

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**7:00pm, December 6, 2023**  
**Town Hall, 557 Main Street, Becket**

**Attendees**

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

**Staff:** Katherine A. Warden, *Town Administrator*; Beverly Gilbert (BG), *Administrative Assistant*;  
Paul Mikaniewicz, *Fire Chief*

**Board of Assessors:** Geri Walter, Jessica Perotti, Beverly Gilbert

**Remote:** Robin Mathiesen, *Town Clerk*, Julie Craumer, Pat Mullins, Christie Lewis,  
Sean Howe (SunWealth)

**Others:** Thomas Salzer, Alvin Blake, Dan Bruno (Twin Oaks); Chris Cozzaglio (Assessor – Regional Resource Group), Harald Scheid (Assessors – Regional Resource Group), Vincent Vigilante (Jacob's Pillow), Bob Gross, Municipal Light Plant Manager

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

BE called the meeting to order at 7pm, and indicated the SB was recording the meeting.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

BE led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**3. Board of Assessors Tax Classification Hearing - The Select Board will hold a Tax Classification hearing to determine the allocation of property tax levy among the four classes of real estate and personal property for Fiscal Year 2024**

BE announced the above captioned agenda item and read the public hearing notice stating that the Select Board must make a determination on the factor to be used among the classes of real property, residential, open space, commercial and industrial, and of personal property for the Fiscal Year 2024 tax rate. BE commenced the public hearing at 7:03pm and introduced Harald Scheid, owner of Regional Resource Group, the town's contracted assessing company. Becket's Principal Contracted Assessor Chris Cozzaglio, and Board of Assessor Members Geri Walter, Jessica Perotti and Beverly Gilbert were in attendance. Mr. Scheid presented during the public hearing.

Mr. Scheid discussed the three components that are used to generate the tax bill: Assessments, tax levy (revenues the town will be raising), and tax rate. He provided a handout which lists calculations relating to setting the Town's tax rates. He specified that in accordance with Massachusetts Dept. of Revenue regulations, municipalities with a large commercial and industrial tax base often shift the tax burden to help maintain lower residential taxes. Mr. Scheid explained that given Becket's small commercial and industrial base, it would take a large shift of the tax burden from the residential class to the commercial and industrial class to yield a modest residential tax reduction. Traditionally the SB has adopted a single rate.

Mr. Scheid stated that due to high inflation rates, most communities he works with have realized strong increases in their property tax levy.

Mr. Scheid stated the following:

- The Town will raise approximately between \$7,055,645 and \$7,149,053 in property tax revenues; within the next few days, this figure will be finalized. Last year's tax levy was \$6,381,956.
- New growth is derived from newly taxable properties like new construction, additions, subdivision, and personal property. New Growth was tabulated at \$21,413.
- The estimated tax rate for FY2024 is \$9.77
- The average value of a single family home increased from \$312,500 (FY23) to \$352,800 (FY24) to. The estimated average annual single family home tax bill will change from \$3,363 to \$3,347 (\$84 difference).

BE asked if others wished to ask questions or comment. Mr. Scheid fielded JP's questions about commercial and non-profit property assessment.

BE moved that the Becket Select Board votes in accordance with MGL Chapter 40, Section 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2024 tax rates and set the Residential Factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. JP 2nd: Motion carried. The hearing ended at 7:19pm.

**4. Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Community Development Block Grant Presentation/Discussion and potential Select Board vote to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Becket and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.**

Patricia Mullins and Christie Lewis, both from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), attended on behalf of this agenda item. Ms. Mullins highlighted Becket's participation in previous CDBG grants (Fiscal Years 2009, 2011, 2017, 2020) of which BRPC administered. She inquired whether the Town of Becket is interested in applying for the FY2024 CDBG grant (Becket would enter into a contract with BRPC to prepare the grant application and administer the grant). The application is due March 25, 2024. The grant could potentially bring up to \$950,000 to Becket as a single community or up to \$1,000,000 if Becket partnered with at least one other community. Ms. Mullins explained that there is strong competition to obtain CDBG funding and she brought up how communities may be favorably scored. Becket's low income residential population percentage falls at approximately 35%. Although this is regarded as a large number, other neighboring communities may have an even higher percentage. Another component that must be presented in the application is Becket must present strong interest and need for the CDBG program. Ms. Mullins discussed how inflation has impacted construction costs, and BRPC may request a waiver to exceed the state current \$50,000 per project cap (\$60,000 to \$75,000). Ms. Mullins provided a packet of background information to the SB, and went over the next steps in the process to create a viable grant application. The town will need to conduct a public hearing to demonstrate that there has been community input, and that there are both need and demand within Becket for the activities within the CDBG program. Towards this end, BRPC would maintain a list of households interested in participating. This list will also include those on the FY2017 CDBG waiting list. Ms. Mullins indicated that if the town determines it wishes to pursue the FY2024 CDBG Grant, BRPC needs the SB to sign

the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town of Becket and BRPC. The aforementioned MOU will name BRPC the administrator of the grant, and will allow BRPC to begin working towards this effort. KW and BG expressed they support the FY2024 CDBG Grant Program. BE moved that the Town of Becket will participate in the Fiscal Year 2024 Community Development Block Grant through Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, and appoint Katherine Warden, Town Administrator, as Environmental Certifying Officer for the FY2024 Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant Program. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously. The Select Board Chair signed the MOU and letter naming the Town Administrator the Environmental Certifying Officer.

## **5. Fire Chief Update**

Paul Mikaniewicz, Fire Chief, discussed a variety of topics with the SB:

- BE reminded Fire Chief Mikaniewicz that the SB asks all department heads to submit a monthly report, and they are due by the 2<sup>nd</sup> SB monthly meeting. JP indicated that the reports helps him to understand what the Fire Department is doing, as he otherwise has no experience with them.
- Equipment
- Liability – equipment and trainings must be up to date.
- Ideas for recruitment and retaining Firefighters
- training
- CS inquired about the status of the new Fire Truck – the new truck will not be delivered until the summer or fall of 2024. KW asked to be updated so that she may make borrowing arrangements.
- CS stated he would like the Fire Dept. to contact the Becket Washington School Officials to arrange for hazmat drills and training. KW will reach out to MEMA to determine the next steps to create a plan in the event of a trail derailment requiring evacuations.
- Mutual aid
- Budget – BE indicated that when a budgeted funding for a specific account is not spent, the Finance Committee assumes funding for that account is not needed.
- Stipends – KW requested a list of those qualifying for stipends. The auditors require attendance records.
- BE and JP stated they would like the Fire Dept. to enforce the town's False Alarm Bylaw.
- BE questioned if it is time to hire a full-time Fire Chief to handle the duties, and serve as the Emergency Management Director. BE also inquired if the Town should hire a full-time Firefighter to work daytime, Monday through Friday.

## **6. Board to consider Renewals of Annual Licenses:**

- The Dreamaway Lodge Restaurant LLC: All Alcoholic Beverages Restaurant, Common Victuallers, Six Day Entertainment, and Sunday Entertainment;
- Neon Newt LLC (d/b/a The Neon Newt): Wines & Malt with Cordial/Liqueur Restaurant, and Common Victuallers;
- M.D.A. Inc. (d/b/a Berkshire Berries): All Alcoholic Beverages Restaurant, Wine & Malt Package Store, and Common Victuallers;
- Twin Oaks, LLC: All Alcoholic Beverages Club, Common Victuallers, Six-Day Entertainment, and Automatic Amusement

- Sherwood Shoppe of Becket LLC: All Alcoholic Beverages Package Store, and Common Victuallers;
- Papa Bob's LLC: All Alcoholic Beverages Restaurant, Common Victuallers, Six Day Entertainment, Sunday Entertainment, and Automatic Amusement;
- Becket General Store Inc. (d/b/a Becket General Store): All Alcoholic Beverages Package Store, All Alcoholic Beverages Restaurant, Six Day Entertainment, Sunday Entertainment, and Common Victuallers
- Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival: Six Day Entertainment, Sunday Entertainment

The SB postponed voting on Becket General Store Inc.'s license renewals. They asked BG to request the owner of Becket General Store Inc., Heather Anello, to attend the SB's Dec. 20th meeting to discuss Becket General Store Inc.'s dba, manager, and locations of entertainment. BE moved to approve renewal of the above captioned licenses for Dreamaway Inc.; Neon Newt LLC (d/b/a The Neon Newt), M.D.A. Inc., Twin Oaks, LLC; Sherwood Shoppe; Papa Bob's LLC; and Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival for operation during 2024, with the stipulation that all renewal documents are submitted. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

**7. Select Board to consider the following appointments:**

- **Thomas W. Salzer – Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals effective 12/6/2023 through 6/30/2026**
- **Thomas W. Salzer – Member of the Community Preservation Committee effective 12/6/2023 through 6/30/2026**

JP moved to appoint Thomas W. Salzer member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, and member of the Community Preservation Committee effective 12/6/2023 through 6/30/2026. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

**8. Select Board to consider issuing Common Victuallers licenses to Becket Country Store to operate through December 31, 2023 and during 2024.**

BE moved to issue a Common Victuallers license to Becket Country Store to operate through December 31, 2024. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

**9. Approval of the November 15, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

CS moved to approve the November 15, 2023 meeting minutes, JP 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

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

Al Blake suggested updating the Town Clerk's document entitled, "TOWN OF BECKET HANDBOOK FOR ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS, BOARD/COMMITTEE/COMMISSION MEMBERS." Al Blake stated that although somewhat outdated, he found this (listed on the Town Clerk's webpage) to be informative and a good companion to the town bylaws which are referenced in several places. BE stated that it is his recommendation that the Town Clerk, Town Administrator and Select Board review this and talk about it after the first of the New Year, and see what we need to do.

**11. Select Board to consider voting to sign a Resolution in Support of State Paint Stewardship Legislation (H. 823 "An Act Relative to Paint Recycling", S. 542 "An Act to Establish Safe Paint Stewardship", and S. 551 "An Act Relative to Paint Recycling).**

The SB tabled this item for a future meeting, preferably during January 2024. KW will invite Thomas B. Irwin, member of the Massachusetts Paint Stewardship Advocacy Group, to attend the SB discussion.

**12. Select Board review and possible vote to approve Energy Committee/Berkshire Community Action Council (BCAC) mailing to residents in the economic justice area of Becket re: 1) energy services available through BCAC or Mass Save, and 2) Community Solar opportunity through Sunwealth Community Solar**

CS moved to approve the Energy Committee/Berkshire Community Action Council's mailing to residents in the environmental justice area of Becket regarding 1) energy services available through BCAC or Mass Save, and 2) Community Solar opportunities through Sunwealth Community Solar with the understanding that Sean Howe, Community Solar Manager of Sunwealth will incorporate eligibility clarification into the letters, JP 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously.

**13. Select Board to review Departmental Reports**

The SB will review department reports on Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

**14. Town Administrator's Report**

KW brought up the following:

- Bylaw Review Committee: Chairperson inquired about procedures for reviewing/creating bylaws and is seeking clarification to avoid duplication of effort, enhance efficiency and for record keeping. The Bylaw Review Committee organized: Chuck Garman is the Chair, Bob Gross is the Vice Chair and Vicki Delorenzo is the Clerk. Bob Gross discussed that an outside group submitted a proposal for a Dark Skies bylaw. KW will reach out to Town Counsel to clarify which town entity (Planning Board?) should evaluate the proposal.
- KW will hire King Information Systems, Inc. for \$1,800 to send several of its staff members to spend a few days at Town Hall to evaluate the town's records/files and generate a proposal to return with a team for comprehensive reorganization. This firm comes highly recommended by other municipalities. After the proposal (plan, cost) is created, KW will seek a grant to help fund this capital expense.

**15. Select Board's Comments and Announcements**

None

**16. Any other business to come before the Board**

All three members of the SB signed a disclosure notice to allow Town Counsel (KP Law, Inc.) to review the regional school agreement for the Town of Becket. This is necessary because Town Counsel is representing most other towns in the regional school district. KW indicated that KP Law Inc. is assigning separate lawyers for each town.

**17. Correspondence/announcements: **

- **2023.11.17 Zoning Board of Appeals Notice of Public Hearing scheduled on January 2, 2024 for review of Special Permit Application – 281 South Cove Drive (Map 211, Lot 36). Applicants**

seek relief from Section 3.4.5 of the Becket Zoning Bylaws to reduce setback from side boundary from 10'6" to 5'10" in order to build an addition with relief from dimensional requirements for lot side setbacks

The SB reviewed the above communications.

**18. Select Board to review and sign payable warrants**

The SB reviewed and signed payable warrants.

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

MLP Bob Gross discussed Broadband items:

- Construction of the Broadband network is complete.

The Ad Hoc Group discussed finances. There is a great deal of scrutiny with respect to WiredWest proforma excess revenue. WiredWest's budget reporting includes projections for excess revenue. In February, 2024, the Broadband Ad Hoc Group will review several months of actuals, and Bob Gross will provide a recommendation re: using state notes or bonds for funding the broadband project.

**20. Select Board to vote to enter into Executive Session in accordance**

JP moved to enter into Executive Session in accordance with:

- MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a): 3 To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; as it relates to the town's broadband contracts.
- MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21 (b): 5 To vote on approval of the 10/4/2023 Executive Session Minutes
- And as specified by the Chair the Select Board will return to open meeting.

CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Roll call vote: Bill Elovirta – aye, Chris Swindlehurst – aye, and Jeff Piemont – aye. At 9:05pm, the SB went into Executive Session.

At 9:25pm, the SB returned to the open meeting.

**21. Possible Select Board vote regarding approval of Broadband related contracts including WiredWest.**

JP moved to approve the execution of the three-year contract with WiredWest for Broadband services commencing July 1, 2024 upon the expiration of the Town of Becket's existing contract, subject to attorney review. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>. Motion carried unanimously.

JP moved to pay via net available MLP funds, a \$2,250 quarterly MLP stipend (\$750.00 per month) to the Municipal Light Plant Manager (Bob Gross) effective FY2024: This includes retroactive payments. Date of payments: September 30, 2023; December 31, 2023; March 31, 2024 and June 30, 2024, CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously. During discussion, JP indicated that Dan Parnell, a member of the Broadband Ad Hoc Group, had brought up compensation for the Municipal Light Plant Manager which requires a high level of expertise (including contract negotiations) and time commitment. The SB agreed a stipend for Bob Gross is most certainly warranted given his skillset

and time he expends. JP indicated that stipends for other nearby town MLP Managers typically range between \$250 and \$1,000 per month. The SB agreed that the MLP Manager stipend should be a component of broadband operations.

**22. Select Board to adjourn the meeting.**

JP moved to adjourn. CS 2<sup>nd</sup>: Motion carried unanimously. At 9:42pm, BE adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Beverly Gilbert, *Administrative Assistant*

Signed by:

 / December 6, 2023  
William H. Elovirta, *Chairperson*      Date Approved

**Meeting documents:**

- Agenda
- 11/15/2023 meeting minutes
- Appointment Applications –Thomas Salzer (Community Preservation, Zoning Board of Appeals)
- Correspondence: listed Agenda Item 17
- 2023.12.01 e-mail Julie Craumer re: Becket Energy Committee Mailing for Dec. 6 Agenda with attachments: BCAC Becket mailing, Becket Mail Campaign
- 2024 License renewal document check list of items received from each establishment
- Common Victuallers application – Becket Country Store
- Berkshire Regional Planning Commission documents: 1) MOU 2) Certifying Officer designation – letter 3) Information re: Proposed FY24 Becket CDBG Grant Application
- Tax Classification Documents: 1) Tax Classification Information & Terminology 2) Becket LA4, LAF Comparison Report, Levy Limit
- Determination and Consent Pursuant to Massachusetts Rules of Professional Conduct, Rul3 1.7 Central Berkshire Regional School District Agreement – disclosure letter to KP Law, Inc. dated 12/6/2023