

Selectboard Priority Planning Meeting via Zoom and in person
at 334 Main Street Great Barrington MA
Monday, January 30, 2023

1. CALL TO ORDER SELECTBOARD REGULAR MEETING - Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm with a roll call: Ed Abrahams, "aye," Steve Bannon, "aye," Leigh Davis, "aye," Eric Gabriel, "aye," Garfield Reed, "aye."
Additional attendees: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski; Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold; DPW Superintendent Joe Aberdale.

2. SELECTBOARD'S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS – There were none.

3. NEW BUSINESS

a. Priority Planning – M. Pruhenski stated the Selectboard has a copy of the current priority planning worksheet which is posted on the Town website. He noted priorities are reviewed twice annually. The Selectboard reviewed the following high priority projects:

i. Housatonic Water Works (HWW) – M. Pruhenski stated the appraisal is underway by Raftelis and a site visit to the HWW physical plant is expected in mid-February with a full public report by late February. He noted Mr. Mercer asked for a letter from the Selectboard authorizing the release of the appraisal within 10 days of receipt. M. Pruhenski asked if the Selectboard was in agreement or had other suggestions so that the site visit can proceed on February 7. S. Bannon stated under the Open Meeting Law, the Selectboard could choose not to release it as potentially part of negotiations, but there is no reason to do that and it would be unfair to HWW customers and all residents. He stated the report would be released publicly at the next Selectboard meeting following the receipt of the report and subject to the Open Meeting Law.

E. Abrahams made a motion to publicly release the appraisal/report at the Selectboard meeting following the receipt of the report, subject to Open Meeting Law; L. Davis seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion - E. Gabriel confirmed the paperwork is not subject to the Open Meeting Law since it could be considered part of the negotiation to purchase HWW and M. Pruhenski added it is exemption i in the Public Records Law. S. Bannon emphasized there is no reason to withhold the report. E. Gabriel asked if the Town would feel rushed in this timeframe – S. Bannon replied there will be enough time to review/consider it. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, "aye," S. Bannon, "aye," L. Davis, "aye," E. Gabriel, "aye," G. Reed, "aye." All in favor: 5-0.

- S. Bannon stated this is planned for the February 28 meeting agenda. M.

Pruhenski stated he would draft a letter for signature.

ii. Affordable Housing/Aging in Place – C. Rembold stated this is a major focus for the Planning Office and there has been a lot of progress. He reported the Town Manager made a significant investment of \$1.3m in ARPA funds towards affordable housing for CDC and Construct. He noted the Housing Trust has been active with the downpayment and rental assistance programs. He reported that \$100,000 was directed to the CDC's downtown housing acquisition program and a mixed-use building on Main Street was acquired. He also stated there has been preliminary engineering for the North Plain Road site in partnership with Habitat for Humanity and plans will be submitted to the Planning Board in February – he also noted there is a grant from MassWorks for \$3.2m towards roads and utilities. He continued to state the Town partnered with TRI to submit a \$1.3m Community Development Block Grant for housing rehabilitation for low/moderate income homeowners for emergency, roof, boiler, code issue repairs, etc. – and noted previously the Town partnered with other South County towns, but was eligible this year to apply independently. He stated the Planning Board recently approved 30 units in the

former nursing home on Maple Avenue and will be sending to the Selectboard draft zoning amendments for this year's Town Meeting so it can hold a public hearing on these proposals which include increasing buy right housing opportunities such as allowing three-unit residences by right and eliminating some site plan review criteria.

- L. Davis stated the Housing Subcommittee's next meeting is February 8 and it has been working on proposals to review with the Selectboard on February 13.
- iii. Cook's Garage Property – C. Rembold stated the property is located at 426 Park Street and was taken for back taxes in 2018. He stated there has been some environmental assessment with the EPA's assistance, and a marketing and reuse feasibility study for the building is being completed and will be shared in February to serve as a basis for Selectboard and Housatonic Improvement Committee consideration of what should be done with the property.
- iv. Housatonic Community Center – Joe Aberdale reported on improvements/work in progress - LED lighting, insulation and weather stripping is complete; pickleball lines are being painted; and lockable storage units added. He noted operating risks for the building are being evaluated for insurance purposes and the heating system is being assessed for potential improvements. He asked if this priority should be marked as complete – E. Gabriel replied there could be more progress as this is the Town's only community center. It was agreed this would remain a priority, but the description will be updated.
- v. Ambulance Service Study – Chief Burger provided an update stating the board of directors was replaced and there were efforts to manage budget/expenses but revenue was substantially under and the project consultant was not effective – though he confirmed they are more knowledgeable and on a better track now. He noted a new Director of Operations is being hired, but emphasized challenges due to the scarcity of medics and high labor cost. Regarding funding he stated the towns served will be asked for additional assistance, but several new board members are adept at fundraising and will help in that regard. He noted that regionalization is still a priority, but little progress has been made and a new consultant will need to be hired.
- G. Reed asked about next steps regarding the resignation of Chief Burger – M. Pruhenski replied it would be announced on February 13 and recruitment/hiring will be addressed at that time.
- vi. Housatonic School – M. Pruhenski stated staff is meeting with the developer and there is a draft purchase and sale agreement from Town Counsel. He noted broken windows will be boarded up and the Town will monitor the property until ownership is transferred.
- vii. Housatonic Fiber – C. Rembold stated the make ready costs for stringing fiber up on Stockbridge Road, Park Street/183 and Housatonic Village is estimated at \$350,000 and it has been put on the capital proposal for FY24 for budget discussions. He noted grants for the work could be pursued in March.
- viii. Infrastructure – J. Aberdale provided an update - regarding roads he stated there will be resurfacing/resealing in multiple locations, upgrades to LED streetlights, drainage design for Castle Hill and potential speed/signage adjustments for Monument Valley Road along with a new speed detector – he acknowledged there have been complaints about the road from residents. Regarding bridges, he stated there will be a traffic study for Division Street/Bridge, and future planned work by the state on Cottage Street and the permanent Division Street bridges; and repair/replacement of the Brookside Road and Division Street bridge over the Williams River are being looked into.

- Michelle Loubert, 70 Division Street reported two Division Street Bridge related hazards - an opening in the walkway and the crosswalk at the Bridge. She also

noted a flashing light at the Bridge would be dangerous for pedestrians. She also stated the speed checkers on Division Street are in the wrong location to get accurate readings. She asked for a copy of the Bridge study and S. Bannon stated her concerns were being noted.

J. Aberdale continued with an update on the Brush Hill culvert and efforts to identify funding for construction. He also noted the need to replace the retaining wall at the Mahaiwe Cemetery. Regarding sidewalks, he reported the Main Street crosswalks are being designed and will go out to bid with projected summer construction and noted multiple sidewalk improvements/replacements including West and Lewis Avenues.

- E. Gabriel confirmed the West/Lewis Avenues sidewalks will be blacktop and he suggested a sidewalk on Front Street which was discussed and it was clarified it had been considered in the past, but several challenges were identified that would require significant effort and funding to address. J. Aberdale agreed to get an estimated cost for the work and connect with Police/Fire Chiefs to understand any concerns.
- L. Davis suggested adding sidewalks for access to McAllister Park on Alford Road near Castle St and Haley Rd. C. Rembold noted issues with guardrails there, but it was agreed J. Aberdale would look onto it.

- ix. Main Street Pedestrian Safety – J. Aberdale stated this was covered under infrastructure.
- x. Monument Mountain Regional High School Entrance – M. Pruhenski stated the buffer and turning lane has been built out and the next step is the installation of an intersection conflict warning system, though he noted the system is on back order and there is no estimated date for availability. The delay was discussed and S. Bannon stated this system is the first of its kind in the state and there is only one manufacturer. M. Pruhenski stated the buffer/turning lane has greatly improved visibility.
- xi. Ramsdel Library Entrance – J. Aberdale reported the project is designed and out to bid with construction planned for the summer. He also noted a sewer line will be replaced at the same time and a new boiler will be installed in the spring.
- xii. Reid Cleaners – C. Rembold stated the Town has a \$500,000 clean-up grant from the DEP for the property, an environmental firm has been retained to guide the work and there is a contractor for the cleanup. He stated a second round of grant funds is needed for additional investigation and to finalize clean-up statement of work. He noted funds have not been identified but the goal is for the work to begin this year. S. Bannon stated the Town would like to move forward, but it is a complex and expensive project.
- xiii. Short-term Rental Compliance – M. Pruhenski stated registration will be launched soon and significant work has been completed including the application, FAQs, parcel data and fee schedule. He noted the remaining pieces – matching parcels to listings so each rental is only identified once, payment portal testing, and staff training. He stated there would be a campaign and notice to short-term rental hosts when the portal is open.
 - L. Davis asked about matching parcels to listings and cross-checking on LLCs - M. Pruhenski replied staff will do that during registration and GovOS will ensure each listing across multiple listing platforms are only listed once so the Town knows how many people will need to register.
 - E. Gabriel confirmed the portal is only for registration and other fees are paid through DOR.

The Selectboard reviewed select moderate priority projects:

- xiv. 5G Technology – C. Rembold stated this was assigned to the Planning Board/Planning Department but has not been discussed as it is not on their priority list – he asked for the Selectboard’s perspective. E. Gabriel asked about permission for installing 5G – C.

Rembold replied 5G is covered by FCC rules and like cell towers, generally have to be allowed as municipalities are limited in imposing restrictions on telecommunications. S. Bannon stated it should stay where it is on the list.

- xv. Business Improvement District – C. Rembold stated there has not been any work on a BID for years as there has not been interest from downtown business/property owners – he suggested it be removed from the list

E. Abrahams made a motion to remove Business Improvement District from the priority list; L. Davis seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – it was noted the Cultural District includes downtown business owners – and while currently there is no need for a strictly business structure, it can be looked at again if there is interest. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

- xvi. Open Space and Recreation Plan – C. Rembold reported that if the Plan is updated the Town would be eligible for land conservation, park and playground grants, but there is not currently bandwidth to pursue it. He recommended keeping it on the list and working in concert with Parks in the future. J. Aberdale stated he requested a consultant proposal for this which would be helpful as it is an intensive process with the state.
- xvii. Economic Development – C. Rembold stated the focus here is on housing which has been covered.
- xviii. Elevator Repairs – J. Aberdale stated upgrades to the Town Hall elevator will go out to bid along with fire alarm upgrades. He noted the Police Department elevator upgrade is complete as is the Mason Library, only the inspection is outstanding. S. Bannon expressed concerns about the Town Hall elevator being out of service and meetings there not being handicap accessible. He noted having the meetings elsewhere presents technology issues and posed whether the meeting being hybrid addresses the access issue as there is a way to participate. J. Aberdale stated he would discuss with the consultant the extent/timing for upgrades so the potential disruption could be assessed. He added any restrictions can be included in the bid specs.
- xix. Community Discussions with BRIDGE – M. Pruhenski stated trainings have been held, and asked if additional sessions should be scheduled – G. Reed stated this should continue as there is always room for improvement. S. Bannon suggested taking it off the priority list and adding it to the yearly calendar especially due to staff turnover – and it should always be a to do. L. Davis added the Police Chief should be included.
- xx. Website and URL for Email Addresses – M. Pruhenski reported the .gov name has been approved - when the website is revamped, email will transition to townofgbma.gov

S. Bannon asked if there is anything the Selectboard would like to add or change –

- xxi. S. Bannon asked if website redesign should be added as a top priority – M. Pruhenski replied it should.

E. Abrahams made a motion to make the Town website redesign a high priority; L. Davis seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

- xxii. E. Abrahams asked for a laundromat in the Town be added as a high priority - he noted it is already in progress, but the Town could facilitate with permitting, etc.

E. Abrahams made a motion to add a Town laundromat as a high priority; L. Davis seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

xxiii. E. Abrahams suggested adding establishing a dog park/off leash area as a moderate priority – he acknowledged the obstacles, but asked that the Town take it on as a priority and help the effort, where possible.

E. Abrahams made a motion to add a dog park/off leash area as a moderate priority; L. Davis seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

xxiv. E. Gabriel asked to add as a priority a first responder plan to establish a five-year projection on what is needed re: hiring/marketing/employment for police, fire, ambulance personnel/services to address increased density in the Town. G. Reed stated these careers should be added to the high school vocational program.

E. Gabriel made a motion to add a first responder plan as a priority; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

xxv. L. Davis suggested adding a Wassaic shuttle as a moderate priority as there is local interest and potential state support.

L. Davis made a motion to add a Wassaic shuttle as a moderate priority; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – E. Abrahams stated local transportation is a higher priority and greater need. G. Reed stated there are better ways to support Town residents. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “no,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “no,” G. Reed, “no.” Motion failed: 3-2.

4. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME – No citizens asked to speak.

5. SELECTBOARD’S TIME – No Selectboard members asked to speak.

6. MEDIA TIME

a. Eileen Mooney asked about the status of the Committee Charters Policy – S. Bannon replied it is a work in progress – it would provide a simple, consistent way to remove committee members who do not participate over a period of time. He noted it is important and impacts quorums.

7. ADJOURNMENT - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 7:07pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk