Ambulance, fire truck from Fire Station 2) have four-wheel drive and are capable of responding.

At the next meeting, the SB will list the Historical Commission's request for a letter of support of the Historical Commission's Community Preservation Application to place the Cupola on the top of the Town Hall. KW requested that cost information that was sent to the SB be forwarded to her.

9. Discussion and potential vote: ATM Article to authorize a local excise tax upon the transfer of occupancy of any room or rooms in a bed & breakfast establishment, hotel, lodging house, shortterm rental or motel.

KW, Dan Parnell, and Al Blake spoke in support of a short-term occupancy local excise tax. Salient points during the discussion:

- All other towns in the area (except for Hinsdale) have this source of income.

- The additional funding will help defray some of the costs affiliated with the town's services provided to visitors (Ambulance & Police response, use of Roads & Town Beach
- The State, not the town, is responsible for collecting and distributing the excise tax to municipalities.
- The additional revenue would help with town expenditures (perhaps road repair).
- This can be an opportunity to educate owners of short-term rental facilities to comply with safety regulations.

Per KW's recommendation, CS moved to add an article to the Annual Town Meeting Warrant: to authorize a 6% local excise tax upon the transfer of occupancy of any room or rooms in a bed & breakfast establishment, hotel, lodging house, shortterm rental or motel. BE 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – yes; Chris Swindlehurst – yes, and Michael Lavery – yes.

KW, Dan Parnell and Al Blake will schedule an information session in February to educate the community about the benefits and innerworkings the excise taxes. They will invite owners of short-term rental entities.

10. Approval of the January 4, 2023 Meeting Minutes

ML moved to approve the January 4, 2023 meeting minutes, BE 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – yes, Michael Lavery yes, and Chris Swindlehurst abstained.

11. SB to discuss Superintendent's January 9, 2023 letter of invitation addressed to the SB Chair. The Invitation is for a member of the SB or Town Administrator to attend the Central Berkshire Regional School District's Superintendent's meeting scheduled on 2/9/2023 at 6:30pm in the Wahconah H.S. Learning Commons for the purpose of electing a member from among the seven towns to represent all towns during the collective bargaining activities.

KW will attend the above captioned 2/9 meeting.

12. SB to review item for possible posting on the town website: Sherwood Greens Road Maintenance District's tax letter to its property owners

BE indicated that he did not object to posting on the town website Sherwood Greens Roads Maintenance District's letter to remind its property owners about paying their district tax bills. ML recused himself. It was agreed that CS will review and convey to BG whether she may post the letter on the website.

13. Select Board to review Departmental Reports

- Ambulance Dept. – 2022 Year
- Building Inspector – Dec. 2022
- Others tba

The SB reviewed the above captioned reports.

14. Town Administrator's Report

KW provided the following update:

- Tax Title work has begun with 55 letters going out to land with low value
- Free Cash was certified as of January 10, 2023, ... \$965,197.00
- 1Berkshire Façade Improvement Micro Grants – emailed to town businesses
- Away at the MMA Convention for Thursday and Friday

15. Select Board's Comments and Announcements

ML received a communication from a Becket Washington School fourth grader who is part of a school group interested in promoting climate initiatives. Ms. Klepetar suggested that Becket require that new homes will only use 100% renewable energy. Although this is not something the Select Board acted on, they appreciate that students wish to be involved with seeking solutions to world issues. KW stated she thinks it is important for students to gain public speaking skills. KW and ML would be interested in attending a student presentation at the school.

CS expressed his deep appreciation to Ray Ferrin (Ambulance Director) and other emergency personnel (Ambulance, Police, Volunteer Fire and Highway Departments) for their response during his time of need when the tree fell on him. He is grateful that their response saved his foot and leg below his knee.

16. Any other business to come before the Board

Al Blake sent an e-mail with suggestions for the subscription section of the town website: 1) removing subscription to the Becket Bulletin if it is no longer produced. – The SB confirmed the Becket Bulletin subscription may be eliminated. 2) Adding the Becket Beat. – The SB stated that only Town of Becket, not private, entities may be listed under the town website subscriptions. There is a link on the website for *The Becket Beat*. *The Becket Beat's* website has a subscription link.

17. Correspondence/announcements:

• **2023.01.06 e-mail from Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) Licensing Specialist with attachment [2023.01.06 Municipal Notice: Proposed Marijuana Establishment MRN284668] to advise that Himalayan High has completed a license application for an adult use Marijuana Establishment. If the town does not respond within 60 days of the aforementioned notice, the CCC will consider this notice requirement to be satisfied without any further action by the Municipality or applicant.** KW will e-mail to the CCC Licensing Specialist the Planning Board Chair's response stating Himalayan High complies with town ordinances/bylaws.

18. Select Board to review and sign payable warrants


The SB reviewed and signed payable warrants.

18. Select Board to adjourn the Meeting

ML moved to adjourn the meeting, CS 2nd: Roll call: Bill Elovirta – yes, Chris Swindlehurst – yes, Michael Lavery - yes. At 8:55pm, BE adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Beverly Gilbert, *Administrative Assistant*

Signed by:

 / February 8, 2023
William H. Elovirta, *Chair* Date Approved

Documents discussed at this meeting:

- ✚ 2023.01.18 Select Board Agenda
- ✚ 2023.01.18 Select Board Meeting Minutes
- ✚ Correspondence as listed above - Agenda item 17

- ✚ Town Administrator's report
- ✚ Departmental Report(s) listed above Agenda item 13
- ✚ Draft citizen's petition re: Short Term Rental Tax
- ✚ Eversource documents: estimated 2023 cost comparison for LED lighting; Streetlight Inventory; NSTAR Electric Company d/b/a Eversource energy Street and Security Lighting M.D.P.U. no. 44I document S-1 Rate
- ✚ Town of Sheffield Building Permit Fees (Building Inspector proposing to adopt), Town of Becket Building Permit Fees
- ✚ 2023.01.12 E-mail Beverly Gilbert, Al Blake regarding Subscribe to News | Becket MA
- ✚ Bid Documents received (See agenda Item 3)
- ✚ 2023.01.17, Historical Commission letter requesting SB letter of support of Historical Commission Community Preservation Grant Application - Cupola Project
- ✚ Sherwood Greens Road Improvement and Maintenance District Tax Letter to its property owners