

*Minutes*  
*Williamsburg Board of Selectmen*  
*November 18, 2021*

The members of the Board of Selectmen met in regular session on Thursday, November 18, 2021, at the town office. The chair called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

Present: David Mathers, Denise Banister and William Sayre

Also present: Dan Banister (Highway Superintendent), Rebecca Brooks (Mountain Street), Nick Caccamo (Town Administrator), Glen Everett (Assessor), Robin Everett (Assessor), Ryan Feyre (Reminder Publishing), Nathan Rosewarne (Treasurer), Robert Ross, Cynthia Schaedig (MA Pre-Apprenticeship Program), Steve Smith (Planning Board), Eleanor Warnock (Administrative Assistant)

1. Tax classification hearing – The public hearing to determine if all classes of property will be taxed at the same rate opened at 9:02 a.m. Denise Banister as an Assessor explained that they do this hearing every year to see if commercial, industrial, residential and personal property will all be taxed at the same rate. If the commercial rate were increased to 150%, the maximum allowable, the residential rate would go down by \$1.06 per \$1000 of assessed value, and the commercial rate would go up by \$10.49. The assessors feel that this is not friendly to business and they recommend keeping a single tax rate. The public hearing closed at 9:06 a.m. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/WS) to vote to set the same tax rate for residential, commercial, industrial, and personal property. **So voted** (3-0).

2. Licenses – Class II Used Car Dealer’s license – Robert Ross d/b/a Ross Bros – It was reported that the Zoning Board of Appeals would be meeting tonight to address the renewal of the Special Permit and that otherwise all the paperwork was in order. The Board decided at the last meeting that the discrepancy in the names on the Special Permit and on the Used Car Dealer’s license would not be a problem. The Board was reluctant to act on the license until there was a valid Special Permit. Discussion included that Mr. Ross had not applied for the license until last month and that there were problems with the application, including the name issue and the fact that the Special Permit had not been filed at the Registry of Deeds. A letter from the ZBA to Mr. Ross regarding some unresolved issues, including organization of the property, was read. As a courtesy to Mr. Ross, the Board agreed to hold a special meeting on November 23 to consider the license, in case the decision of the ZBA was ready by then.

3. Treasurer – Nate Rosewarne, Treasurer, gave his regular report –  
Tax title, 125 Goshen Road – He said that the tax title process is going slowly and may have to be started again from the beginning because of a technical issue. The value of the land is slightly more than the legal and other expenses the town is incurring, but the process is worth it to add the property to the tax rolls going forward.  
Tax title, 4 Fort Hill Road – A neighbor raised a concern about vines growing over the property’s telephone wires. The town does not yet own the property and it sounds as if nothing is currently in danger.

Borrowing for Public Safety Complex – Nate will be having a preliminary meeting with Unibank on December 2 about borrowing for the Public Safety Complex. Selectman William Sayre and Town Administrator Nick Caccamo are interested in attending.

Praise for Accountant – Nate commended Accountant Kala Fisher for the work she has done. The reconciling of accounts recently was the simplest process that he can remember.

Audit Management letter – The issues highlighted have all been taken care of. Going forward, Town Administrator Nick Caccamo will report back to the Select Board that things have been addressed.

4. Planning Board – Planning Board Chair Steve Smith reported that the Planning Board is doing well. They are fully staffed with a good team. They value having good relationships with other boards. A Select Board member mentioned the Public Safety Complex and asked the Planning Board to do what it can it move it along.

Solar projects – Updates to the solar bylaws were approved at the last town meeting and there are no other urgent changes. A concern was raised about clear cutting for solar projects and having the soil run off every time it rains. Runoff due to clear cutting is an issue for the Conservation Commission. Property owners are allowed to do what they want with their land, just not clear cut their land in order to put in solar, but they can clear cut for one purpose and put in solar a year later.

Marijuana bylaws – The state has revised its laws and the town needs to update to match the state. The Planning Board has also learned that cultivation can be a very industrial enterprise as well as being smelly. It is currently allowed broadly in the Rural Zone. The financial benefit to the town is small. They will be looking at this carefully.

Master plan – Planning Board members are very interested in working on a master plan for the town. They want to work on it themselves before engaging consultants, in order not to have someone else's cookie-cutter plan. It was suggested that the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary might be a good opportunity for people to think about the next 250 years.

5. Mass. Pre-Apprenticeship Program – Cindy Schaedig of the Mass. Pre-Apprenticeship Program explained the program. They place selected students from vocational schools to work with highway departments and MassDOT on a co-op schedule, in school every other week and working every other week. MassDOT realized that many of their employees would be retiring soon and so they looked for a way to draw in young people. The top three to five students in the class are eligible for the co-op program. A local highway department treats the student like a temporary employee and the program reimburses the town up to \$50 per hour for the student's work. The initial program is four weeks full time working every other week. If the student does well, another program can extend up to four months. They are then eligible for scholarships and training for the CDL and hoisting licenses. Highway Superintendent Dan Banister is very interested in participating in the program, noting that there is a shortage of qualified people to hire and one of the crew members is planning to retire next summer. The student would not be working alone and would not be doing anything dangerous. The Highway Superintendent would interview the student and could fire anyone who wasn't working out. The Select Board members were impressed with the program.

6. Highway holiday party – The Highway Department would like to offer the traditional holiday party at the Highway Garage. The chair of the Board of Health has expressed varying opinions. It was noted that the town has a low rate of infection and high level of vaccination. Board members would favor recommending masks but not requiring them. A question was raised about the authority of the Board of Health to require masks in town-owned buildings and asked the Town Administrator to look into it. Highway is looking at Thursday, December 23, for the party.
7. Speed limits – A town resident said that she had requested a speed limit monitoring device some weeks ago. The Select Board will ask the Highway Superintendent. There was a reminder that the data need to be downloaded before a sign is moved to a different location.
8. Appointments – 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee – **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/WS) to appoint Miana Dawson and Apostol Hoda to the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee. **So voted** (3-0). Denise Banister was appointed as the Board’s liaison to the committee.
9. Expansion of broadband to last the three houses on Chesterfield Road – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo has looked into the last negotiation with Comcast. It appeared to be from 2017, with the contract expiring in 2027. Board members would like Comcast to do the expansion as part of the contract but don’t want the three families to have to wait for six years. The Town Administrator can ask Comcast if they are willing to split the cost. Comcast’s estimate for the work was \$14,700; adding 10% for unforeseen contingencies brings it to \$16,171. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/WS) to authorize the spending of ARPA funds up to \$16,171 to expand broadband to the last three houses on Chesterfield Road. **So voted** (3-0).
10. Mass in Motion – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that the town has participated in programs in the past, naming some of them, and that there appears to be zero downside. Signing on costs nothing and may improve Mass in Motion’s application to the state for funding. **Motion** was made and seconded (WS/DB) to authorize the chair to sign the Mass in Motion Participation Agreement. **So voted** (3-0).
11. Green Communities report – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that this year’s report is similar to last year’s. The town’s total energy usage is 0.8% lower than the 2011 baseline. The report will be filed on Friday and is a step in being eligible for grant funding. The Energy Committee is looking for significant ways to reduce usage. Nick worked with the Energy Committee and had technical assistance from PVPC. **Motion** was made and seconded (WS/DB) to authorize the chair to sign the Green Communities Annual Report. **So voted** (3-0).
12. Town Office Building assessment – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo proposed the possibility of doing an assessment of the Town Office Building to determine deterioration and to get a systematic understanding of the building, and asked for the Board’s thoughts about maintaining or improving the building. He recommended Building Conservation Associates out of Boston, who quoted \$6500 for an assessment, and said there is plenty of money in the Building Repairs budget line. The Board noted that there are structural issues with the old building and some retrofits and rebuilding have been done. The Board will plan to discuss this further at the next meeting.

13. Helen E. James Building plaque – There is a plaque in the elevator shaft that could be removed and saved. This will be discussed by the Public Safety Complex Building Committee.

14. Water/sewer staffing – MassDEP has issued an order to rectify the staffing at the pump house, including the type of operator and number of hours. Water/sewer is discussing the issue and thinks they have a plan. This will be on the agenda for the Select Board’s Nov. 23 special meeting.

15. Employee evaluations – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo has been collecting and compiling the evaluations of the department heads. He will set up individual meetings between the Select Board member and the department head being evaluated. Then the Select Board member will write a short memo of the conversation for the file. At some point all Board members will see all the evaluations.

16. Town Administrator’s six month evaluation – The question arose whether the six-month new employee evaluation of the Town Administrator would be done the same way as a regular yearly evaluation of a department head or whether it would include additional areas of inquiry. The Board will plan to follow the usual evaluation format, and in addition have a conversation among the Board members and Town Administrator about goals and what the Town Administrator should be working on for the next year. Board members appreciated having the option to do a narrative report or to focus on specific questions.

17. Collector’s fees – Board members discussed raising the fees, at the Collector’s request. **Motion** was made and seconded (DB/WS) to raise the fees as follows, effective January 1, 2022: Municipal Lien Certificate \$50, real property and personal property demand letters \$20, motor vehicle excise tax demand letters \$15. **So voted** (3-0). The fees go into the General Fund, not to the Collector. Interest on unpaid taxes is set by law. Water/Sewer fees are set by the Water/Sewer Commission, and Board members felt that Water/Sewer fees should go to the Water/Sewer Enterprise Funds instead of into the General Fund.

18. Town Administrator’s report –

Covid – Town Administrator Nick Caccamo reported that there are three active cases in town.

Wage classification study – Nick reported that the orientation with department heads happened last week, questionnaires have been distributed, and the next step is direct interviews. The market analysis will focus not on like-size communities but on the distance people are willing to drive, i.e., not a comparability study but who you can get and what their options are. The study will come up with a wage range, with mean and median, and the town decides where on the range it wants to be. The goal is to have more information for making an informed decision.

Anne T. Dunphy School HVAC – The equipment has been installed and hooked up. The School is paying \$15,000 from ESSR II funds, the town will pay from ARPA funds as previously agreed, and anything left unpaid will come from Stabilization. School Principal Stacey Jenkins will be asked to get a quote to evaluate and test the repairs.

MassDOT – Meeting with MassDOT District 1 was very informative. Nick will report later.

Winter commute – Nick asked how the Board would like him to deal with commuting from his home in Pittsfield during winter weather, whether to exercise caution or come anyway. Board members would like him to evaluate for his own safety and let the Board know if he is not coming in. There may be ice on the road. It was noted that most work can be done remotely.

MassDOT meeting on Mountain Street – Nick reported that MassDOT acknowledged the input received from comments. Northampton’s involvement has been limited. The same consultant is working with Whately for their portion of the road. Whately has not yet seen their 25% design. Whately’s topography is different and has constraints that don’t apply to the Williamsburg section. MassDOT is still going to work on the right of way. They continue to work through the next design phase.

19. Warrant – Approved and signed the warrants: payroll warrant WP22-11 for \$119,317.20 and expense warrant W22-11 for \$446,562.27, payable 11/24/21.

20. Miscellaneous – Veterans’ Day – Board member commented that the Veterans’ Day observance was excellent, especially the speaker.

Documents used

Tax classification handout

Letters of interest

Mass in Motion Participation Agreement

Green Communities Annual Report

Collector fee recommendations

Adjourned at 12:16 p.m.

Approved:

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Clerk