

Meeting of the Washington Board of Selectmen at Washington Town Hall

January 29, 2018

1. J. Huebner called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Attending for the Board were J. Huebner and R. Grillon. D. Drugmand was recording the meeting for Selectwoman T. Drugmand who was unable to attend. After leading the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance J. Huebner made a motion to accept the minutes of January 22 as written. R. Grillon seconded and the minutes were accepted unanimously.
2. **Highway:** R. Grillon initiated discussion of safety problems on Washington Mountain Road (WMR). He has heard complaints of excessive speed causing a dangerous situation for people who live on or below the steep downslope into Dalton. T. Johnson agreed that this section of WMR is hazardous. He plans to put up more “steep slope” warning signs. R. Grillon mentioned the “Drive Like Your Children Live Here!” signs posted by families who reside along that stretch of the road. T. Johnson mentioned the danger created by the big eighteen wheel trucks which use the road and have a hard time negotiating the downhill curves. There was brief discussion of building a runaway truck ramp. There was agreement that Dalton would have to take on that job.

J. Huebner asked Tom Johnson to complete the TIP request forms for Middlefield Road and to send them in to DOT. He mentioned that there are not many towns applying for TIP this year. He reminded T. Johnson that he needs to get 3 quotes for Middlefield Road and suggested that if he has trouble getting the quotes he should speak with Cathy Stevens at DOT.

J. Huebner signed invoices to be put through Chapter 90 which have to be on the warrant. He will discuss these with Treasurer G. Grogan.

J. Huebner signed a form certifying that the Eden Glen project has been completed and returned that to the Treasurer. Ed Bond told the Board he had taken pictures documenting the excellent performance of the new

culvert in handling the recent heavy rainstorm. T. Johnson is following up on snow plowing questions with Hinsdale.

3. **Police:** Chief Breen reported that he was attacked by 2 dogs belonging to a Town resident while returning their third dog which had strayed. Both his hand and leg were bitten. He sought treatment in the Emergency Room at BMC and was happy to learn that the dogs all had current rabies vaccinations. All were also licensed. J. Huebner asked if the Town should fine the owners for having “dangerous animals”. Gregg Viner of the Assessors Department mentioned the legal complications which might apply in such a situation.

J. Huebner asked Chief Breen for an update on the woman who claimed the school bus had scratched her car exiting the school driveway last month. Chief told the Board that he has searched for her but has had no luck so far. He will continue the effort.

4. **Taxation of Pugzee’s Farm:** With the Town’s Assessors in attendance J. Huebner initiated discussion of questions which have arisen lately about the tax status of Mr. Shapira’s Pugzee’s Farm estate on Washington Mountain Road. The Select Board learned that he has filed his Lenox property under the Homestead Act indicating he considers that to be his primary residence. However he has also claimed his WMR home as his primary residence by registering to vote in Town and exercising that right. According to Town Clerk Allison Mikaniewicz he is not registered to vote in Lenox. Consulting Assessor Karen Avalle told the Board that this creates a taxation issue which we need to get clarified. She said that based on the Lenox homestead registration he will owe personal property tax on Pugzee’s Farm going forward. J. Huebner said that he will talk with the Clerk about dropping him from the voting rolls in Washington based on his homestead claim in Lenox. He said that this is a matter of legality. K. Avalle said that we cannot go back and tax him on a changed tax status. But going forward, once we have clarification, we will tax him accordingly. The

Assessors were not aware of his Homestead filing in Lenox. K. Avalle noted that he built 2 houses on Pugzee's Farm last year. J. Huebner asked the Assessors to reach out to Mr. Shapira to clarify the tax situation.

5. **Farmland Taxation:** Dick Spencer raised questions about the basis for taxing farm land in Town. He believes that his farm should be taxed at a lower rate than his personal property. He wants the Assessors to adopt Section 8A and wants to put the issue on the Spring ATM agenda. J. Huebner advised him to follow up on his own case and to bring it back to the Select Board later.

6. **Virginia Lakes Valuation:** J. Huebner cited difficulty in setting property valuation in the Virginia Lakes areas. There is little to go by to set values. Our goal is to sell the land and get it back on the tax rolls. R. Spencer said that only The Nature Conservancy seems interested in purchasing any of that land. There are no current comps available to use. D. Spencer said that we will have to go property by property. J. Huebner said that we will need some kind of valuation by mid-March. We should have a final valuation for the ATM. D. Spencer will get together with K. Avalle to come up with a guesstimate on value.

7. **2018 Cherry Sheet:** The State's recently issued Cherry Sheet indicates that Washington will lose one third of its annual budget. That amounts to \$30,000. This is accounted for by the de-valuation of our public lands to only \$9.00 per acre, with the resulting loss in our PILOT funds. J. Huebner has already spoken with Sen. Hinds and Rep. Pignatelli about this. He learned that all state-owned lands were re-valued this year. The Board agreed that we need to agitate about this severe cut-back in our PILOT valuation. If we don't speak up we won't have a chance of getting an adjustment of the state's decision. J. Huebner said that if we are not successful we will have to come up with the \$30,000 somehow.

- 8. Broadband Update:** S. Nelson told the Select Board that he and K. Lew have continued to have monthly calls with Bill Ennen, our liaison to the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) in Boston. Our contractor, Westfield Gas and Electric, is still working on Washington's network design. The next step will be to put in our application to Verizon and Eversource to work on our poles. This will start the "make ready" process. We will need a blanket agreement to move ahead with this. J. Huebner asked what we think make ready will cost. K. Lew said that we do not know yet. He guesstimated that the cost could be in the \$300,000 to \$400,000 range. He reminded the Board that the state has put up more funding for make ready "true up". This additional funding is to address at least in part the inadequate cost estimates for each town done early on by MBI's consultant. S. Nelson said that he believes the state is committed to getting the towns wired.
- 9. Monthly Selectmen's Letter:** After making a minor clarification in the letter to more accurately describe the current phase of our broadband process J. Huebner made a motion to accept the letter as amended. R. Grillon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. J. Huebner asked J. Nelson to email the letter to Lisa Guthrie tonight.
- 10. Parks Commission:** Chair Dave Drugmand told the Select Board that he hopes to have the revised Parks Event Application completed for next Monday's meeting. He is working to confirm that our liability coverage is adequate.
- 11. Berkshire Selectmen's Association (BSA) :** J. Huebner reported that he attended the Saturday meeting of the BSA. The Association is getting involved with the issue of public transportation in the Berkshires. He observed that there is no one from Western Mass on the state transportation committee.

12. Wahconah Visioning Session: D. Spencer told the Board that he had received an emailed invitation from CBRSD to attend a 2-day discussion of what the Wahconah educational program should be. He will contact Sean Armacost on the School Committee for more information.

13. Public Safety letter: J. Huebner reported receiving a letter from the Public Safety Office describing new restrictions on firearm legality.

14. Financial Audit: J. Huebner told the Treasurer that the Town must budget for an audit next year. The Treasurer informed him that we also need to discuss interest rate changes.

15. Town Long-Range Planning Effort: J. Huebner said that there has been no response from the residents whom the Select Board invited to participate in the planning effort. We do have some DLTA grant assistance available through BRPC. K. Lew suggested that we may need more clarity on what assistance we are looking for on the project.

16. Brief Items: Becket beach stickers will be available this spring at Becket Town Hall; The Berkshire Eagle is reaching out to small towns for local news. They recently interviewed J. Huebner on the status of our broadband efforts; J. Huebner will not be able to attend next week's Select Board meeting. T. Drugmand will chair the meeting.

17. Adjournment: J. Huebner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 pm. R. Grillon seconded the motion and the vote to adjourn was unanimous.

Accepted: _____ Date: _____

Accepted: _____

Accepted: _____

Respectfully submitted: Jan Nelson