

Selectboard Special Priority Planning Meeting via Zoom
Wednesday, July 20, 2022

1. CALL TO ORDER SELECTBOARD SPECIAL MEETING - Chairman Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00pm.

a. Roll call: Ed Abrahams, “aye,” Steve Bannon, “aye,” Leigh Davis, “aye,” Eric Gabriel, “aye,” Garfield Reed, “aye.” All members present.

Additional attendees: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski, Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold.

2. SECECTBOARD’S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS

a. G. Reed reported that 22 stores had signed on for Great Barrington Day.

3. TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT – M. Pruhenski stated there is nothing new to report at this time.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. Housatonic School Request for Proposal Opening, Process and Timeline

i. S. Bannon stated he would open the four bids received, but would not provide detail as they will be posted to the Town website. Selectboard members will receive copies.

The proposals are:

- Berkshire Innovation Center, Pittsfield
- WDM Properties LLC., Main Street, North Adams
- Jeff Glickman and Elliot Fireworker, Arete Venture Partners LLC, Nanuet, NY
- Elements, Inc., Housatonic

ii. M. Pruhenski stated Town staff would review the proposals to determine eligibility and provide a summary spreadsheet and hardcopy for the Selectboard. He anticipated a discussion in August to identify next steps. It was also noted that RFP section xii describes the review process including Selectboard interviews.

b. Main Street Pedestrian Safety Improvement

i. S. Bannon provided background/recap stating that due to a number of incidents on Main Street, the Town engaged traffic engineers to assess the situation and submit a proposal to improve pedestrian safety. The Selectboard voted to support high visibility crossings on Main Street at two intersections – approving at Railroad Street, a raised island and three flashing beacons and at Rotary Way, no raised island, but two flashing beacons for pedestrian safety. He stated the vote was 5-0. He continued to say L. Davis has asked for reconsideration and it will be discussed/decided if it should be reconsidered. He added the project also has to be approved by the state.

ii. L. Davis restated her concerns about pedestrian safety and emphasized BETA Engineering’s recommendations for raised islands/lane reductions. She raised the idea of a road diet to be considered as an option – reducing Main Street to two traffic lanes and one safety lane down the middle. Her position was that this would address concerns about visibility/blind spots created by four lanes of traffic – and would calm traffic in a dense area while giving first responders access via the safety lane. She suggested this idea be vetted and further Q&A raised with BETA Engineering – though she also expressed respect for the Selectboard vote/decision.

iii. S, Bannon asked Selectboard members if they would like to reconsider.

- G. Reed stated there should be more driver education about safety.
- E. Abrahams stated the Selectboard had considered/weighed the position of various experts in its decision-making.
- E. Abrahams and S. Bannon confirmed the DOT work on Main Street was focused on concerns for both moving traffic and pedestrian safety.
- E. Gabriel stated the Selectboard's decision will result in improved pedestrian safety, and he supports the vote.
- S. Bannon stated the vote was clear/understood and will improve pedestrian safety while not creating a bottleneck on Main Street. He also noted that two plans had been received from the traffic engineers.

L. Davis made a motion to reopen the discussion and ask BETA back for questions; G. Reed seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – G. Reed stated his interest in cost-effectiveness and noted the success of South Main Street crossings. E. Gabriel stated the Selectboard has had extensive discussion on his matter. Roll call vote: Ed Abrahams, “no,” Steve Bannon, “no,” Leigh Davis, “aye,” Eric Gabriel, “no,” Garfield Reed, “no.” Motion failed 4-1.

c. Priority Planning - M. Pruhenski stated the priority planning worksheet dated July 18 has been provided - noting items in green are considered completed and the Selectboard will make the determination whether to close them. The Selectboard reviewed high priority projects:

- i. Housatonic Water Works – M. Pruhenski stated this was moved to the top of the list at the January priorities meeting. He noted regular meetings are being held with the Selectboard and Town Counsel to discuss strategy and consider options. He said updates to the Selectboard and the public will continue.
- ii. Affordable Housing/Aging in Place – C. Rembold stated the Planning Board is holding discussions this summer/fall on regulatory/zoning and financial incentives/organizational capacity - and also coordinating the Affordable Housing Trust and the Housing Authority. ARPA funds are being used for these efforts and CPC grant options are being considered.
 - E. Gabriel confirmed that ARPA funds can be used for affordable housing projects with private developers just so the housing plan aligns with funding criteria. C. Rembold also stated Town Meeting approval might be needed and that the Affordable Housing Trust and CPA would be in the lead on projects.
 - G. Reed stated the Affordable Housing Trust is meeting more regularly and looking at funding opportunities.
 - E. Abrahams confirmed the Planning Board is considering Selectboard suggestions and will report back. He also stated short-term rental should be separated from affordable housing as a separate issue.
- iii. Ambulance Service Study – M. Pruhenski stated there has been good progress – there is a new director, new EMTs/medics are being recruited and Chief Berger is on the board. He noted all member towns donated towards a new ambulance - Great Barrington provided \$136,000 in ARPA funds and no Town subsidies are needed for FY23.
- iv. Cooks Garage Property – C. Rembold stated Town Meeting authorized the Town to dispose of this property and a list will be developed of reuse/revitalization goals for the site. He stated this will likely be implemented via an RFP process and the Housatonic Improvement Committee will be involved.
 - S. Bannon stated E. Gabriel is the Selectboard liaison and the matter should be discussed by the Selectboard when appropriate.

- v. COVID-19 Public Health Emergency – M. Pruhenski stated COVID cases are relatively low and taskforce meetings are on hold, though information is shared as needed. He stated this item is taking less staff time.

- S. Bannon supported removing this as a high priority, though if COVID comes back stronger it can be moved up. The Selectboard agreed to remove it as a high priority.
- vi. Housatonic Community Center – M. Pruhenski stated lighting is upgraded to LED, the meeting room is updated and wifi is functional with a booster to be installed. He stated insulation cannot be completed due to increased labor/materials costs and insufficient DOER grant funding. He noted the Town cannot apply for new funding until existing funds are spent, but the Town and BRPC are working to resolve.
- vii. Housatonic School – M. Pruhenski stated the roof protection work has been completed and Town staff will review/report back on the pending proposals.
- viii. Housatonic Fiber Optic – C. Rembold stated the Town is working to determine the cost to take fiber optic up Park Street to Housatonic Village – which involves further discussion/negotiation with National Grid and Verizon, who own the utility poles, to determine which need replacing - this is the main driver of cost. This needs to be assessed before a feasibility/cost estimate.
- ix. Infrastructure – C. Rembold reported the Division Street Bridge project is progressing and is on track for the replacement temporary bridge. He outlined numerous projects including paving in Berkshire Heights and the surrounding area, Lake Mansfield parking/road repairs and sidewalk projects as per the capital plan approved at Town Meeting.
 - E. Gabriel asked if there is a map of the planned five-year road upgrades – C. Rembold replied there is a plan for looking ahead and asset management to anticipate and determine what rehab is needed and that is incorporated into capital planning.
- x. Main Street Pedestrian Safety and Traffic – C. Rembold noted the plan for recently approved work to improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow at both Railroad Street and Rotary Way. He stated the Town will provide updates to the Selectboard and State agencies – and that funding for the work was approved at Town Meeting.
- xi. MMRHS Entrance – M. Pruhenski stated a buffered right turn lane was installed to provide better visibility/sightlines for drivers. He noted next is an intersection conflict warning system to be completed by DOT – though there is no confirmed timeline. He will provide updates as it proceeds.
- xii. Parking – M. Pruhenski stated there are no new updates – and confirmed the Town cannot apply for grants through Wayfinding. He stated Taconic parking lot work is complete. He also noted downtown employees and visitors need parking.
 - The Selectboard discussed employee parking and reasons downtown street parking is time limited. It was noted for downtown employees there is eight-hour parking in the 60 spots recently added which is a five-minute walk to downtown.
- xiii. Reed Cleaners – C. Rembold stated there is an EPA clean-up grant and Town capital budget for this project. A scope of work is needed for remediation to protect the ground water/soil and to develop the site. He also noted additional investigation into another area that might impact the scope of work. He stated clean up should start spring 2023.
- xiv. Short-term Rental Regulations – M. Pruhenski stated this is marked completed because the bylaw was drafted and approved at Town Meeting – but staff is working on implementation in January including pricing compliance software and developing a host registration application. He also stated the software is not budgeted, so funds will need to be requested from the Finance Committee.
 - S. Bannon suggested changing the verbiage and leaving it as a high priority as it will take considerable staff time.

- xv. Systemic Racism Proclamation – M. Pruhenski stated this is marked completed and the proclamation was posted in 2020. He noted the Trust Policy Committee was never formed because it did not attract volunteers even though advertised three times – so it is on hold. He suggested the item be renamed regarding the portion to be completed.

- S. Bannon suggested perhaps this is moved to a moderate priority as it is important, but will take less staff time. The Selectboard agreed to move it to a moderate priority, but to keep working on it.
- xvi. Trip Hazard Main Street – It was noted there are funds to make repairs in problem areas and the new Public Works Superintendent will oversee.
- xvii. S. Bannon asked if the Selectboard would like to discuss anything under moderate priority or anything to add to high priority.
- M. Pruhenski stated Downtown Pride is marked completed – there has been a lot of progress – active outdoor dining/entertainment; rainbow crosswalks; cultural district flags and marketing that has created significant energy in downtown.
 - L. Davis asked if the Master Plan would be moved to a high priority this year – C. Rembold stated it would be discussed with the Planning Board this year, and with the Selectboard to determine when and how to move forward regarding committee formation, consultants, funding, etc. S. Bannon stated it should remain a moderate priority until the project commences.
 - M. Pruhenski stated the Mission Statement was updated and approved in June, so it is marked completed.
 - M. Pruhenski stated Open Meeting Training for Town boards and staff was held on April 4 and 12, 2022 – but should be revisited ongoing. S. Bannon suggested moving it to the operations calendar and M. Pruhenski stated he would ask Jenn Messina to schedule the trainings on an annual basis.
 - The Selectboard did not identify any other items to move up, add or discuss . It was noted it is helpful for the Selectboard and the public to see projects and get updates.
 - M. Pruhenski stated the list would be on the Town website.

S. Bannon stated there were 7 panelists and 13 attendees at the height of the meeting.

5. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME

- a. Nan Wile, 59 Taconic Avenue, stated there should be shade at the bus stops especially for older people. S. Bannon stated it would be looked into.

6. SELECTBOARD'S TIME

7. MEDIA TIME

8. ADJOURNMENT - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 7:16pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk