

Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 7, 2022
Town Hall, 334 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230 and via Zoom

1. CALL TO ORDER SELECTBOARD REGULAR MEETING - Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm. Those present: Ed Abrahams, Steve Bannon, Leigh Davis, Eric Gabriel, Garfield Reed.
Additional attendees: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – No minutes were reviewed.

3. SELECTBOARD’S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS – There were no Selectboard statements.

4. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

a. Housatonic Water Works

i. Letter from Planning Board

ii. Request from Finance Committee

M. Pruhenski stated in the packet is a letter from the Planning Board and a Finance Committee proposal – these were acknowledged and planned for follow up discussion.

iii. Joint meeting with GB Fire District Officials scheduled for November 21st – M.

Pruhenski confirmed there would be a public session with the Great Barrington Fire District on November 21 during the Selectboard regular meeting to discuss aspects of a potential merger.

5. CONVENE AS SEWER COMMISSIONERS

a. Night Soil Abatement – S. Bannon stated this would be discussed at the Nov 21 Selectboard meeting.

6. LICENSES AND PERMITS

a. Betsy Andrus, Executive Director, Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce for the 2022 Annual Holiday Stroll, Saturday, December 10, and permission to use public parking spaces downtown - B. Andrus described plans for this year’s Holiday Stroll including activities for kids/families and entertainment noting participation is free. The request is to use 4 parking spaces at the foot of Railroad Street for the hayride and 4 spaces in the First Congregational Church/TD Bank parking lot on either side of the entrance for a vendor area.

L. Davis made a motion to grant permission to hold the 2022 Holiday Stroll on December 10 and to use 4 parking spots at Railroad Street and 4 spots on either side of the First Congregational Church/TD Bank parking lot; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – L. Davis asked that attendees be informed there will be fireworks. All in favor: 5-0.

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Matthew Porter, Krishna Bhakti Corp., dba Plaza Package Rachna Karia, Manager for a transfer of the current All Alcoholic Package Store Liquor License, including Pledge of Inventory and Pledge of License from Carjac, Inc. dba Plaza Package, 155 State Road Great Barrington, Regio Almori, Manager.

L. Davis made a motion to open the public hearing; E. Abrahams seconded. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

i. M. Porter, attorney, presented the request and qualifications of the owner and manager in

the ownership of such licenses - he stated they have no prior violations at their other locations; they understand the responsibilities of operating a license and they/employees are TIPS certified. He noted there has been a smooth transition/transfer with the seller and there will be no changes in operations.

L. Davis made a motion to close the public hearing; E. Abrahams seconded. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, "aye," S. Bannon, "aye," L. Davis, "aye," E. Gabriel, "aye," G. Reed, "aye." All in favor: 5-0.

ii. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none

L. Davis made a motion to approve the transfer of the current All Alcoholic Package Store Liquor License, including Pledge of Inventory and Pledge of License from Carjac, Inc. dba Plaza Package at 155 State Road Great Barrington to Matthew Porter for Krishna Bhakti Corp., dba Plaza Package, Rachna Karia Manager; 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.

b. Tax Classification Hearing – Ross Vivori, Principal Assessor, presented information relevant to the tax classification hearing to determine the tax rate and distribution of the tax levy. He outlined the implications, impact and recommendations for each tax classification option and the recommendation to maintain a single tax rate with no exemptions/discounts given to specific classes of property. He also shared various scenarios related to shifting the tax burden. He noted an increase in the FY23 total tax levy; growth in taxable value in total/for property classes but noting a decrease in commercial; historical tax rates and the recommended FY23 rate of \$14.07 per \$1,000 of valuation which is a decrease of \$.79 from FY22. He also pointed to significant new growth especially in single-family home values.

i. E. Gabriel noted the residential growth and commercial decline - R. Vivori stated qualified residential sales are significantly over assessed value. E. Gabriel asked if a split tax should be considered due to this situation to ease the burden on residential property owners – R. Vivori replied that could be considered, but if the residential tax rate was decreased, for example, to 12% - commercial would go up to 21% - which would be a significant shift.

ii. Anne O'Dwyer, 26 Kirk Street, pointed out a typo on the change in tax levy.

iii. E. Abrahams suggested the recommendations be accepted, but to also take some steps on a potential residential tax exemption. S. Bannon stated that was discussed in January and was turned down. R. Vivori stated there was an in-depth study last year, but there may be other types of exemptions to consider. S. Bannon suggest having two separate motions.

E. Abrahams made a motion to adopt a single tax rate of approximately \$14.07 per \$1,000 for all classes of property for FY23; E. Gabriel seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion - L. Davis asked for research on other options/exemptions to provide relief to taxpayers. G. Reed supported a residential exemption. E. Gabriel suggested an expanded residential exemption to include year-long leases. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, "aye," S. Bannon, "aye," L. Davis, "aye," E. Gabriel, "aye," G. Reed, "aye." All in favor: 5-0.

E. Abrahams made a motion to ask our state representatives to work towards a local option to allow Great Barrington to include the year-round rental and residential exemption; to place a nonbinding question on the annual Town Meeting warrant this spring asking voters their preferences; to include the cost of implementing a residential exemption in the next fiscal year budget; and to ask the next Selectboard to vote on a residential exemption early enough to adopt it if that is decided; G. Reed seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – S. Bannon suggested R. Vivori come back with recommendations/suggestions in December-January before taking action. E. Abrahams stated he would support a postponement just so it is in time for the budget period. E. Abrahams withdrew the motion; G. Reed withdrew the second.

iv. R. Vivori stated he would have information by January.

v. It was stated M. Pruhenski would sign related paperwork on the Selectboard's behalf.

vi. The Great Barrington Fire District Prudential Committee voted unanimously to open the

public hearing to discuss the tax classification and allocation for FY23. Walter Atwood, chair, stated the tax rate will be \$1.01 – based on the FY23 proposed tax levy and total value of taxable property. The Prudential Committee voted unanimously to approve the tax rate for FY23.

S. Bannon stated there are 6 panelists and 28 attendees via zoom, with additional attendees in person.

8. PREVIOUS BUSINESS

a. Housatonic School RFP: Phase 2 presentation by WDM Properties, LLC.–Selectboard and Public Q&A session to follow.

- i. Dave Carver of CT Management Group, developer, Dan Soldato, construction manager and Robert Harrison, architect were in attendance. D. Carver summarized their proposal to create 10, 2-bedroom apartment units that address the need for quality market rate housing that includes people no higher than 100% of the HUD median household income - to be monitored by a rent regulatory agreement. He noted HUD has set a maximum monthly rent at \$2,300, but initial rent on these units will be \$1,765 plus some utilities bringing the monthly rent to \$1,890. He noted there would be 20 parking spaces/two per unit and an area for deliveries. Funds will be secured through tax credits, a Town grant, private bank financing and developer equity. R. Harrison presented the site plan and highlighted the large size and amenities in each unit, storage areas and a grassy area added near the park.
 - ii. G. Reed asked about handicapped accessibility – R. Harrison replied those requirements are not triggered as the property has only 10 units. G. Reed confirmed there are fire exits and emergency vehicle/public services access as well as sufficient lighting.
 - iii. E. Gabriel asked about the easement for some parking spaces – D. Carver replied he would work with the Town as well as on regrading required in the area. E. Abrahams confirmed parking along Pleasant Street for the Community Center will remain.
 - iv. L. Davis asked about the funds and timeline for Historic Tax Credits – D. Carver acknowledged the challenges, but noted projects that are ready to go and easily meet criteria move forward more quickly - likely taking a year. L. Davis inquired about a backup plan if there is no/reduced financing – D. Carver replied it would be difficult to find significant alternate funding sources. S. Bannon asked about their track record with receiving Historical Tax Credits – D. Carver replied they have not used them often.
 - v. L. Davis asked about giving Great Barrington residents/workers priority for the apartments – D. Carver replied the Town can direct that. L. Davis confirmed typically one-year leases are offered, income qualification would be confirmed annually and that the units are large enough for families. It was also confirmed there would be wifi perhaps as bulk purchase with cost included in rent.
 - vi. E. Abrahams asked if a Tax Installment Payment Plan (TIPP) would be proposed – D. Carver replied that would be likely and in past projects a 10-year phase in was used.
 - vii. L. Davis asked if they had similar local projects – D. Carver suggested the apartment conversion at the St. Mary's School building in Pittsfield at 85 Plunkett Street.
 - viii. E. Gabriel asked about the outside location of utilities – D. Carver replied they would likely be low and on either side of the building with shrubs/fencing. E. Gabriel asked about Historical Tax Credit restrictions – D. Carver replied it is mostly the building exterior - and that window replacement would likely be the biggest question, but normally there is negotiation about what should/should not be altered/restored/replaced. It was also clarified there would be some landscaping on the park side of the building.
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- ix. Carol McGlinchy, 10 Beacon Hill, confirmed the sand/salt that has been in the parking lot would have to be relocated.

- x. A. O'Dwyer asked if the building could be made accessible – D. Carver replied that would require a 72-foot ramp due to the grade.
- xi. Ben Elloitt, 208 Pleasant Street, asked about plans for a water filtration system – D. Carver replied he assumes it will be needed, but does not have additional information at this time. B. Elliott asked about building materials required under the Historical Tax Credit – D. Carver replied the architectural look would be maintained – there is already an asphalt roof and any damaged brick will be replaced – the windows are an open question. It was noted that the Town would not be building a sidewalk and the community center would lose two back parking spots. B. Elliott asked how this plan will engage/contribute to the community – it was explained the design and moderate rents will bring stability and long-term residents in the building. It was also clarified that no ground floor commercial/multi-use space was considered due to potential security, transient use and other complications. It was confirmed that the rent has increased since the original proposal due to inflation.
- xii. Cecelia Turner, 208 Pleasant Street asked about the timeline for the project – D. Carver replied approximately two years start to finish.
- xiii. Eileen Mooney asked about the Town's \$650,000 contribution to the project – M. Pruhenski replied he would send details.

9. NEW BUSINESS

- a. SB vote to appointment of Planning Board Associate Member
L. Davis made a motion to appoint Jackie Kain to the Planning Board as an Associate Member; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. All in favor: 5-0.
- b. SB vote to authorize the unused bond proceeds for completed Capital projects be applied to the debt service payments – M. Pruhenski stated the interim finance coordinator has provided information on left over bond balances.
L. Davis made a motion to apply surplus loan proceeds of all capital projects to the payment of debt service in accordance with GL Chapter 44, Section 20; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked for any discussion – E. Gabriel confirmed this is because budgets were under and being put towards debt – M. Pruhenski stated this is permitted under GL. All in favor: 5-0.

10. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME – No citizens requested to speak.

11. SELECTBOARD'S TIME – No Selectboard members requested to speak.

12. MEDIA TIME – No media requested to speak.

13. ADJOURNMENT - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 7:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk