

THE NEWSletter

The Newsy Little Paper That Supplements Other Media

Volume 32 Number 12 February 2024

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Quotes of the Issue

“... Mr. Wheat stated that ‘We let our familiarity and collegial relationship with the GBPD cloud our judgment about the role of police in our schools when it concerns complaints about teachers and books. We should have followed our policies, pushed back right away and said we would look into the issues and get back to the police. If the District had looked into the issue instead of the police, it would have been resolved right away. The problems we have encountered were not caused by malice or laziness, they were caused by our comfort level with our relationship with the police. We should have insisted upon a warrant from the start.’”

-Paragraph 120 of the Berkshire Hills Regional School District Investigative Report December 8, 2023—Police Search W.E.B. DU Bois Regional Middle School, page 24.

* * *

“Regarding each of the above-referenced policies, all District employees who were interviewed during the Independent Investigation indicated that they have never been trained on the policies — and some did not even know of their existence.”

“Employees stated that policy training and an updated MOU would have been helpful to them in this situation and they also expressed a need for a policy that applies specifically to classroom libraries that are maintained by individual teachers.”

-Paragraphs 122 and 123 of the above report, page 25. The MOU, or memorandum of understanding between the school district and police, which ended July 30, 2021, is reproduced in the report.

* * *

“District decision-makers never sought to ‘ban’ the Book. Rather, that effort was initiated by a single, disgruntled employee who no longer works for the District.”

-Paragraph 128 — the last one — of the above report, page 25.

Hearing on Zoning Changes Will Be March 14

The **Planning Board** will hold a public hearing **March 14** at 6 p.m. in the Town Hall meeting room and by Zoom on three zoning changes that will be on the warrant for the May 6 annual town meeting. A zoning change requires approval by two-thirds of the voters at a town meeting. The map showing these districts is on the Planning Board’s page at townofgb.org/planning-board.

One change, proposed by the board, would establish **cohousing residential development** by right in all zoning districts except R2 and R4, where a special permit would be required.

Another change, also proposed by the board, would change the zoning so that a **special permit would no longer be needed and four to eight units of housing could be built by right** in the Housatonic Village Center (HVC), neighborhood business (B1) and Light Industrial (I2) zones.

Also, **nine units of housing could be built without the now-required special permit** in the HVC, downtown business (B), general business (B2), State Road Mixed Use (B2X), Mixed (MXD) and I2 districts. A special permit would be needed in the Industrial (I) district where they now are not allowed.

Mixed use also would be allowed by right in the B1 and B2 district. A special permit now is required.

Citizen petitions sponsored by Black Water Realty, 33 Silver St., and the Haddad family, 33 Silver St., seek to **change the Residential (R2) district to allow multi-unit dwellings in a MXD district on Silver Street**. Nonresidential commercial uses would not be allowed, the petitioners said.



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Late News!



THE PLANNING BOARD on **March 14** at 6:30 p.m. will continue its hearing on a special permit for a subdivision road with infrastructure at the **development Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity will build on the Affordable Housing Trust's North Plain Road land** in Housatonic.

Board members want revised plans for the roadway and utilities, plus where two-family houses will go, the number of trees and their proposed locations, and what structures will be in the central green.

The hearing will resume after the one on proposed zoning changes. Page 1 has information about that hearing.

* * *

THE BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE'S building committee seeks members for seven groups to consider different aspects of a **renovated or replaced Monument Mountain Regional High School**.

The groups are outreach, sustainability, site design, exterior building design, visual/performing arts, health and safety wellness, and athletics, including for community use. Anyone interested in serving could notify building committee chairman Jason St. Peter at jstpetersc@gmail.com or district superintendent Peter Dillon at peter.dillon@bhrsd.org.

Members also are sought for a visioning committee.

Superintendent Dillon has signed the contract with DiNisco Design of Boston for a feasibility study phase (\$350,000) and a schematic design phase (\$450,000). At the building committee's meeting Feb. 27, the firm's president, Donna DiNisco, said staff has visited the high school and its grounds and will return to talk to people in the building. Community forums could start in April, she said.

The building committee agreed that land nearest Route 7 and farthest from the existing school will not be considered as possible sites for a new high school.

* * *

GREAT BARRINGTON'S TAX RATE will apparently **increase by \$1.14** — to \$15.03 per \$1,000 of valuation — if **May 6 town meeting** voters approve the operating budget, capital expenses and special financial articles recommended by the Finance Committee and Selectboard.

The proposed new rate is 31 cents less than town manager Mark Pruhenski's originally recommended \$15.45 as he and the two boards made cuts. A total amount for the proposed budget had not been calculated at THE NEWSletter's deadline; the tax rate could also change. The revised budget will be posted on the town website, townofgb.org.

Eight people spoke during the Feb. 28 hearing, including Sharon Gregory, who provided her statement to THE NEWSletter; it was sent to the email list and will be in the next issue. She urged care for the town's historic buildings, which include Ramsdell Library. Jim Bailly urged that the veterans' budget include \$8,200 more for the VFW lease; both boards unanimously agreed. More about that request is reported in this issue.

That added amount was balanced by small cuts in some department budgets, including for the amount of time for lifeguards in the Parks Commission's budget. Mr. Pruhenski said not as much coverage is needed during quiet times at Lake Mansfield. For the capital budget, the boards voted to recommend that the Fire Department get a new car but did not support reserving \$100,000 for a new fire engine.

They agreed to cut \$750,000 from streets in the Department of Public Works' account. That amount was for the road and infrastructure for the North Plain Road development. The town has a \$2.5 million MassGrant for that work but bids are not in; if the grant does not cover the cost, a special town meeting will be needed to request the difference.

Both boards voted unanimously to recommend \$150,000 in a special article so library trustees can seek a state grant to renovate Ramsdell Library. Selectboard chairman Steve Bannon repeated his concerns, reported in this issue. Selectman Eric Gabriel said the building needs work and the question is when it will be done. Finance Committee member Rich Geiler noted that if the state grant is not awarded, the \$150,000 will not be needed.

Finance Committee members have expressed concern about the amount of debt from borrowing.

All Selectboard members were present as were Finance Committee members Phil Orenstein, Anne O'Dwyer and Mr. Geiler. Milena Cerna and Madonna Meagher were absent.

Please Turn Over for News of BHRSD Budget

THE BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT'S **proposed operating and capital budgets will increase by 4.02%** if voters in the district's three towns approve them at May's town meetings. The budgets are reproduced in this issue.

During the school committee's Feb. 29 hearing, superintendent Dillon said he met recently with Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School parents concerned about cutting a kindergarten teacher, proposed because enrollment is expected to decrease. Two parents said they do not want a particular teacher cut. Committee member Rich Dohoney noted that according to the district's contract with teachers, the last person hired is the first to be let go.

Mr. Dillon also noted that the district-wide position of the Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging coordinator, which he had cut from the budget, has been returned and will be paid with a Rural Aid grant. Also because of decreased enrollment, a social studies position at the high school will be cut. A biology teacher certified to teach social studies will handle both subjects.

After the hearing, committee chairman Steve Bannon said cutting teachers is very difficult but the operating budget is more than 75% teachers' salaries.

Member Jason St. Peter said he has a "real problem with the budget" because of the social studies cut. Social studies and English classes must be small, he said.

Principal Kristi Farina said enrollment is returning to pre-Covid staffing. Committee member Bill Fields, who taught social studies at the high school before retiring, said he is concerned about electives. How to increase enrollment should be discussed, he said. Mr. Dohoney said the high school now is overstaffed.

The vote to recommend the proposed operating budget passed, 8-1, with Mr. St. Peter opposed. The capital budget passed unanimously. Anne Hutchinson was absent.

Budget detail is on the district's website, **BHRSD.org**, and in town libraries.





Meetings and More in March and April

MEETING AGENDAS are posted on the town's website at townofgb.org, and sent by THE NEWSletter. The agendas tell where to attend and provide a Zoom link, if needed.

A meeting held with members meeting in person may still be held even if a Zoom link doesn't work, according to the Division of Open Government.

Recordings of many meetings are on Community Television for the Southern Berkshires at ctsbvtv.org, YouTube and the Selectboard's website page. You can watch on your computer or on Spectrum cable channels 1301 (public), 1302 (education) and 1303 (government).

The Berkshire Hills Regional School District has a website, bhrrsd.org. It, the town, the Cultural Council, the police and fire departments have Facebook pages.

The following meeting dates may change and more almost certainly will be added.

March

-Nomination papers for annual town elections May 14 are available at town clerk's office through March 22.

-Presidential primary is March 5 with voting from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., State Road Fire Station & Housatonic Community Center.

-Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee meets March 7 & 21, 6 p.m.

-Selectboard meets March 11 & 25, 6 p.m.

-Tree Committee meets March 13, 5 p.m.

-Board of Health meets March 14, 6:30 p.m.

-Planning Board meets March 14 & 28, 6 p.m.

-Parks Commission meets March 18, 5:15 p.m.

-Finance Committee meets March 19, 6 p.m.

-Affordable -Historic District Commission meets March 21, 6:30 p.m.

-Housatonic Improvement Committee meets March 21, 6:30 p.m.

--Council on Aging meets March 27, 1 p.m.

--Conservation Commission meets March 27, 6:30 p.m.

April

-Board of Health meets April 4, 6:30 p.m.

-Selectboard meets April 6 & 29, 6 p.m.

-Planning Board meets April 11 & 25, 6 p.m.

-Patriots' Day is April 15. Town buildings are closed.

-April 26 at 5 p.m. is deadline to register to vote for annual town meeting May 6 & town elections May 14 for people not yet registered in Great Barrington.

Libraries; Senior Center; Recycling Center Information

THE TOWN'S TWO LIBRARIES



have a website at gblibraries.org. It lists activities and new books and tapes. Books, CDs and DVDs can be ordered by calling Mason Library at 528-2403 or email at mason-ramsdell@gmail.com or bark.cwmars.org.

Wifi is available on both libraries' lawns and Mason's parking lot.

The New York Times, New York Times Cooking, Washington Post and THE NEWSletter can be read free online. Anyone with a Massachusetts library card can sign up for a Boston Public Library e-card.

THE NEWSletter sends the libraries' monthly newsletter to its email list.

Mason Library

Mason Library on Main Street, Great Barrington is closed Sundays and Mondays and open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Ramsdell's Hours

Ramsdell Library on Main Street, Housatonic, is open Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m., Monday from 1 to 6 p.m. and closed other days.

Its phone number is 274-3738.

Ramsdell has a loaning Library of Things, including visual reality goggles, a sewing machine and a staple gun.

THE CLAIRE TEAGUE SENIOR CENTER at 917 South Main St. offers activities and fitness classes, lunches and help with technology, driver license renewals, and more.

Its website lists the lunch menus and is at greatbarringtonseniors.org.

It provides transportation for elderly and disabled people who call 528-1881 at least 48 hours in advance.

Staff is available Mondays through Fridays to answer calls and offer SHINE counseling. Big Y donations are available Mondays and Wednesdays.

THE NEWSletter sends "Grapevine," the center's monthly newsletter, to subscribers who have requested it.

THE RECYCLING CENTER on Stockbridge Road, across from Monument Mountain Regional High School, is open Fridays, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturdays, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Materials to compost are accepted at no charge. More information about this is under "News and Announcements" on the town website's home page at townofgb.org.

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THE NEWSletter can make this offer only because some subscribers generously send extra when they renew. Thanks to them, THE NEWSletter can hold off on a rate increase, even as all its costs increase.

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Twelve issues (one year) are \$35 for the print version within the 012 zip code or \$30 for the emailed one anywhere.

Cost to get the printed TN by bulk mail outside the 012 zip code is \$38. Cost for first class for a year (12 issues) is \$50.

Where To Mail Your Check

Checks should be made payable to THE NEWSletter and mailed to it at POB 567, Housatonic 01236.

Available in Large Type

Cost to receive THE NEWSletter in large type is \$40 for 12 issues, plus the annual print subscription.

Both the written and emailed versions include **free emails** — agendas, news updates, forwarded material — sent between issues. Your name and email address are kept confidential **unless** you're an elected or appointed public official.

You can forward all emails to as many people as you want. Having THE NEWSletter send those emails between issues is \$5 a year for each added name.

Questions? Suggestions? Please email me at thenewsltr@gmail.com

And a suggestion: THE NEWSletter makes a great gift for new neighbors, children leaving home and former residents.

Thanks, folks, for your support!

-Eileen W. Mooney

Finance Committee, Selectboard Seeking Budget Cuts

THE LATE NEWS PAGE has a report on the **Finance Committee's** Feb. 28 hearing on the proposed budget and other expenditures and recommendations by that board and the **Selectboard** on what town meeting voters approve.

It also has a report on the **Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee's** Feb. 29 hearing on its budget.

Usually by this time those recommendations are almost certain. But not this year — at least not at this writing, especially for the town.

Proposed Budget Up by 5.9%

The proposed town budget increased by \$2,584,533 from this year, or by 5.9%. The total amount sought would be \$45,789,085, of which \$21,040,872 would be the town's assessment for the school district.

The tax rate would go from \$13.89 to \$15.45 per \$1,000 of real-estate valuation. Information reproduced in this issue shows that the owner of a house valued at \$440,100 would pay \$685.61, or 11.2%, more than this year.

According to the History of Property Values and Tax Levies in the budget packet, a house valued at \$440,100 in fiscal years 2025 and 2024 was assessed at \$399,60 in fiscal 2023; \$348,400 in fiscal 2022; and \$313,950 in fiscal 2021.

The next NEWSletter will include the results of any changes the Selectboard and Finance Committee make to spending proposals. THE NEWSletter also sends updates on the budget meetings to its email list.

Finance Committee-Selectboard meetings can be watched on Community Television for the Southern Berkshires' website at cts.org.

Where To See Budget

The originally presented budget, including capital and special articles, is on the accountant/financial services coordinator page on the town website, townofgb.org.

Budget Called 'Most Challenging'

In introducing the budget, town manager Mark Pruhenski called it the most challenging of the years he has been town manager. He started here in 2019.

This year, after reviewing the budget, both boards asked Mr. Pruhenski to show what cuts of \$100,000, \$200,000 and \$500,000 would do.

On Feb. 20, after discussing his proposed cuts for more than three hours, there seemed agreement on two points: People's positions should not be touched and cutting \$500,000 would be too much.

Chairmen's Views on Budget Cuts

READERS: To avoid the appearance of conflict of interest, I do not report on the Great Barrington Housing Authority or send its minutes as I am an elected member of its board. -EWM

Sewer Bills Due March 11

The town has issued a reminder that sewer bills and abatements are due by Monday, **March 11**.

Anyone who uses town sewer and did not receive a bill is asked to notify the Department of Public Works at 528-0867 ext. 1.

The chairmen of the two boards seemed to have differing views.

"We can only cut so much without hurting," Steve Bannon, Selectboard chairman, stated Feb. 20.

"Significant cuts to the budget" are needed," Phil Orenstein, Finance Committee chairman, felt.

The town has an aging population and people are looking at their taxes, selectman Garfield Reed observed during the discussion.

Some Notes from Budget Meetings

Following are some notes from about 10 hours of the budget consideration, with a cautionary note: It was often difficult to hear so I don't have all the votes. Also, all votes at this stage are nonbinding.

-EWM

As soon as town manager Pruhenski presented proposed town expenditures, Finance Committee members and selectmen began to review department budgets.

A new \$20,000 entry of "social media/public relations" in the Selectboard/town manager budget had been in contracted services, Mr. Pruhenski explained. Its location in the budget changed; the amount has not.

Building Dept. Increase Not Really So

The building inspector's budget shows a large increase in salaries — from \$72,192 to \$123,600 for the inspector and from \$59,280 to \$231,750 for the assistant.

Actually, Mr. Pruhenski said, the town only pays 32.5% of those costs. With the new shared department, Lee pays 25.5%, Lenox, 23.5%, and Stockbridge, 18.5%.

Their payments will be shown in next year's revenue report.

Health Board Wants More Funds

The Board of Health requested \$9,795 more in contracted services so it could have Housatonic Water Works' water tested, but Mr. Pruhenski recommends an increase from the present \$11,205 to \$12,000.

The health board also sought and did not get \$50,000 for legal assistance.

Board member Dr. Ruby Chang said funds are needed to do independent water testing. This is "crucial to public health," she emphasized.

Health board chairman Michael Lanoue said not having designated funds for legal help was acceptable but funds to test water are needed.

Notes from Feb. 13 Budget Meeting

During the Feb. 13 budget meeting, Berkshire Hills Regional School District superintendent Peter Dillon said his proposed operating budget might change after the Feb. 29 public hearing.

The school assessment is a separate article on the town meeting warrant, not part of the town budget.

School Assessment Up 3.48%

The proposed operating budget now is \$33,014,758, up \$1,517,900 or 4.82% from the present fiscal year. The capital budget is \$533,750, or \$1,183,125 or \$68.91% less than this fiscal year.

The town's assessment for both budgets is up \$707,138, or 3.48%.

Stockbridge's assessment is \$3,866,686, up \$133,543 or 3.58%, and West Stockbridge is assessed at \$3,653,683, up \$261,838 or 7.72%.

Assessments are determined by the number of students from a town and the state Minimum Local Contribution, or MLC.

Where To See School Budgets

Summaries of the operating and capital budgets are reproduced in this issue. The entire budget is on the school district's website at bhrs.org and in each town's libraries.

(NEWS continues on page 4)



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More from Boards' Meetings on Using Town Funds

Also during the Feb. 13 meeting, Police Chief Paul Storti said the department was fully staffed at 15 officers but then two officers left.

Seven officers have less than a year of experience and he wants to focus on them and their training, Chief Storti explained.

He also wants more street presence in town, with more parking tickets written. Mr. Pruhenski did not agree with his request for an electric bike for downtown patrols.

The Fire Department's budget is recommended as presented.

Parks' Commission Budget

The Parks and Recreation Commission's budget had a \$5,500 cut in its youth programming. It sought \$115,500 and Mr. Pruhenski recommends the \$110,000 it has this year.

No Increase for VFW Lease

In the veterans' budget, an increase from \$21,600 to \$30,000 was requested for the VFW lease but not recommended.

No increase was sought for the American Legion lease, which is \$23,000.

Not All Boards Get Requested Funds

The Historical Commission sought an additional \$17,000; Mr. Pruhenski recommends it get \$10,000, an increase of \$3,000. The Historic District Commission sought

\$19,000; \$5,000, the same as this year, is recommended.

More money is needed to care for town statues and other town assets, the boards' chairmen explained.

The Du Bois Commission sought \$20,000. It too is recommended for the same as this year — \$5,000.

No Technology Director

The technology coordinator gets a stipend of \$6,500 a year. A director of technology services at \$85,000 a year was sought but not recommended.

Capital Budget

(Please note: These votes are nonbinding.)

Capital requests total \$10,271,734, plus \$2,650,000 for the wastewater plant which is a separate item. While town meeting votes on funds for the plant, its users pay its costs.

Of that total, \$8,653,000 would be borrowed. The rest would come from free cash, Community Preservation Act funds or grants.

DPW Has Biggest Requests

The biggest requests are from the Department of Public Works

Requests for street and bridge improvements total \$7,195,000. Buildings and grounds total \$2,269,000. Vehicles and equipment are \$259,684.

Both boards agreed to cut street and bridge improvements by Finance Committee chairman Orenstein's suggested \$3.5 million. He, Ms. O'Dwyer and Richard Geiler voted for the motion; Madonna Meagher and Ms. Cerna were opposed.

No Commercial Kitchen

The boards also agreed to cut the \$75,000 requested for a commercial kitchen in the Claire Teague Senior Center and intended to enable the building to serve as an emergency center.

The town has no emergency centers, DPW head Joe Aberdale has noted.

The selectmen voted 4-1, with Mr. Bannon opposed, to recommend buying 10 shields to cover police officers' vital organs and arms, a car radio and one of the two requested cruisers.

The Finance Committee had a tie vote. so no decision on that motion. Mr. Orenstein and Milena Cerna voted no and Madonna Meagher and Ms. O'Dwyer, yes. Member Richard Geiler was absent.

The Finance Committee voted unanimously to recommend funding the Fire Department's requested car but not an engine.

The Selectboard voted for the same motion 4-1, with Mr. Bannon opposed.

Aberdale: Don't Just Fix The Cracks

During discussion of capital funds for buildings, Mr. Aberdale said the five buildings listed need \$659,000 for immediate work, including correcting code violations.

More information is on page 7.

"Let's do it the right way. Don't fix the cracks — fix it," Mr. Aberdale declared Feb. 7.

Very little maintenance has been done on the State Road fire station, he said. Town Hall's elevator needs work. He cited other needs.

Courthouse Improvements

The state wants improvements to be made over the 10 years of a new lease being negotiated for the former Dewey School to be used as a courthouse.

The 10-year lease that is ending calls for the state to pay \$9,294 a month, to Mr. Pruhenski told THE NEWSletter.

Pruhenski: No to 7 Special Articles

Twelve special articles sought a total of \$1,715,326. Mr. Pruhenski recommends \$1,000,326 be approved for five requests.

He did not recommend \$100,000 each for the stabilization, capital stabilization, or Other Post-Employment Benefits Trust, or OPEB.

Also sought but not recommended was \$200,000 for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. This means its only anticipated funds for the next fiscal year would be \$23,000 recommended by the Community Preservation Committee.

Also cut were \$15,000 for town meeting equipment; \$50,000 for Berkshire Busk and \$150,000 sought by the Board of Library Trustees to plan and design a renovated Ramsdell Library to be mostly paid by a state Library Building Grant the trustees hope to get.

Boards Favor \$150,000 for Ramsdell

The library funds, however, were, in non-binding votes, recommended by both boards.

The funds are sought so the Board of Library Trustees can show the state Library Commission that the town supports renovating Ramsdell Library by approving funds for planning and design.

Orenstein: Can't Afford 2 Libraries

Mr. Orenstein said he doesn't think the town can afford two libraries. He voted against the motion to recommend funding.

Selectman Bannon also voted against but noted that he does not support closing Ramsdell. Even if the state Library Commission awards a grant, he is not convinced funds will be raised for work a grant does not cover, leaving the town with possible debt, he said.

During discussion, trustee Ruby Chang said voters should decide whether to grant the money and the board's chairman, Patrick Hollenbeck, said libraries are now community spaces, not just places to get books.

Selectmen Gabriel and Ben Elliott questioned whether fund raising could be done in time.

(NEWS continues on page 5)

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Money, Cont.; Library Trustees; Affordable Housing Trust

RSYP Seeks \$1 Million for Building

Mr. Pruhenski recommended \$500,000 in community impact funding. Those funds come from the sale of retail marijuana and are allocated in accordance with guidelines of the state Cannabis Control Commission.

He appoints a committee to recommend how the funds should be used. THE NEWSletter publishes the recommendations.

Ananda Timpane, director of Railroad Street Youth Project, asked that the \$500,000 be increased by \$1 million from cannabis funding so a second story can be added to its building on Bridge Street.

At its meeting the next night, Feb. 14, the boards voted to increase the recommended amount, noting that they were only agreeing that the amount be increased, not that the added funds be used for this particular purpose.

Board members also agreed that \$15,000 associated with renewing host community agreements for marijuana sales should be moved into this article. It had been a separate special article.

The next special article — \$80,000 for vocational tuition and transportation — was approved in a nonbinding vote. Towns are required to pay such costs.

Funds Recommended for SBA

Southern Berkshire Ambulance requested \$205,326 for help operating. SBA is also seeking funds from the other South County towns.

Jim Santos, president of SBA's board, explained financial pressures and said staffing has become critical.

A fund drive last November and December took in about \$120,000, he said.

The boards requested more financial information, which was provided at the Feb. 20 meeting.

Both boards, in nonbinding votes, agreed to recommend the funds, conditional on receiving the 2021 financial audit, still being completed.

Concern About Finances

Board members go into the public hearing concerned about finances.

More people are needed in town to help pay, Mr. Orenstein observed.

"We need to get a handle on borrowing," Ms. O'Dwyer repeated during discussions.

It's "going to be the same conversation next year," Ms. Cerna observed.

During the meetings, residents Michelle Loubert said she was concerned about her taxes and James Garzon said taxes are "out of control already and going to get worse."

* * *

THE BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES has retained DesignLab of Boston to prepare a feasibility and programming report for Ramsdell Library.

The trustees interviewed the company by Zoom at a Feb. 5 meeting held at Ramsdell. The firm will be also work with EDM of Pittsfield, an architectural, structural and engineering firm.

Mr. Pruhenski had not signed the contract at THE NEWSletter's deadline, trustee vice chairman Ruby Chang said.

THE NEWSletter is a great gift.

Community Meetings To Be Held

Representatives from DesignLab visited both libraries in February and plan community meetings in March.

Building Program Being Formed

The trustees also seek members for a building program committee to work with a firm to be hired to design and plan a renovated Ramsdell Library.

That's if the \$150,000 sought as a special article is on the May 6 town meeting warrant and is approved.

Anyone interested in serving on a building committee is asked to notify Dr. Chang, rbyrbchang@gmail.com, or trustee chairman Pat Hollenbeck, patorch@msn.com.

Screen For Zoom, Movies

During the Feb. 21 meeting, Mr. Hollenbeck said Ramsdell needs a large screen, about five feet, for Zoom now that the library can be used for board meetings.

A new walkway has made the building handicapped accessible.

Mr. Hollenbeck said state aid funds can be used to buy the screen, expected to cost about \$750. It could also be used for movies, he noted.

Dawn Jardine, the new chief librarian, questioned where it would be stored. She agreed it is needed, but said she was concerned about its size and finding storage space.

Rob Shaeffer abstained but other trustees agreed that Ms. Jardine should decide the size and the cost should not exceed \$1,000.

Trustee Carol McGlinchey said she will talk with DPW superintendent Aberdale about making the bathroom handicapped accessible.

* * *

REPRODUCED IN THIS ISSUE is a proposal called Oak Bluff, written by Affordable Housing Trust Fund board member Bill Cooke and discussed at the board's meeting Feb. 20.

His proposal is reproduced in this issue although without the second side, which shows houses in the Oak Bluffs Campground on Cape Cod.

The proposal would have the AHTF board buy land on which homeowners would build small houses — about 750 square feet, which is larger than a so-called "tiny house."

Deed restrictions on the land would keep the resale value tied to increases in the area median income.

2 People, \$20 an Hour, Can Afford

"Two people making \$20 an hour could afford to buy one of these houses," Mr. Cooke said.

Board member Ananda Timpane said if only one person works, the pay would have to be at least \$40,000. She was not sure a two-person income could be assumed, she said.

Costs To Be Verified

Mr. Cooke sought and received the board's approval for him to verify costs.

Land costs drive up housing costs, board chairman Fred Clarke observed, adding that this has the potential to create community.

He referred members to Williamstown's proposed "cottage court" bylaw, described here: www.iberkshires.com/story/70685/Williamstown-Planning-Board-Talks-Cottage-Court-Bylaw.html

Mr. Cooke thought land could be bought for \$150,000 to \$200,000. Even if it cost \$400,000 to \$500,000, taxes paid would make it back in 10-20 years, he said.

Permanent Mobile Homes?

Also during the meeting, the board agreed member Joseph Method should draft a letter asking the Planning Board to review allowing mobile homes to be permanent.

(NEWS continues on next page)

How To Reach State Senator, Representative

STATE SEN. PAUL MARK has office hours in the Great Barrington Town Hall the first and third Monday of the month from 9 a.m. to noon.

His district office is at 773 Tyler St., Pittsfield. Telephone number is 413-464-5635 there and 617-722-1625 at the State House in Boston.

His constituent services director, Casey Pease, is at casey.pease@masenate.gov.

* * *

STATE REP. SMITTY PIGNATELLI does not have office hours but is at rep.smtty@mahouse.gov.

His district office number is 413-637-0631 and the State House number is 617-722-2692.

Staff director Julia Murphy is at julia.murphy@mahouse.gov and legislative aide Trey McNinch, is robert.mcninch@mahouse.gov.

Need a ride? Call the TriTown Connector!

The TriTown Connector is a *call-for-ride* service, serving Egremont, Great Barrington/Housatonic, and Stockbridge. Call 413-591-3826.

Visit www.tritown.org

**TRITOWN
CONNECTOR**

AN UNPAID PUBLIC SERVICE AD

Cont. News of Town Boards, BHRSD, GBFD, More

Mobile homes now may be used as temporary residences for not more than 60 days in a 12-month period unless the Selectboard issues a special permit for a hardship and allows longer use not to exceed a year. That's Section 8.6 of the zoning bylaws.

Mr. Method asked why a case was not being made for mobile homes.

"They're much cheaper," member Krystyna Kurzyca observed.

The Affordable Trust board doesn't have the expertise to recommend zoning, Ms. Timpane said, adding:

"It's a well-known critique — and I think it's a valid critique — that the way communities embrace tiny houses but not mobile homes is distinctly classist."

Member Garfield Reed, who is also a selectman, was not present as he was at the budget meeting. The board has a vacancy.

STATEMENTS FROM "Berkshire Hills Regional School District Investigative Report December 8, 2023—Police Search W.E.B. Du Bois Regional Middle School," are provided on page 1.

The report is on the school district's website at bhrsd.org. THE NEWSletter sent it to its email list.

In the report, author Kevin Kinne of Cohen Kinne Valicenti & Cook LLP said a school custodian told the police about the book "Gender Queer." He also made statements about a teacher's conduct.

His statements were not true, Mr. Kinne found. He identified the person who made the statements to police and provided photographs of pages from the book. The police had not identified him.

The custodian is no longer with the district.

The Selectboard has also hired a firm to investigate the police investigation.

THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION at its Feb. 21 meeting approved removal of 10 dead, diseased and/or dangerous trees within a mapped Scenic Mountain Area at 320 Long Pond Road, provided the trees are flush cut and all roots are left in the ground, according to agent Shep Evans' draft minutes.

Also approved with the same conditions was removal of a butternut tree and trimming adjacent trees at 15 Dresser Ave.

Members agreed that permits must be sought for invasive aquatic weed control efforts in Lake Mansfield.

Butternut Basin's request to remove a ski chair-lift and build a new one was continued to **March 6** for discussion of invasive species management and follow-up stewardship.

Conservation Commission members are chairman Kate Van Olst, Andrew Didio, Tom Ferris, David Shanahan, Michael Lanoue and Andrew Mankin.

There is one vacancy.

IN NEWS FROM SELECTMEN'S MEETINGS, about 100 people have sought reimbursement for expenses related to the quality of water from **Housatonic Water Works**, town manager Mark Pruhenski has reported.

Progress is being made by the firm determining the company's worth, he said at the board's Feb. 26 meeting.

At that meeting, the board agreed to a host community agreement with Midori's Garden to manufacture marijuana at 920 Main St. The agreement is in the meeting's packet on the Selectboard page on the town website.

THE GREAT BARRINGTON FIRE DISTRICT'S Prudential Committee plans to acquire an acre of open space at Forest Row on Christian Hill Road so it can connect its water lines with Housatonic Water Works' in case one system needs more water.

The district plans to build a 40'-by-60' metal building for storage and use some land for walking trails, chairman Walter Atwood said at the committee's Feb. 6 meeting.

A Selectboard hearing on amending the special permit, issued in 1988, so the acre may be removed is scheduled for **March 11**.

SELECTMAN LEIGH DAVIS is running for the seat that long-time **state Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli** plans to leave when his term ends in November.

Also seeking that seat is Stockbridge selectman Patrick White.

'Time for a New Generation'

In a statement announcing that he will not seek re-election, Rep. Pignatelli said he feels "it's time for a new generation of leadership to, hopefully, make the people of the 3rd Berkshire District their priority as your new State Representative."

He has been the district's representative for 22 years. Before that, he was on the Lenox Planning Board for five years, a Lenox selectman for 11 years and a Berkshire County Commissioner for four years.

He is vice chairman of the House Committee on Rules. He also serves on the Joint Committees on Education, Financial Services and Tourism, Arts and Cultural Developments.

His entire statement will be reproduced in a future NEWSletter.

THE SELECTBOARD/TOWN MANAGER's office has a new **administrative assistant**, who works with office administrator Josh Risen.

Natalie Amendola graduated from the State University of New York in Albany in 2022 with an English degree and a 4.0 GPA.

She received an award for outstanding achievement in English.

(NEWS continued on page 11)



Sales Team: Lisa Crawford, John Segalla, Claire Shomphe, Molly DiGiovanni, Suzann Ward, Owner



402 Park Street
Housatonic, MA 01236
www.housatonicrealestate.com
413.274.5065

Report: \$11 Million-Plus To Fix 5 Town Buildings

Summary of Costs Per Building

THE TOWN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS hired Tighe and Bond engineering firm “to evaluate the existing conditions of five key town buildings and to develop a general plan for Facilities Asset Management that provides recommendations for improvements over a 10-year planning horizon.

Studied were the Town Hall, State Road Fire Station, Ramsdell Library, Mason Library and Southern Berkshire District Courthouse.

As a result, capital requests were proposed of \$425,000 for architectural and engineering services; \$241,000 for the courthouse, \$150,000 for the fire station, \$428,000 for the two libraries, and \$700,000 for Town Hall.

Roofs of 3 Buildings Not Assessed

A survey for hazardous materials was not included in the estimate, nor were roofs of the Southern Berkshire District Court and the two libraries. The report states that access to those roofs was unavailable during the planned site visit.

The report also notes that it “is not intended to serve as a detailed survey and more accurate estimates should be conducted.

The assessments covered architecture and structure, including mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire-protection system, heating and air conditioning.

What Categories A, B Mean

Recommendations for capital improvements are prioritized according to :

-“Immediate”

-Category A for “Replacement, repair or maintenance needed within the next 5 years, or ongoing maintenance of 1-to-5-year intervals.”

-Category B means “Replacement, repair or maintenance needed in 6-to-10 year intervals.”

The report also recommends that the historical building status at Town Hall, Ramsdell Library and Mason Library be determined.

THE NEWSletter sent the 63-page report to its email list. It is also available from the DPW office.

As noted elsewhere in this NEWSletter issue, the library trustees intend to apply for a state Library Commissioners grant to renovate the library.

Mason Library

Table 2-5 Summary of Estimated Costs for Mason Library

Discipline	Estimated Cost for Each Action Category ⁽¹⁾			
	Immediate	Cat A	Cat B	Total
Electrical	\$ 1,000	\$25,000	\$201,000	\$227,000
Structural / Architectural	\$51,000	\$205,000	\$57,000	\$313,000
HVAC	\$0	\$388,000	\$138,000	\$476,000
Plumbing / Fire Protection	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$21,000	\$29,000
Subtotal	\$56,000	\$622,000	\$417,000	\$1,045,000
Contingency (40%)	\$22,400	\$248,800	\$166,800	\$418,000
Total	\$78,400	\$870,800	\$583,800	\$1,463,000

(The scanned material wouldn't respond to straightening so the information is a bit tipsy.—

Table 2-7 Summary of Estimated Cost Per Building

Location	Estimated Cost for Each Action Category			
	Immediate	Cat A	Cat B	Total
Town Hall	\$86,000	\$1,953,000	\$476,000	\$2,515,000
Fire Station	\$301,000	\$210,000	\$694,900	\$1,205,000
Ramsdell Library	\$140,000	\$1,092,000	\$93,000	\$1,855,000
Mason Library	\$56,000	\$622,000	\$417,000	\$1,045,000
Southern Berkshire District Courthouse	\$76,000	\$977,000	\$544,000	\$1,597,000
Subtotal	\$659,000	\$4,854,000	\$2,227,900	\$8,217,000
Contingency (40%)	\$263,000	\$1,941,000	\$889,960	\$3,286,800
Total	\$922,600	\$6,795,000	\$3,117,860	\$11,503,800

Note 1: Hazardous materials survey not included, the results of which may increase cost estimates.
 Note 2: Costs based on March 2022 ENR Construction Cost Index, 12791.43.

Ramsdell Library

Table 2-4 Summary of Estimated Costs for Ramsdell Library

Discipline	Estimated Cost for Each Action Category ⁽¹⁾			
	Immediate	Cat A	Cat B	Total
Electrical	\$0	\$17,000	\$33,000	\$50,000
Structural / Architectural	\$133,000	\$611,000	\$60,000	\$804,000
HVAC	\$0	\$339,000	\$0	\$339,000
Plumbing/Fire Protection	\$7,000	\$125,000	\$0	\$132,000
Subtotal	\$140,000	\$1,092,000	\$93,000	\$1,325,000
Contingency (40%)	\$56,000	\$436,800	\$37,200	\$530,000
Total	\$196,000	\$1,528,800	\$130,200	\$1,855,000

State Road Fire Station

Table 2-3 Summary of Estimated Costs for Fire Station

Discipline	Estimated Cost for Each Action Category ⁽²⁾			
	Immediate	Cat A	Cat B	Total
Electrical	\$14,000	\$15,000	\$349,000	\$378,000
Structural / Architectural	\$252,000	\$104,000	\$4,000	\$360,000
HVAC	\$0	\$91,000	\$321,000	\$412,000
Plumbing / Fire Protection	\$35,000	\$0	\$20,000	\$55,000
Subtotal	\$301,000	\$210,000	\$694,000	\$1,206,000
Contingency (40%)	\$120,400	\$84,000	\$277,600	\$482,400
Total	\$421,400	\$294,000	\$971,600	\$1,688,400

Southern Berkshire District Courthouse

Table 2-6 Summary of Estimated Costs for Southern Berkshire District Courthouse

Discipline	Estimated Cost for Each Action Category ⁽¹⁾			
	Immediate	Cat A	Cat B	Total
Electrical	\$15,000	\$62,000	\$56,000	\$133,000
Structural / Architectural	\$39,000	\$508,000	\$223,000	\$770,000
HVAC	\$0	\$201,000	\$259,000	\$460,000
Plumbing / Fire Protection	\$22,000	\$206,000	\$6,000	\$234,000
Subtotal	\$76,000	\$977,000	\$544,000	\$1,597,000

Oh, That Pesky Open Meeting Law

Assessors: Another Meeting, Another OML Complaint

AS REPORTED IN THE LAST ISSUE, an assistant attorney general in the Attorney General’s Division of Open Government told the Board of Assessors to revise minutes of July 20 and Sept. 13, 2023 so they inform.

That was in OML 2023-241, from Matthew Lindberg, dated Dec. 28, 2023.

Another assistant attorney general in that division also told the board in a separate determination — OML 2023-221 dated Dec. 11, 2023 — that while declining to review meetings of May 31, 2022, because they were still in draft form, she found the board “violated the Open Meeting Law by failing to timely approve” them.

Would Find Minutes ‘Inadequate’

But, Carrie Benedon also noted, “had the minutes been approved in their current form, they would be inadequate.”

The draft May 31, 2022, minutes are below. Compare them with the draft minutes for Feb. 8, 2024.

Minutes Were Revised — But ...

The board — principal assessor Ross Vivori, Tammy Touponce and Carol Strommer, who is also Mr. Vivori’s office assistant — did revise minutes of the meetings.

As THE NEWSletter, I’d filed the original complaint about the minutes. And when I read the revisions, I filed complaints about them, too.

Play a Game With Feb. 6 Agenda

So here’s a game for you. Read the Feb. 6 agenda and answer:

- What meeting minutes were to be approved?
- What OML complaint? Who filed it?

Questions Also for Minutes

Here are additional questions for the Feb. 8 minutes:

- What was said and done about the OML complaint?
- How many entities wanted abatements and exemptions? One entity seeking multiple abatements and exemptions or several?
- Why did the entity(ies) want an abatement/exemption?
- How many properties are involved?
- Where is/are the property/properties?

Game Rules To Follow

In his determination of OML 2023-241, Assistant Attorney General Lindberg wrote that the list of topics for a meeting’s notice “must have sufficient specificity to reasonably advise the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting.”

Assistant Attorney General Benedon notes:

“A public body must create and maintain accurate minutes of all meetings, including executive sessions, setting forth the date, time and place, the members present or absent, a summary of the discussions on each subject, a list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting, the decisions made and the actions taken at each meeting, including the record of all votes. ...”

“The Open Meeting Law requires that meeting minutes include more than a statement *that* a public body held a discussion about a specified topic; the Law requires that the minutes summarize the substance of the public body’s discussion,” she noted. (*Italics in original.*)

The determinations are online at [mass.gov/the-open-meeting-law](https://www.mass.gov/the-open-meeting-law) or tell me to send them.

New Member Sought for Board

Back to the Board of Assessors:

Carol Strommer, the office’s administrative assessor, had been appointed to a temporary term that ended Dec. 31.

I couldn’t find notice of the vacancy in any of the usual places board vacancies are listed.

On Jan. 9, town manager Mark Pruhenski appointed Ms. Strommer to another temporary term that ends June 24 or until a permanent Board of Assessors member can be recruited (whichever comes first).”

What the board is supposed to do is at <https://www.townofgb.org/assessor>, its page on the town website.

Interested? If you are, you should notify Mr. Pruhenski at the Town Hall or email him at mpruhenski@townofgb.org. -EWM

Agenda
Board of Assessor Meeting
Thursday February 8, 2024
2:00 PM
Select Board Meeting Room
Great Barrington Town Hall
334 Main St.
Great Barrington, MA. 01230

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Review and Approve Prior Meeting Minutes.
3. Discuss open meeting law complaint.
4. Public Comment
5. Convene into Executive Session (and will not return to open session) a. Executive Session under GL Ch.59, s 60, Purpose (7).To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real estate, abatements and /or personal / financial information if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body.
 - i. Motion: Move that the Board meet in executive session pursuant to GL Ch.59, s 60, Purpose (7).o ii.
 - ii. Roll Call Vote
6. Executive Session – Under GL Ch.59, s 60, Purpose (7).
7. 6.Adjournment

Pursuant to MGL, 7C 30A sec. 20(f), after notifying the Chair of the public body, any person may make a video or audio recording of an open session of a meeting of a public body, or may transmit the meeting through any medium. At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair shall inform other attendees of any such recordings. Any member of the public wishing to speak at the meeting must receive permission of the Chair.

Board of Assessors Minutes of Meeting of February 8, 2024 - DRAFT

Present: Tammy Touponce
 Carol Strommer
 Ross Vivori, Principal Assessor

1. Meeting called to order by Ross Vivori at 2:00 pm
2. Approve Prior Meeting Minutes:
3. Discuss open meeting law compliant.
4. Public Comment: None
5. Move to Executive Session- A motion was made by the chair to move to Executive Session under G.L. c 59, S 60, Purpose 7, to discuss abatement & exemptions under consideration by the board of assessors. A roll call vote was taken, all board members voted unanimously to move to executive session and not return to open session. The Open session was adjourned at 2:20
6. Adjourn from Open Session - Having no further business and without any questions from citizens, a motion by Assessor Vivori, seconded by Assessor Strommer, and with all in favor, the Board voted to adjourn at 2:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

ROSS A. Vivori
 Principal Assessor.

Board of Assessor
Draft Meeting Minutes
May 31, 2022
In person at Town Hall

1. Meeting called to order at 2:01 pm
2. Roll count taken – John Katz, Bruce Firger, Ross Vivori, and Carol Strommer, All present.
3. Move to Executive Session at 2:15
4. Discuss JABC applications;
 - a. Fair Grounds
 - b. Green Berkshire Inc.

Respect fully submitted
 Ross Vivori

January Police Report

Great Barrington police can be reached by calling 911 for an emergency or 528-0306.

The department's website is greatbarringtonpolice.com and its Facebook page is www.facebook.com/GBPDMA/

Police at 911 handle ambulance dispatch. The station is at 465 South Main St.

Police officers wear cameras to help document investigations and incidents.

The department participates in the state Disability Indicator Program. Forms are at mass.gov/doc/disability-indicator-form.

The following are taken from the month's police report.

January

POLICE RECEIVED a call Jan. 24 that a man wearing all dark clothing was in the middle of South Main Street. "Caller had to swerve into oncoming travel lane to avoid a collision," the report states.

The next entry is that a vehicle struck the pedestrian, identified as Niall Nordoff. He was killed.

Also during January, police arrested two men, one from West Stockbridge and one from Great Barrington, on drug charges.

Jonah Wolf Christianson, 28, of 47 Grove St. was charged with distributing cocaine and drug trafficking. Konstantin Walter Benson, 21, of West Stockbridge was charged with class B Drug possession.

Gabriel Ibanez of Monterey, 31, was arrested for operating a vehicle under the influence of liquor.

Richard Minacci, 60, described as homeless, was issued a summons for trespass.

Police are investigating forgery of a \$9,900 bank check.

27 Vehicular Collisions Reported

Twenty-seven vehicular collisions were reported in January, including 21 that involved two cars.

One collision was in the rotary at South Main Street and Maple Avenue, next to the police station.

Four deer collided with vehicles on Seekonk Cross Road, Park Street, Alford Road and South Egremont Road.

Also, three vehicles went off the road, plus a car hit the Fairview Center for Wound Care building at 10 Maple Ave.

Keith Winthrop Ryon, 38, of 284 Main St. was arrested for driving under the influence of liquor, negligent operation of a motor vehicle and speeding after his vehicle hit a fence on Monterey Road.

Another car hit a mail box and one hit a pole.

Police responded to two disturbances.

Radar on 15 Roadways

Police ran radar on 15 roads, including 14 times on Main Street, six times on South Main and 12 times on Stockbridge Road, of which three were at Fountain Pond.

Also, 10 times, Monument Valley Road, seven, Old Stockbridge Road; six, Egremont Plain Road; five, East Street; four, State Road; and three each, North Plain and Alford roads.

Also, twice each, Maple Avenue and Division Street; and once each, Park Street, Taconic Avenue and Hurlburt Road.

Police helped at six incidents of people making suicidal statements. Two people were taken to Berkshire Medical Center.

Police stopped 20 vehicles and issued citations/warnings to 19 drivers.

Emotional Distress?

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide or is in emotional distress, the Police Department encourages you to reach out for help.

-Text "988," the suicide and crisis lifeline. Free and confidential emotional support is available 24/7. Call or text 988 (Veterans: Press 1, Spanish Line: Press 2)

-Chat is available on 988lifeline.org/chat

-Visit 988lifeline.org for additional information.

Also: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/suicide-prevention-crisis-hotlines>.

They helped 18 drivers who were locked out of their vehicles.

Police were called after two incidents involving altercations at Timberlyn Heights Rehabilitation and Care Center.

Spam Calls Reported

Someone reported receiving a call that her daughter had been abducted. She hadn't been; she was fine.

Someone else reported a call that if he would provide his Medicare information, he would get a new Medicare card. He didn't provide anything.

Another person was told to send money or be killed. He didn't and wasn't.

A hiker at Monument Mountain reservation off Stockbridge Road reported that his car window was smashed and his wallet taken.

Southern Berkshire Ambulance reported Jan. 28 that it had "only one ambulance staffed for entire 24 hours" so calls would have to go to mutual aid, the police report stated.

QUESTION FOR POLICE?

Chief Paul Storti says to call him at 528-0306 or email him at pstorti@twnofgb.org.

January Fire Calls

FIREFIGHTERS responded to 81 incidents during January, including at a Jan. 30 fire at 4 Manville St.

Fire damage was minor in a garage storage unit and moderate in the apartment above, Fire Chief Scott Turner said.

Sixteen department firefighters responded, helped at the scene by Egremont Fire Chief Joe Schneider, Great Barrington police and the Fire Department Support Group.

The fire was reported to be under control in 15 minutes.

Sheffield firefighters and an engine covered the State Road Fire Station and answered an alarm from Simon's Rock Early College.

THE NEWSletter forwarded the department's news release and photos about the fire to its email list.

Other Action During Month

Firefighters rescued a hiker on the trail near Fountain Pond, off Stockbridge Road. There were no injuries, Chief Turner said.

They helped at a house fire in Otis.

They responded to two smoke/odor incidents. Chief Turner said one was on Main Street when a resident left a paint brush in a pot of boiling water on the stove. No damage resulted. The other was on Park Street when a pellet stove malfunctioned. There was no fire or damage, the chief said.

Firefighters helped medical crews 32 times, including at a vehicle-pedestrian collision.

They also responded to 27 false alarms for hazardous materials, fire or carbon monoxide alarms that activated because of malfunction or unintentionally.

Responses From Each Station

Chief Turner said crews from the Housatonic fire station responded to 12 incidents, including an unauthorized burning and six medical assists.

The State Road station responded to 69 calls, including the building fires on Manville Street and in Otis.



Buying a house?

A family of 4, with an annual household income of less than \$92,100, can qualify for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund's **Down Payment Assistance Program** – an interest free loan of 10% of the purchase price, up to \$25,000! The loan does not need to be repaid until the house is sold or transferred.

Visit www.gbhousing.org for details.

AN UNPAID PUBLIC SERVICE AD

Former Housatonic School Officially Sold for \$100

In the last issue, I noted in Real Estate Transactions that:

“-Great Barrington Town to WDM Properties, 207 Pleasant St., Great Barrington, \$100. (This is under the usual transaction amount but it is the former Housatonic School and thus worth special notice. EWM)”

Some people asked me whether the school building had been sold. That’s how I knew for sure that not everyone reads Real Estate Transactions.

Actually, I knew that from your readership surveys. It’s OK — you don’t have to read everything! -EWM

Clerk’s Corner

By Town Clerk Jennifer Messina and Assistant Town Clerk Katherine Couch

Annual Street Listing (a/k/a Annual Census): Please return the form that was mailed to you in December.

The census is critical for Great Barrington to maintain accurate population information for municipal services, calculating state and federal funding allocations and projecting school enrollments and costs.

It also assists individuals with proof of residence for housing and veterans’ benefits, in-state college tuition, insurance benefits and more.

If you can’t find your form, you can go online to townofgb.org, then to the Town Clerk’s page. In the blue box on the left side of the page, click on “Census Information.” Or call us and we’ll mail you one.

All **dog license renewals** must be made before March 31 to avoid a late fee.

You can reach us at (413) 528-1619, press 2 then 1. If we don’t answer, please leave a message. **We will call you back.**

The office is open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed for lunch from 1 to 1:30 p.m.

Happy Spring! Jenn and Kathy

Recent Real Estate Transactions

THE SOUTHERN Berkshire Registry of Deeds is in the Great Barrington Town Hall and open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Documents are online at www.masslandrecords.com.

Following are recent transactions of \$35,000 or more in Great Barrington (including Housatonic), Egremont, Monterey, Alford & West Stockbridge.

-STT LLC to Lori Beth Haims, 113 Hillsdale Road, Egremont, \$401,000.

-Stuart M. Rosen & Suzanne Butterfield Rose, trustees, Shun Toll Realty Trust, to Kenneth Goldman, trustee, Ross Goldman 2012 Grantor Trust, 59 Shun Toll Road, Egremont, \$3.75 million.

-Kimberley C. Hyatt, Kimberley Beattie & Jonathan E.

Beattie to Undermountain Road LLC, property on Undermountain Road, Egremont, \$390,000.

-Adam Zipkin & Rebecca Dince Zipkin to Jane R. Marcus & Johnson M. Tyler, 165 North Baldwin Hill Road, Egremont, \$2.82 million.

-Daniel M. Kasper & Sharon L. Kasper, trustees, Kingsmont Real Estate Nominee Trust, to Estelle Miller, trustee, Estelle Miller Revocable Trust of 2007, unit 203, 34 Bridge St., Great Barrington, \$600,000.

-James J. Phelan to William D. Schillinger & Elizabeth Rose, 29 Swann Road, Monterey, \$280,000.

-Daniel L. Kurtz & Elizabeth Olofson to Daniel L. Kurtz & Shveta Katar Kurtz, property on Route 23, Monterey, \$350,000.

-Susan H. LeProvest & estate of Amy H. Enoe to William J. Gould Associates Inc., property on Main Road, Monterey, \$50,000.

-Peter O. Bodnar & Robin M. Weiser to Timothy J. Aluise & Amy S. Friend, 148 Steven Lake Way, Monterey, \$2.4 million.

-WALM LLC to Pagliari LLC, 3-5 Center St., West Stockbridge, \$650,000.

-Siri R. Sakkaf, trustee, Sakkaf Family Realty Trust, to German Kroytor & Nicole L. Kroytor, 1 Furnace Road, West Stockbridge, \$625,000.

-Lisa M. Greene to Janine S. Begasse, 39 Bidwell Road, Monterey, \$1.4 million.

-Howard Schlesinger & estate of Sarah M. Gossage to Quentin Avery & Carol Avery, 2 Sheffield Road, Egremont, \$712,500.

-Amy Townsend to Eve Caimano, 296 North Plain Road, Great Barrington, \$465,000.

-Eve M. Carmano to Herbert W. Staniszewski & Kathleen Staniszewski, trustees, Herbert W. Staniszewski Revocable Trust & Kathleen Staniszewski Revocable Trust, 162 Christian Hill Road, Great Barrington, \$929,000.

-Myrna Jargowsky & Daniel Bailes to Sharon G. Ferguson, unit 16, 80 Taconic Ave., Great Barrington, \$565,000.

-Michael Singer & Margaret F. Singer to Ilana Siegal, 10 South St., Great Barrington, \$1 million.

-Harriet Fabrykant to James B. Ketchen & Susan B. Ketchen, property on Seekonk & Green River oads, Alford, \$107,000.

-David J. Ullrich & Cynthia J. Ullrich to Melodie Rose MacNeil & Arthur Richard MacNeil, 10 Ramsey Ave., Great Barrington, \$560,000.

-Alicia A. Jost, Alicia A. Irsfield & Eric Jost to Abigail M. Wade, 5 Depot St., Great Barrington, \$275,000.

-Sandra L. Pratt & Glenn R. Pratt to Tyler J. Wade, 232 Grove St., Great Barrington, \$245,000.

-Michael Heath to James L. Mercer & Mary D. Mercer, trustees, Chalkey Nominee Trust, 541 Main St., Great Barrington, \$100,000.

-6 Parley LLC to Parley Holdings LLC, 6 Parley St., Great Barrington, \$520,000.

-Ryan D. Salamie to Ryan J. Vandervoort, 47 Stockbridge Road, West Stockbridge, \$150,000.

-Cassi Amanda Gibson to Giada Lubomirski, 7 Stockbridge Road, West Stockbridge, \$550,000.

Stockbridge

The Middle Berkshire Registry of Deeds is at 44 Bank Row, Pittsfield. It is open from 8:30 a.m. to 3:59 p.m. weekdays. Documents are online at masslandrecords.com/BerkMiddle/

-Marc Teich, Michael Teich & Jaime Teich Entner, trustees, Jack Teich 2005 Family Trust, to Alberto Barcenas & Amanda L. Barcenas, property on Rattlesnake Mountain Road, Stockbridge, \$150,000.

-Jonathan R. Aronoff, Nina L. Aronoff & Kenneth D. Aronoff to Figrocker Berkshire LLC, 19 Yale Hill Road, \$755,000.

-Robert A. Schubert & Audrey Schachnow to Andrew O. Smith & Lavea Brachman, 8 Meadow Road, Stockbridge, \$1.82 million.

-Ethan Jadow to Anne Wein, 1 Shamrock St., Stockbridge, \$484,000.

-Pearse A. Murray & Elizabeth F. Murray to Kathryn Noyes, 30 Mahkeenac Road, Stockbridge, \$809,000.

-Miyo Kato & Miyoko Kato to Frances & Cole LLC, 15 Park St., Stockbridge, \$390,000.

-Derek V. Witt, trustee, JCD Realty Trust, to Lise LaPrelle, unit 10, 57 Main St., Stockbridge, \$335,000.

-Linda S. Olson, trustee, Linda S. Olson Living Trust, to Nancy Ann Kasten & David Eli Stern, 12 Beachwood Drive, Stockbridge, \$600,000.

-Carol Andrea Whitcomb, trustee, Carol Andrea 2007 Revocable Trust, to Edward Steve Lichtenberg & Betsy Suzanne Aubrey, 3 Lakeview Drive, Stockbridge, \$1.8 million.

-Michael A. Shirley & Jane S. Shirley to Andrew M. Ebert & Nance E. Levine-Ebert, 13 Cherry Hill Road, Stockbridge, \$562,500.

BUILDING PERMITS WILL RETURN WHEN THE BUILDING DEPARTMENT HAS THEM DONE.

THE NEWSletter unfortunately lacks the space to include all details and all survivors.

Arthur Scott Bachetti

Arthur Scott Bachetti, 71, of Sheffield died Feb. 20 at home.

He opened Bachetti's Auto Body in 1975 and Bachetti's Auto Sales and Service in 1989. In 1989, he formed Bachetti Motor-sports.

Mr. Bachetti leaves his wife, Sherri; his sons, Andy and Greg; four grandchildren; and his sister, Jean Christman.

He was predeceased by his parents, Arthur and Judy Bachetti, and his grandchild Colby Bachetti.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to Donation Community Outreach at the Sheffield Police Department through the funeral home.

Duke L. Donsbough

Duke L. Donsbough, 86, of Great Barrington died Feb. 9 at Hartford (Conn.) Hospital.

He graduated from Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, Conn.

He was a subcontractor for the U.S. Postal Service for 19 years and was then facilities and grounds manager for the Great Barrington Savings Bank until his retirement.

He had coached junior football and Housatonic Bitty Basketball.

Mr. Donsbough leaves his son, Lee Donsbough; two granddaughters; and his companion of 22 years, Theodora "Teddi" Killiard.

He was predeceased by his wife of 43 years, Elaine Rhodes Donsbough; his sister, Polly Ann Broderick Storms; his mother, Polly Miller Shove; his stepfather, Lawrence Shove; and his father, Frederick Earl Donsbough.

Birches-Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to the Southern Berkshire Volunteer Ambulance Squad through the website sbvas.com or through the funeral home.

Emilia J. Bassett Fracasso

Emilia J. Bassett Fracasso, 85, formerly of Sheffield, died Feb. 20.

She had worked for Bicon Electronics.

Ms. Fracasso leaves her children, Catherine Joy, Albert Bassett, Dickie Bassett, and Andrew Bassett; 13 grandchildren; 23 great-grandchildren; and her sister, Maria Colli.

She was predeceased in 1997 by her husband of 42 years, Richard Bassett. She was also predeceased by her brother, Stanley Kleiner, and daughter Mary Bassett.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to the Berkshire Humane Society through the funeral home.

Michael Heath

Michael Heath, 61, of Main Street, Great Barrington, died Feb. 9 at Berkshire Medical Center.

After attending local schools, he worked in food service, including as a dietary aide at

Recent Obituaries

Fairview Commons Nursing Facility and at the former Captain Toss Seafood Restaurant and Dunkin Donuts.

Mr. Heath leaves his partner, Tammy Kubik; his sister, Linda Owens; his nephew, Tony Vallone; and his niece, Gina Vallone.

He was predeceased by his parents, Elery and Dorothy Heath; his brother, Mark Heath; and his nephew, Peter Vallone.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to the American Cancer Society through the funeral home.

Niall Stewart Nordoff

Niall Stewart Nordoff, 41, of Sheffield died Jan. 24 in Great Barrington in a vehicular accident.

He grew up in North Egremont and attended Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School, and High Mowing High School. He graduated from Mount Everett Regional High School.

He was a landscaper, gardener and mason.

Mr. Nordoff leaves his parents, Anthony Nordoff and Bonnie Nordoff; his brother, Cy; his sister, Jessica; his stepmother, Christi Nordoff; his stepbrother, Mat Inglis; and his stepsister, Amy Inglis.

Birches-Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to Christian Community at 10 Green River Lane, Hillsdale, N.Y. 12529.

Peter Pshenishny

Peter Pshenishny, 96, of Sheffield died Feb. 25 at home.

After graduating from the former Sheffield High School, he served in the Army.

He was a dairy farmer for many years.

Mr. Pshenishny leaves two sons, Nick and Gary; his daughter, Lauri; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

His wife of 71 years, Aurora, died in 2021. He was also predeceased by his son David; two brothers, Tony and John; and his sister, Anne Phillips.

Birches-Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to Southern Berkshire Ambulance Squad or HospiceCare in the Berkshires through the funeral home.

Joseph R. Race

Joseph R. Race, 53, of Ashley Falls died Feb. 7 at Berkshire Medical Center.

He graduated in 1989 from Monument Mountain Regional High School.

He was a caretaker for local properties.

Mr. Race leaves his father, Francis Race; his brother, Kenneth Race; and a niece and nephew.

Birches-Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

John Rybacki

John M. Rybacki, 36, of Lee died Feb. 8, two days before his 37th birthday.

He grew up in Great Barrington and graduated high school in Florida, then earned an associate's degree from Berkshire Community College.

He had a certificate in welding and was a journeyman ironworker, working on projects across Massachusetts.

Mr. Rybacki leaves his children, Blake Rybacki and Isabella Crittendon; his sister, Kendall Rybacki; and his parents, Peter and Geri Ryback of Great Barrington.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

John Snyder

John Snyder, 83, of Great Barrington died Feb. 13.

He supervised the minerals department of Pfizer for more than 40 years.

He was in the Army Reserves from 1961 to 1963.

Mr. Snyder was predeceased by his wife of more than 60 years, Barbara Snyder, and his siblings Billy and Betty-Anne.

He leaves his siblings Shirley Roots, Nancy Peck, Lorraine Love, Anne McDermott, Lily Hankey, Janey Eichstedt, James Snyder, David Snyder, and Larry Ball; three sons, John Jr., Joe and Jeff; and five grandchildren.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

NEWS from Page 6

Ms. Amendola's skills include working with Microsoft Office, with extensive experience in Excel, Outlook, Forms, and Teams, according to her resume.

DPW Promotes Two

Steve Larkin has been promoted to **Department of Public Works' highway and facilities superintendent**. He had been buildings and grounds foreman.

Brian Aherne, formerly the buildings and grounds crew leader, is now **grounds and facilities foreman**.

Two Full-time Firefighters Hired

Chris Laramee and Josh Siele have been hired as **staff firefighters** in the Fire Department, bringing that number to four, plus Chief Scott Turner.

In the TriTown Connector transportation program, Mary Beth McDonough and Deborah Stiles have been named **assistant operations managers**.

THE NEWSletter makes a great gift

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Bill Cooke, a former selectman and now a member of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund board, wrote this proposal, presented at the board's meeting Feb. 20.

GB **Great Barrington** **AHTF** **Affordable Housing Trust Fund**



The Oak Bluffs concept — a proposal

I propose that the GBAHTF explore the possibility of creating “small house” developments on town lots, purchased or otherwise acquired by the GBAHTF. The Trust would own the property and make it available (long term lease or similar arrangement) to income qualified potential homeowners.

Depending on zoning, up to 8 units could be put on a single lot. All 8 units would be built at the same time, to save on construction costs and create a cohesive look. The cohesive look I have in mind would be based on the Cottages in the Oak Bluffs Campground (photos attached).

All 8 units would need to be under contract before construction begins. The homeowners will be able to purchase the houses at an affordable price, using a standard bank loan. A permanent deed restriction would be placed on the houses, linking the sales price to the AMI. (If the AMI goes up 5% the house price can go up by 5%). The goal is to keep the house permanently affordable. The town will use the deed restricted price for the real estate tax assessment. The land would not be taxed because it is owned by the AHTF (the town, essentially).

Even with this deed restriction, this is a path to wealth building for the homeowner, because they will be building equity every month. There is also the tax benefit of home ownership, which will make the housing even more affordable.

All of the units will be built by one contractor, but each unit will be paid for by the homeowner. While there should be a cohesive look to the entire development, homeowners will be able to choose from several basic designs and make modifications to suit their individual budget.

Cost breakdown

All of the homes will be between 600 and 900 sq. ft. Size of the building and/or down payment assistance can be adjusted to fit individual budgets. I've used 750 sq. ft. in this example.

Land is owned by the AHTF/Town

750 square foot house X \$300 per square foot to build = \$225,000

Down payment \$15,000 (from AHTF)

Loan amount = \$210,000

30 year fixed rate mortgage @ 7.25% = \$1,433/month

Taxes, insurance, etc. (building only) = \$536/month

Total monthly expenses = \$1,969

Two person AMI = $\$81,200 \div 12 = \$6,766 \times 30\% = \$2,030$

This and the next four pages are reproduced from “FISCAL 2025 MUNICIPAL BUDGET July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025 Town of Great Barrington,” presented Feb. 6 by town manager Mark Pruhenski.

PROPOSED FY25 EXPENSES AT-A-GLANCE:

TOWN OPERATING BUDGET: The proposed operating budget for the coming year is \$16,505,858 which is an increase of \$1,886,339 or 12.9% over FY24.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT: The proposed operating budget for the Enterprise Fund is \$3,153,295 which is an increase of \$328,584 or 11.63% over FY24. As an Enterprise Fund, all expenses associated with this budget are funded by the users of the system. The proposed Capital Budget for the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) is \$2,650,000 this year, to cover the projects noted in tab 7 of your budget books.

CAPITAL BUDGET: The proposed general fund capital budget requests a total authorization of \$10,271,734 this year, with \$1,618,734 in funding expected through other (non-borrowing) revenue sources such as the CPA, grants, and Chapter 90 funding.

SCHOOL ASSESSMENT: The estimated assessment for our share of the Berkshire Hills Regional School District Budget is \$21,040,872, which is an increase of \$770,139 or 3.5% over FY24.

ESTIMATED FY25 REVENUES AT-A-GLANCE:

PROPERTY TAXES: This year’s budget assumes that \$30,921,636 of revenue will be collected through local property taxes. An increase of \$3,118,335 or 11.2%.

LOCAL RECEIPTS: This year’s budget assumes that \$2,222,500 will be collected through our local revenue streams. This conservative estimate is unchanged from last year, and includes motor vehicle excise taxes, license/permit and inspectional fees, local option taxes from rooms, meals, and the sale of retail marijuana products.

STATE AID: This year’s budget assumes that we will receive approximately \$1,428,855 in state aid, an increase of \$38,582 or 2.8%.

FREE CASH: Our available certified free cash is \$10,170,900. Retained Earnings for the Enterprise Fund is certified at \$6,461,206. This year’s budget proposes to apply \$3,675,000 in Free Cash to reduce the tax levy, a decrease of \$500,000 or 12% below FY24.

OPERATING BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS AT-A-GLANCE
BY DEPARTMENT IN THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY APPEAR IN YOUR BUDGET BINDER:

Assessors 01141- This year's budget is proposed to increase by \$35,488 or 17.69%. This is due to an increase in contracted service costs associated with the upcoming FY25 town-wide re-certification year (this occurs every 5 years).

Human Resources (HR) 01152- This year's HR budget reflects an increase of \$36,591 or 86.01%. This sharp increase is a result of our mid-year transition from a part-time Shared HR Director position to a dedicated full-time position after the completion of a 5-town pilot program in FY23 and early FY24. We currently have roughly 130 part and full-time employees.

Buildings and Grounds 01192- Several increases are being proposed in this budget that total \$106,702 or 11.63%. Most are necessary to address needed repairs to our town's many aging buildings, to make equipment repairs, and to provide funding for safety trainings for our public works staff.

Police Department 01210- This budget includes an increase of \$157,087 or 7.91%, being driven mostly by the need to increase salary lines to cover necessary overtime and remain competitive with other Berkshire towns. No new hires are being proposed this year.

Fire Department 01220- Up this year by \$59,798 or 7.13%. The majority of this increase is in salaries (transitioning to a full year fourth firefighter position that was approved last year) and vehicle and equipment maintenance. The maintenance/repairs line has been underfunded for several years. No new hires are being proposed this year.

Building Commissioner/Inspector Department 01241- Recognizing the challenges of recruiting qualified candidates for this department, we transitioned from a two-person Building Department to a Shared Building Department covering permitting and inspectional services for four (4) communities including the towns of Lenox, Lee, and Stockbridge. The department now consists of a Building Commissioner, and three (3) local Building Inspectors in addition to administrative staff. While the increase is steep at \$283,265 or 148.59%, Great Barrington is only responsible for a portion of that total. This will be discussed in more detail during our budget process.

DPW Highways 01422- An increase of \$64,680 or 3.29%. This is primarily attributed to increases in the following lines: street and bridge maintenance and repairs, police details, travel/training, and the Mechanic's tool allowance for maintaining our fleets. No new hires are being proposed this year.

School administrators prepared this list, which was on the agenda for the Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee's Feb. 29 meeting.

FOCUS AREAS 2.21.2024

Communications

- To parents/families
- To School Committee – check ins, written updates, access, etc.
- To residents/tax payers

Newsletters

- Website development (Building Project now, District and Schools for August 1)

Communications consultants and their next steps

- Structures
- Content generation
- Staff training and support

Budget

- Budget 101 in September
- Connect with PTAs / school councils / staff
- Finance committee discussion about ongoing for meeting rising costs - health care, pensions, salaries, etc. - without sacrificing services

Policy

- All policies connected to search (March 5 shared in folder and March 12 Policy Meeting)
- Personal electronics
- Great Schools Partnership Policy Review

Negotiations

- IBB training
- Actual negotiations with teachers

Strategic Planning

- Portrait of a Graduate
- 5 year District Improvement/Strategic Plan
- 5 year School Improvement Plans
- DEIB update and outcomes in light of STOKE report
- CVTE Plan

Community Services 01528- This line is eliminated entirely for FY25 due to the need to reduce the proposed budget. This will be discussed in more detail during our budget process. Historical Appropriations: FY17/\$20k, FY18/\$35k, FY19/\$30k, FY20/\$35k, FY21/\$25k, FY22/\$30k, FY23/\$35k and FY24/\$25k.

Council on Aging 01541- This budget was increased by \$69,069 or 38.80%. The majority of the increase is related to two lines----van drivers and outreach services. The van driver line will cover the salaries of two (2) additional drivers for our senior and micro-transit program. It's possible that this will be funded by a grant. The outreach line covers the salary of our Senior Outreach Coordinator.

Debt Service 01752- A sharp increase of \$882,284 or 35.35%. This increase is required to fund the interest on short and long-term bonds and fund debt issuance costs as detailed in the debt service budget.

Retirement 01911- An increase of \$72,798 or 6.29%. This reflects the increase in our Medicare and Retirement Contribution assessments.

CONCLUSION:

This budget memo and the proposed budget before you, is the culmination of hundreds of hours of staff time. As our work concludes with these presentations, your work begins. Staff will be present throughout the hearings to answer any questions you may have.

There's no question in my mind----this was the most difficult budget to draft in my time as your Town Manager. Due to significant increases in fixed costs like debt service, our retirement assessment, insurance expenses, as well increases in our public safety budgets and buildings and grounds maintenance lines, many other budget requests were scaled-back or eliminated altogether in some cases.

I am very much looking forward to working with the Selectboard and Finance Committee in the coming weeks to discuss our shared priorities and develop a final budget that we can all support at the conclusion of this process.

I am grateful for the support of the various department heads and staff that participated in developing this budget and for their creative suggestions and ideas that will allow us to continue providing quality services while remaining fiscally responsible to our residents and taxpayers.

A special thank you to our Financial Coordinator Allie Crespo for all her work developing this year's budget, and to our Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold for his time developing and managing our Capital Improvement Plan.

Mark A. Pruhenski- Town Manager

Fiscal 2025 Budget Projection

	FY2024 Town Meeting Budget	FY2024 Budget at Tax Rate	FY2025 Proposed Budget	\$ Change from FY24 Tax Rate	% Change from FY24 Tax Rate
REVENUE:					
Tax Levy	\$ 27,159,764	\$ 27,803,301	\$ 30,921,636	\$ 3,118,335	11.2%
State Aid	\$ 1,379,872	\$ 1,390,273	\$ 1,428,855	\$ 38,582	2.8%
Local Receipts	\$ 2,222,500	\$ 2,222,500	\$ 2,222,500	\$ -	0.0%
Enterprise Funds	\$ 2,824,711	\$ 3,439,111	\$ 3,153,295	\$ (285,816)	-8.3%
Free Cash to Reduce Tax Levy	\$ 4,175,000	\$ 4,175,000	\$ 3,675,000	\$ (500,000)	-12.0%
Retained Earnings/Enterprise Funds	\$ 614,400	\$ -	\$ 1,150,000	\$ 1,150,000	100.0%
Community Preservation Funds	\$ -	\$ 1,320,000	\$ 1,320,000	\$ -	0.0%
Free Cash for Special Article/Capital Equipment Funding	\$ 1,595,894	\$ 1,448,394	\$ 1,020,326	\$ (428,068)	-29.6%
Other Available Funds (Grants, etc.)	\$ -	\$ 1,698,500	\$ 1,190,000	\$ (508,500)	-29.9%
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 39,972,141	\$ 43,497,079	\$ 46,081,612	\$ 2,584,533	5.9%
TO BE RAISED:					
Town Budget	\$ 14,577,919	\$ 14,619,519	\$ 16,505,858	\$ 1,886,339	12.9%
School Budget Assessment	\$ 20,333,733	\$ 20,333,733	\$ 21,040,872	\$ 707,139	3.5%
Special Articles & Capital (Tax Levy)	\$ -	\$ 140,000	\$ 408,734	\$ 268,734	192.0%
From Free Cash	\$ 1,331,894	\$ 1,448,394	\$ 1,020,326	\$ (428,068)	-29.6%
From Other Available Funds (Grants, etc.)	\$ 614,400	\$ 1,698,500	\$ 1,190,000	\$ (508,500)	-29.9%
Enterprise Fund (Wastewater)	\$ 2,824,711	\$ 3,439,111	\$ 3,153,295	\$ (285,816)	-8.3%
From Retained Earnings (Wastewater)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,150,000	\$ 1,150,000	100.0%
Community Preservation Funds	\$ -	\$ 1,320,000	\$ 1,320,000	\$ -	0.0%
Total Appropriations	\$ 39,682,657	\$ 42,999,257	\$ 45,789,085	\$ 2,789,828	
OTHER AMOUNTS:					
Amounts certified for tax title purposes	\$ -	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ (25,000)	0.0%
State Offsets	\$ 17,981	\$ 17,981	\$ 18,448	\$ 467	2.6%
Snow & Ice Deficit	\$ -	\$ 158,374	\$ -	\$ (158,374)	0.0%
Berkshire Regional Planning Assessment	\$ 6,108	\$ 6,106	\$ -	\$ (6,106)	-100.0%
Other Deficits to be Raised (Grants, etc.)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%
	\$ 24,089	\$ 207,461	\$ 18,448	\$ (189,013)	-91.1%
State Assessments	\$ 65,395	\$ 65,395	\$ 74,079	\$ 8,684	13.3%
Abatements/Exemptions	\$ 200,000	\$ 224,966	\$ 200,000	\$ (24,966)	-11.1%
TOTAL TO BE RAISED	\$ 39,972,141	\$ 43,497,079	\$ 46,081,612	\$ 2,584,533	5.9%

UPDATED 02/06/24

The information below is corrected from the original History of Property Values and Tax Levies in the budget presented Feb. 6 by town manager Mark Pruhenski. That history showed an estimated median tax bill of \$1,176.23 for a home assessed at \$440,100.

The estimate was corrected after it was noted as incorrect during the Selectboard and Finance Committee meeting held Feb. 14.

History of Property Values and Tax Levies

Budget Year	Total Assessed Value	Property Tax	Tax Rate per \$1,000 Assessed Value	Median Single Family Home Value	Median Tax Bill	Increase/ (Decrease)	% Increase/ Decrease
2025*	\$ 2,001,677,517	\$ 30,921,636	\$15.45	\$440,100	\$6,798.60	\$685.61	11.2%
2024	\$ 2,001,677,517	\$ 27,803,301	\$13.89	\$440,100	\$6,112.99	\$490.62	8.7%
2023	\$ 1,860,810,837	\$ 26,181,608	\$14.07	\$399,600	\$5,622.37	\$445.15	8.6%
2022	\$ 1,691,449,482	\$ 25,134,939	\$14.86	\$348,400	\$5,177.22	\$157.16	3.1%
2021	\$ 1,540,736,695	\$ 24,636,380	\$15.99	\$313,950	\$5,020.06	\$80.07	1.6%
2020	\$ 1,523,392,459	\$ 23,993,431	\$15.75	\$313,650	\$4,939.99	\$135.17	2.8%
2019	\$ 1,494,974,463	\$ 23,500,999	\$15.72	\$305,650	\$4,804.82	\$295.84	6.6%
2018	\$ 1,440,219,751	\$ 21,574,492	\$14.98	\$301,000	\$4,508.98	\$150.88	3.5%
2017	\$ 1,426,915,909	\$ 20,832,972	\$14.60	\$298,500	\$4,358.10	\$123.97	2.9%
2016	\$ 1,386,204,580	\$ 19,808,863	\$14.29	\$296,300	\$4,234.13	\$194.96	4.8%
2015	\$ 1,370,499,134	\$ 18,803,248	\$13.72	\$294,400	\$4,039.17	\$185.42	4.8%
2014	\$ 1,322,379,245	\$ 17,931,463	\$13.56	\$284,200	\$3,853.75	-\$111.90	-2.8%
2013	\$ 1,360,883,527	\$ 17,882,010	\$13.14	\$301,800	\$3,965.65	\$16.53	0.4%
2012	\$ 1,351,621,807	\$ 17,733,277	\$13.12	\$301,000	\$3,949.12	\$140.61	3.7%
2011	\$ 1,392,020,846	\$ 16,926,973	\$12.16	\$313,200	\$3,808.51	\$4.61	0.1%
2010	\$ 1,451,065,595	\$ 16,716,276	\$11.52	\$330,200	\$3,803.90	\$138.03	3.8%
2009	\$ 1,427,357,423	\$ 16,214,780	\$11.36	\$322,700	\$3,665.87	\$258.18	7.6%
2008	\$ 1,351,145,810	\$ 15,240,925	\$11.28	\$302,100	\$3,407.69	\$254.45	8.1%
2007	\$ 1,246,355,681	\$ 14,208,455	\$11.40	\$276,600	\$3,153.24	-\$0.44	0.0%
2006	\$ 1,032,428,583	\$ 13,896,489	\$13.46	\$234,300	\$3,153.68	\$209.06	7.1%
2005	\$ 871,438,862	\$ 12,862,438	\$14.76	\$199,500	\$2,944.62	\$186.90	6.8%
2004	\$ 805,151,570	\$ 11,835,728	\$14.70	\$187,600	\$2,757.72	-\$264.69	

* estimate based on current year assessed value

UPDATED 02/14/24

Program Updates, Data, and Analysis (shared process on reporting)
School by school and District Wide

Muddy Brook

Recess update
Tone/faculty/leadership

Du Bois

Music at the middle school -- update
Math K-12 and possibility of middle school algebra for all (with flexible time)

Monument Mountain

Check in on de-leveling
Proficiency-based grading update
Dual enrollment work - making this all more official and universal
What formal programs is the school endorsing/accepting? Etc.
Attempts at rigor and cultural relevance (AP, CVTE, internships, pathways, EMT, arts, etc.)

District

Check in on work with English Language Learners
STOKE updates - more than just this from the DEIB perspective.
CLEO program changes update - how are things going?
Wellness position and department updates. What does it look like going forward?
Student chronic absenteeism
Staff absenteeism

This and the following three pages were updated for the Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee's Feb. 29 budget hearing.

**BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Operating Budget & Capital
FY 25 Budget**

	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Difference</u>	
			<u>Amount</u>	<u>%</u>
Gross Operating Budget	<u>33,521,858</u>	<u>35,039,758</u>	<u>1,517,900</u>	<u>4.53%</u>
Less: School Choice Tuition Income	(1,300,000)	(1,300,000)		
Regular Tuition Income	<u>(725,000)</u>	(725,000)		
Net Operating Budget	<u>31,496,858</u>	<u>33,014,758</u>	<u>1,517,900</u>	<u>4.82%</u>
Gross Capital Budget	<u>1,716,875</u>	<u>533,750</u>	<u>(1,183,125)</u>	<u>-68.91%</u>
	<u>33,213,733</u>	<u>33,548,508</u>	<u>334,775</u>	<u>1.01%</u>
Less:				
Chapter 70 Aid	(3,045,078)	(3,398,268)		
Chapter 71 Transportation Aid	(850,000)	(850,000)		
Medicaid Reimbursement	(75,000)	(75,000)		
Transfer from E & D	(617,000)	(617,000)		
Interest Income	(15,000)	(15,000)		
Miscellaneous Income	(32,000)	(32,000)		
MSBA Reimbursement	<u>(1,120,934)</u>	0		
	<u>(5,755,012)</u>	<u>(4,987,268)</u>	<u>(767,744)</u>	<u>-13.34%</u>
Net Assessments to Member Towns	<u>27,458,721</u>	<u>28,561,240</u>	<u>1,102,519</u>	<u>4.02%</u>

<u>Allocation of Assessments by Town</u>	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Change</u>	
Great Barrington	20,333,733	21,040,872	707,138	3.48%
Stockbridge	3,733,143	3,866,686	133,543	3.58%
West Stockbridge	<u>3,391,845</u>	<u>3,653,683</u>	<u>261,838</u>	7.72%
Total	<u>27,458,721</u>	<u>28,561,240</u>	<u>1,102,519</u>	<u>4.02%</u>

Calculation of 2024-25 Assessments

	<u>Allocation</u> <u>Percent</u>	<u>MLC</u>	<u>Amount</u> <u>Above MLC</u>	<u>Total</u>
Great Barrington	74.2045%	8,593,682	12,447,190	21,040,872
Stockbridge	12.9546%	1,693,659	2,173,027	3,866,686
West Stockbridge	12.8409%	<u>1,499,728</u>	<u>2,153,955</u>	<u>3,653,683</u>
Total	100.0000%	<u>11,787,069</u>	<u>16,774,171</u>	<u>28,561,240</u>

MLC numbers from DOE web page on 01/24/2024

Operating only

BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Operating Budget
FY 25 Budget

	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Difference</u> <u>Amount</u>	<u>%</u>
Gross Operating Budget	<u>33,521,858</u>	<u>35,039,758</u>	<u>1,517,900</u>	<u>4.53%</u>
Less:				
School Choice Tuition Income	(1,300,000)	(1,300,000)		
Regular Tuition Income	<u>(725,000)</u>	<u>(725,000)</u>		
Net Operating Budget	<u>31,496,858</u>	<u>33,014,758</u>	<u>1,517,900</u>	<u>4.82%</u>
Less:				
Chapter 70 Aid	(3,045,078)	(3,398,268)		
Chapter 71 Transportation Aid	(850,000)	(850,000)		
Medicaid Reimbursement	(75,000)	(75,000)		
Transfer from E & D	(617,000)	(617,000)		
Interest Income	(15,000)	(15,000)		
Miscellaneous Income	<u>(32,000)</u>	<u>(32,000)</u>		
	<u>(4,634,078)</u>	<u>(4,987,268)</u>	<u>(353,190)</u>	<u>7.62%</u>
Net Assessments to Member Towns	<u>26,862,780</u>	<u>28,027,490</u>	<u>1,164,710</u>	<u>4.34%</u>
<u>Allocation of Assessments by Town</u>	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Change</u>	
Great Barrington	19,939,489	20,644,805	705,316	3.54%
Stockbridge	3,598,672	3,797,541	198,869	5.53%
West Stockbridge	<u>3,350,179</u>	<u>3,585,144</u>	<u>234,965</u>	7.01%
Total	<u>26,888,340</u>	<u>28,027,490</u>	<u>1,139,150</u>	4.24%

Calculation of 2024-25 Assessments				
	<u>Allocation</u> <u>Percent</u>	<u>MLC</u>	<u>Amount</u> <u>Above MLC</u>	<u>Total</u>
Great Barrington	74.2045%	8,593,682	12,051,123	20,644,805
Stockbridge	12.9546%	1,693,659	2,103,882	3,797,541
West Stockbridge	12.8409%	<u>1,499,728</u>	<u>2,085,416</u>	<u>3,585,144</u>
Total	100.0000%	<u>11,787,069</u>	<u>16,240,421</u>	<u>28,027,490</u>

MLC numbers from DOE web page on 01/24/2024

Capital
BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
CAPITAL BUDGET
FY 25 Budget

	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Proposed</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Difference</u> <u>Amount</u>	
Gross Capital Budget	1,716,875	500,000	<u>(1,216,875)</u>	<u>-70.88%</u>
ST Borrowing (interest)	0	33,750		
Capital Repairs/Purchases	0	0		
Extraordinary Maint. - HS	0	0		
Stabilization Fund	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>		
	1,716,875	533,750	<u>(1,183,125)</u>	<u>-68.91%</u>
Less:				
Applicable Bond Premium				
MSBA Reimbursement	(1,120,934)	0		
 Net Assessments to Member Towns				
	<u>595,941</u>	<u>533,750</u>	<u>(62,191)</u>	<u>-10.44%</u>
 Allocation of Assessments by Town				
	<u>SC Adopted</u> <u>2023-2024</u>	<u>Preliminary</u> <u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Change</u>	
Great Barrington	443,859	396,067	(47,793)	<u>-10.77%</u>
Stockbridge	78,450	69,145	(9,304)	<u>-11.86%</u>
West Stockbridge	<u>73,632</u>	<u>68,538</u>	<u>(5,094)</u>	<u>-6.92%</u>
Total	<u>595,941</u>	<u>533,750</u>	<u>(62,191)</u>	

Calculation of 2024-25 Assessments			
	Allocation Percent	Capital Assessment	Total
Great Barrington	74.2045%	396,067	396,067
Stockbridge	12.9546%	69,145	69,145
West Stockbridge	12.8409%	<u>68,538</u>	<u>68,538</u>
Total	100.0000%	<u>533,750</u>	<u>533,750</u>