

October 12, 2021 Special Selectboard Meeting via Zoom

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm; those present via zoom: Ed Abrahams, Leigh Davis, Eric Gabriel, Garfield Reed. Town Manager Mark Pruhenski; Fire Department Chief, Charles Burger.

2. SELECTBOARD'S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS

3. HOUSATONIC WATER WORKS DISCUSSION

- a. S. Bannon stated that this is one in a series of community listening meetings hosted by the Selectboard focusing on the continuing problems with Housatonic water. The Town Manager will provide background/status updates and we will then take questions/comments from Housatonic Water Works customers. S. Bannon shared the ground rules for the discussion/discourse and strongly emphasized the right of residents to have safe, clear, clean water. The Selectboard recognizes the seriousness of the situation and is committed to finding a solution.
- b. M. Pruhenski provided background and updates including highlights from the engineers' report/findings on the Housatonic Water Works system and infrastructure (report can be found on the Town website). He also stated the Town has conducted a series of working meetings with stakeholders including state legislators and regulatory agencies. He then outlined four options under consideration:
 - i. Acquire Housatonic Water Works system and operate the system as an enterprise funded by users.
 - ii. Acquire Housatonic Water Works and transition to an independent water district.
 - iii. Acquire Housatonic Water Works and merge with Great Barrington water district.
 - iv. No direct intervention – Town helps to improve water quality through capital improvements.

He closed by stating that any of these options will take time to assess and implement. The Town will continue to explore legal and funding pathways for short and long -term solutions.

- c. S. Bannon stated there are 29 attendees and 6 panelists at the meeting and opened the discussion.
 - i. Suzie Fowle asked has the water been tested by an independent lab? The Environmental Working Group is a good resource for municipal water data. Also, where is the brown water concentrated and is that data being collected? Also, why does the decision have to go before town meeting? M. Pruhenski answered we will need approval for the appropriation and acquisition of real estate. S. Bannon stated we would look into other questions posed.
 - ii. Dave Long asked about using the filtration system suggested by the engineers and noted there are many other good options. Also, asked how direct assistance to Housatonic Water Works for capital improvements would be managed?
 - iii. Elizabeth Rockefeller stated last summer was the worst water in last 50 years. There was no relief for daily needs. Also asked about the focus on manganese in the water

- rust is also a concern because of the old pipes. S. Bannon stated we are currently looking at how we can provide meaningful relief.
- iv. Amelia Berg asked will the Selectboard be involved in the Housatonic Water Works meeting this week? S. Bannon replied no, though we may join as observers.
- v. Pat Hollenbeck asked about the Housatonic fire hydrants. Fire Chief Burger responded there is enough water pressure for the most common fires.
- vi. Dan Bailly asked how would acquiring Housatonic Water Works impact residents' tax rate? S. Bannon replied the Town would seek partial federal/state funding and this would be a phased process.
- vii. Jim Stark suggested we could send out a questionnaire to identify where water is most problematic.
- viii. Dave Long stated that the quality of the water is based on usage.

S. Bannon asked if there were any other questions from the audience; as there were none, he thanked the attendees and added that the Town would keep the public updated and he encouraged people to reach out with questions. In addition, Housatonic Water Works is on every Selectboard meeting agenda and the public is welcome to join for updates.

d. Selectboard member statements

- i. G. Reed commented that even with an acquisition this will take a long time.
- ii. E. Gabriel stated that as a Housatonic Water Works customer, he is happy this is getting attention and there is momentum to get it solved.
- iii. E. Abrahams stated the Selectboard's view is this is a whole town issue, not just Housatonic.
- iv. L. Davis reminded attendees that when they have issues with their water, they should reach out to Housatonic Water Works via email to let them know.

4. CITIZEN SPEAK

5. MEDIA TIME

6. ADJOURNMENT = Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 6:42pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow
Recording Clerk