

## Meeting of the Washington Board of Selectmen – March 17, 2014

1. J. Huebner called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Attending for the Board were J. Huebner, M. Case and S. Lennon.
2. After leading the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance, J. Huebner made a motion to accept the minutes from March 10, 2014. M. Case seconded the motion and the vote to accept was unanimous.
3. R. Borgnis was videoing the meeting.
4. D. Fish told the Board that he will meet with Phil Clark, Conservation Commission Chair, tomorrow night to work on the culvert maintenance schedule. He is still waiting for bridge specs before seeking quotes for a Cross Place Road bridge replacement. Although he hasn't yet discussed the subject with Cathy Stevens of DOT, D. Fish has been thinking about our proposed purchase of a new plow truck. He explained to the Board that it might make more sense to replace the small one ton truck with a portion of Chapter 90 funds and to finance all or a portion of the new Plow truck cost. The small truck is in poor shape and needs to be replaced. D. Spencer asked him about the paver he was considering buying. D. Fish said that he decided not to go forward with that since the winter roads budget was running higher than estimated. D. Fish also reported that he has consulted with P. Clark about improvements to the Transfer Station entrance and area. P. Clark recommended against paving, as the Town will have trouble meeting the very strict conservation requirements that will trigger. We also cannot raise the elevation of any portion of the Transfer Station site because of potential run-off violations. J. Huebner asked him to check with M. Lampro on the Transfer Station form.
5. J. Huebner recognized Dr. Cameron, current Superintendent of Central Berkshire Regional School District (CBRSD) and Dr. Putnam, current Assistant Superintendent. Dr. Putnam will succeed Dr. Cameron when the latter resigns the end of this school year. They were accompanied by Melissa Falkowski. Discussion of the FY15 school budget and its recent approval followed. J. Huebner mentioned that he had sent a thank you note to Ben Downing and Smitty Pignatelli for their efforts at the State House toward drafting a budget with additional local aid. D. Spencer noted that the District got a small increase in CH. 70 funds, but was concerned that it might have come at the expense of critical Chapter 90 funds and we could be a net loser.

Dr. Cameron reported that the District budget for FY15 will be \$26.5 million. This figure is about one half million lower than the initial tentative budget. The District voted not to close the Berkshire Trail School in Cummington this year. There will be some staff reductions though. These are the result of attrition, the need for cost

savings and low case load for one individual. These staff reductions will have a negligible effect this year. However, if budget -driven staff cuts continue for the next few years it will certainly have a negative effect on the quality of education and administration in the District.

He continued, saying that the overall operation of the District has to be re-structured to operate into the future. This year's proposed school closing was not well thought out. Jan Huebner stated that to close a school all 7 towns have to agree to do so. D. Spencer asked if a school closes what happens to their debt. Dr. Cameron replied that if a school ceases to have students for any reason then that debt is shared among the member towns proportional to October 1 student count. This formula is a function of the regional agreement for CBRSD. He added that we may be due to re-examine the regional agreement.

J. Huebner stated that it may be time to start developing a long range operational and financial plan for the District. A previous strategic plan was largely adopted. However, a number of changes from the state interfered with its full implementation. Jan Huebner asked if any of the outlying schools could become Horace Mann charter schools. Dr. Cameron said that the problem is that the students for a Horace Mann school can only be drawn from the District, not the larger county. He had tried unsuccessfully to amend that law. BART, in Adams, is a Commonwealth Charter School and can draw from anywhere. Washington would have to leave CBRSD to do this.

The subject of expenditures was raised. Dr. Cameron confirmed that E&D funding has been used for several years as a revenue source to balance the budget. It is essentially borrowed from one pocket and moved to another. Jan Huebner pointed out that we can't continue to do this forever. The E&D money will run out. She asked if we couldn't invest that money and have it grow. It was observed that retiree benefits must also be impacted by this practice. Copies of the adopted budget were passed out. School Committee Chair, M. Case, observed that his was the tie-breaking and deciding vote in the budget's approval. Washington's increase is 2.06% over last year. The Board thanked Dr. Cameron for his service and the CBRSD delegation departed.

6. Glenn Grogan asked the Board if they could give him some background on mail he has received from the US department of Agriculture (USDA). J. Huebner told him that this is a loan for the Town garage. We have less than \$20,000 to pay. It dates from 1996. The USDA is asking for some financial records from 2010 – 2013 for their audit. Our last payment will be in FY 2016. We pay about \$10,000 annually. D. Parnell will put the USDA data together when he gets back. Dan has emailed confirmation that we can expect \$100,000 in free cash.

7. J. Huebner reported that a representative from DOR has been working with the Assessors to help recover some missing data. DOR will also install a link to the Commonwealth's cloud storage site for future Town data backup.
8. WiredWest delegate S. Nelson asked the board if he could reschedule the broadband last mile financing briefing for Thursday evening March 27 in the auditorium. It was scheduled for last week but had to be cancelled because of weather. The Board approved this request. He hoped that some members of the Board and Finance Committee can attend. Both D. Spencer and J. Huebner said they would try. S. Nelson reported that he had contacted Crocker Communications about providing ISP data and phone services for Town Hall. He will get pricing from a couple of providers active in the area whose capabilities WiredWest is familiar with. They may be able to aggregate a few towns for lower rates.
9. J. Huebner reminded the Administrative Assistants that they must write up the Equal Pay Proclamation to be signed and posted next week.
10. J. Huebner reminded D. Spencer to speak with D. Parnell about the Town's unemployment funds.
11. D. Fish told the Board that Mr. Huntoon, Hinsdale DPW Superintendent, had stopped plowing Plunkett Reservoir Road because people stopped using the road in winter. He did not seem to be aware that a resident dropped a tree across the road each winter.
12. J. Huebner mentioned the following future events: on 3/25 there will be a reception at Cain Hibbard; Peru ZBA meeting on the wind turbine issue has been postponed with a new date to be announced; Western Mass housing seminar at Holyoke Community College on April 25.
13. K. Avalle told the Board that the rest of the Assessors' computer repair work which started today will take place from the Boston DOR office. She had a supplemental bill question for the Board. We had to opt out of this program if we did not want to participate, but did we? J. Huebner said that would have been a Board decision, not an ATM vote. It would have happened in the 2002 – 2005 time frame. He asked K. Avalle to speak with DOR and inquire whether they have a record of our decision on supplemental billing.
14. J. Huebner opened a brief discussion about the second draft of the business survey letter the Board will send to the Town. Counsel had reviewed the re-draft and approved it. There was general agreement about asking if there were employees who lived off-site, out buildings used in the business and the percentage of work done on-site. He said that he had contacted Allison for more business names, but she had none. The quote for mailing 234 pieces is \$250.00. The Board agreed that the return

envelope should be postage paid. He made a motion that the letter be mailed out with the Tracks. S. Lennon seconded and the decision was unanimous.

15. J. Huebner said that there had been no Berkshire Public Health Alliance meeting last week due to weather. He mentioned that we have an opportunity to purchase a defibrillator for the Town and have a percentage of the cost covered by a grant. He thought that the COA should buy it. S. Lennon added that it must be kept in the place where it would most likely be used. He said anyone designated to use it would have to be certified and re-trained each year. If there was an accident with it due to lack of operator training, the Town could be sued. Chief Breen told the Board that we do have a defibrillator now, but it is very old and would be unreliable. He thought the new device should be kept at Town Hall and all Town officers and staff be trained on using it. He also thought that the Good Samaritan Act would protect the Town from lawsuits if it was used improperly. J. Huebner said that we would have to confirm this. We need to get a quote. Chief Breen said that he could get one from Village Ambulance. The usual price range is from \$4,000 to \$5,000.
16. J. Huebner opened discussion on Annual Town Meeting questions. There was general agreement not to go ahead with presenting the Scenic Mountain Act. The language is vague and rules and regulations would be drawn up after the Act had been passed. Town Counsel thought that we will be best protected from wind turbine development by passing a strict ban on any electricity generation, as had been discussed in previous Selectmen's meetings. Regarding the Community Preservation Act, J. Huebner believes that it would benefit the town by providing matching funds for projects like repairing/maintaining Old Town Hall, the Chapel, cemeteries, and for North Lake development. The Act is funded by a 3% surcharge on property taxes which would in turn earn the Town matching state funds. The first \$100,000 in valuation would be exempt from the tax increase. Becket has completed 6 projects financed through the Community Preservation Act over the past 6 years. If seniors have less than \$57, 040 in annual income they are exempted entirely from the tax increase. Families whose income qualifies them as state certified "low income families" would also be exempt. The Board decided to put this information in the Tracks and let residents discuss and consider the issues.
17. J. Huebner reported that the cemetery land transfer work is moving along. We have to have a survey done. D. Spencer mentioned that we could cut the timber there to defray some costs. As there has been no response from Comer Contracting, J. Huebner will have Counsel write to them. The Board asked J. Nelson to research any additional Civil War veterans' names to be added to our memorial if we obtain funds to preserve and perhaps improve it. She is also to check with the state on historic designation of any town buildings. R. Borgnis said that Sally Poland had done the work of getting the old buildings named to the Historic Register. J. Nelson to confirm this with the state Historic Commission.

18. J. Huebner asked J. Hostetter to make reservations for 5 attendees at the Berkshire Selectmen's Association dinner on April 10. The Board will also want 3 reservations for the WMECO dinner at the Crowne Plaza on 3/26. Chief Breen will make this reservation.
19. J. Hostetter confirmed that she had posted the BRPC wind turbine map on the Town web site. The Board asked her to get a copy of the by-law on business registrations.
20. J. Huebner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:26 pm. S. Lennon seconded and the vote to adjourn was unanimous.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Minutes written by J. Nelson