

THE NEWSletter

The Newsy Little Paper That Supplements Other Media

Volume 33 Number 12 March 2025

POB 567, Housatonic, MA 01236 Tel: 413-274-6100 Email thenewsltr@gmail.com

Special Town Meeting Is April 17

A special town meeting, called by citizens' petition, will be **Thursday, April 17**, at 6 p.m. at Monument Mountain Regional High School.

The warrant has two articles. Each requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Article 1 asks voters to acquire the "Housatonic Water Works Company (HWWC) for an amount not to exceed \$2.3 million, exclusive of any debt, pending or incurred, to own and control the Housatonic Water Works system and all its facilities and property rights."

"The former HWWC would become a division under a consolidated Great Barrington Water District," if voters approve acquiring both it and the Great Barrington Fire District, the states.

Article 2 asks voters to acquire the "Great Barrington Fire District (GBFD), aka the Great Barrington Water Company, for an amount not to exceed \$2 million.

"The purpose is for the Town of Great Barrington to acquire its water system and all its facilities and property rights."

The article also states:

"We further propose that a consolidated Great Barrington Water District be formed led by the GBFD and inclusive of the Housatonic water facilities (aka Housatonic Water Works)."

Selectboard Also Considering HWW Purchase

Meanwhile, the Selectboard has met in executive sessions, most recently Feb. 10, "To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real estate, regarding Housatonic Water Works ..."

Interim town manager Chris Rembold said during the board's March 24 meeting, when the special town meeting was scheduled, that the selectmen's discussions and the citizens' petitions and articles are not related. The Selectboard has not made a recommendation on the petitions.

Road Clean-up Is Saturday, April 19

Clean-up along town roads will be **Saturday, April 19**, starting in Housatonic at 8:30 a.m. when members of the sponsoring Housatonic the Beautiful and Housatonic Improvement Committee will be in front of Ramsdell Library with coffee, pastries and maps of areas needing cleaning.

Bags for debris will be available before April 19 at Town Hall and at both Mason and Ramsdell libraries. Filled bags should be left on street corners/intersections for the Department of Public Works to collect.



No Contests In Elections

All candidates are unopposed on the printed ballot for **town elections May 13**.

The deadline has passed to present nomination papers to be on the ballot. Anyone wanting to oppose a candidate must do so with write-in votes.

As a result, the candidates' forum that was scheduled for April 30 has been cancelled. The Democratic and Republican town committees and THE NEWSletter were going to sponsor the forum.

Running for the two seats on the Selectboard are incumbent Steve Bannon and Finance Committee chairman Phil Orenstein.

Two seats on that board are available. The term of Leigh Davis also ends this year. The seat is now vacant as now-state representative Davis resigned from the board.

Zoning Board of Appeals associate member J.B. Brodeur is running for the board's seat being vacated by Carolyn Ivory, who is not seeking re-election.

Also, Maureen Meier seeks a seat on the Great Barrington Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners. She was recently appointed to that seat, which had been vacant.

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Late News



Two finalists for town manager are scheduled to be interviewed **Tuesday, April 15**, at 5 p.m. The Selectboard will conduct the interviews, which are open to the public.

* * *

Posted on the Planning Board's page on the town website (townofgb.org) are the revised zoning bylaws to be decided by voters at the **Saturday, May 3**, town meeting. Board members voted to recommend:

-Amending Requirements for Multi-Unit Dwelling by dropping the required amount of permeable open space on a lot from 50% to 25% and allowing the board, as special permit granting authority, to waive that requirement if a development needs a special permit, and to only require one parking space for each dwelling unit rather than 1-1/2 spaces.

-Replacing the Planned Unit Residential Development with Residential Cluster Development. The intent is to "foster the development of smaller, modestly-sized residential units clustered around or near common open space," the revised bylaw states.

-Adding a Campus Overlay District to facilitate reuse and redevelopment of the Simon's Rock campus as the college is closing this summer. More about this is elsewhere in this issue. Board chair Brandee Nelson recused herself because she is a civil engineer with the firm of Tighe & Bond, which, she said, "was retained by a private party in relationship to the Simon's Rock campus. No work by the firm is before any town board or committee for any decision," but she would not participate in discussion or vote of the overlay district. Ms. Nelson had suggested taking zoning measures for the campus redevelopment.

Board members Pedro Pachano, Malcolm Fick, Jonathan Hankin and Jeremy Higa voted not to allow commercial amusement parks. Instead of restaurants and fast food, they proposed "Food or beverage facilities including production, sale and/or consumption on site or off site of pre-prepared foods." They also added "Retirement Communities that provide residents, age 55 or older, with opportunities for independent living, assisted living, nursing care, rehabilitation, and/or memory care."

* * *

Vote on funding a new high school will be **Tuesday, Nov. 4**. Whether the vote will be at a town meeting or by ballot is expected to be decided in June, which is also when final building cost should be known.

Also, page 8 in this issue is really page 7. Some pages were printed correctly; most weren't.

-EWM



Meetings & More Scheduled in 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 all members there in person may still be held even if a Zoom link doesn't work, according to the Division of Open Government.

Watch Past Meetings Online

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

Some boards, the Claire Teague Senior Center, town libraries and the Affordable Housing Trust have their own websites, given on their town website pages.

The Berkshire Hills Regional School District's website is at bhrs.org. It, the town, Cultural Council, police and fire departments also have Facebook pages.

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

April

-Tour of Monument Mountain Regional High School April 1, 5:30 p.m., followed at 6 by **forum on planning of proposed new high school.**

-Tree Committee meets April 3, 5 p.m.

-Board of Health meets April 3, 6:30 p.m.

-Parks Commission meets April 7, 5:15 p.m.

-FINANCE COMMITTEE'S PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED FY26 BUDGET, APRIL 8, 6 p.m., followed by committee and Selectboard voting on recommendations to town meeting, which is Saturday, May 3.

-Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee's Monument Building Committee meets April 9, 5:30 p.m.

-Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee meets April 10 & May 1, 6 p.m.

-Planning Board meets April 10 & 24 6 p.m.

-Tree Committee meets April 9, 5 p.m.

-Selectboard meets April 14 & 28, 6 p.m.

-Affordable Housing Trust meets April 15, 6:30 p.m.

-Historic District Commission meets April 17, 5:30 p.m.

-Patriot's Day is April 21.

Town buildings will be closed.



-Conservation Commission meets April 23, 6:30 p.m.

Libraries, Senior Center, Bus Services, Recycling

THE TOWN'S TWO LIBRARIES' website at gblibraries.org lists programs for many interests and different ages at both libraries. THE NEWSletter sends the libraries' monthly newsletter to its email list.

The New York Times, New York Times Cooking, Berkshire Eagle, 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.

Books, CDs and DVDs can be ordered by calling Mason Library at 528-2403 or emailing masonramsdel@gmail.com or bark.cwmars.org. Wifi is available on both libraries' lawns and Mason's parking lot.

Museum passes are also available.

Mason Library

Mason Library on Main Street, Great Barrington, is closed Sundays and open Monday through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Its phone number is 528-2403.

Ramsdell Library

Ramsdell Library on Main Street, Housatonic, is open Sundays from 1 to 4

p.m., Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 1 to 6 p.m.; closed Thursdays and Fridays, and open Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Its phone number is 274-3738.

Ramsdell's knitting group now meets every Tuesday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Ramsdell has a loaning **Library of Things** that includes visual reality goggles, a sewing machine, a staple gun and a button maker.

THE CLAIRE TEAGUE SENIOR CENTER at 917 South Main St. offers activities and fitness classes, lunches and help with technology and applications such as SNAP, housing, fuel assistance. and more. Its phone number is 528-1881.

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

Staff is available Mondays through Fridays to answer calls and offer counseling for SHINE, Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone.

Big Y donations are available Mondays and Wednesdays.

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

SOUTH COUNTY CONNECTOR, fka Tritown Connector, bus service has a new website, socoride.org.

The town transit program provides transportation for people who call 413-591-3826 at least 48 hours in advance.

With a Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation grant, the program offers free service until 11:30 p.m. Fridays for veterans, except for Pittsfield medical rides; and for seniors and people with disabilities needing transportation to local food pantries and free meal sites.

Berkshire Regional Transportation's website is at Berkshirerta.com.

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.

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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 everything to as many people as you want, but having THE NEWSletter send the emails between issues is \$5 a year for each name.

-EWM

Town Expenditures, continued

No Services at Parks?

The biggest reduction Mr. Rembold proposed was \$110,950 from the Parks and Recreation budget, which would keep town parks open but without any services, including lifeguards.

Ananda Timpane, director of Railroad Street Youth Project, Eric Bruun of its board, and others spoke against this.

Mr. Bannon, a member of the Parks Commission, said the board has always supported youth and not having lifeguards would be a risk he's not willing to take. Three hundred people can be at Lake Mansfield on a weekend, he said.

This is talking about the town's culture, said Ilana Siegel, Parks Commission chairman.

The Finance Committee voted unanimously not to touch the Parks budget. The Selectboard's vote was 3-1. Mr. Reed was opposed, as he felt weed mats could be eliminated.

Funding for Five Boards

Mr. Rembold had proposed cutting funds for the Historic District, Historical and Agricultural commissions and Du Bois Legacy, Transportation and Tree committees.

Don Howe, chairman of the HDC and a member of the Historical Commission, said funds are needed to care for statues and documents. Gwendolyn VanSant said the Agricultural Commission needs funds to grow food.

She, Sara Mugridge and Tim Likarish of the Legacy Committee noted that its annual observance of Great Barrington native and civil rights leader Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois makes people aware of this town.

Mr. Reed said he has been in Great Barrington for 47 years and doubts he's seen 100 other Black people. This is a pretty white town, and it's important for this town to let everyone know everyone why it's important, he added.

Both boards voted unanimously to recommend funding the Historical Commission at \$5,000; the Historic District Commission, \$10,000; Du Bois Legacy, \$5,000; Agricultural Commission, \$1,000; and transportation and tree committees, zero.

The total amount is \$21,000, or \$1,000 more than originally recommended.

Special Articles

Board members' agreed to recommend that **Southern Berkshire Ambulance** get the \$304,909.11 it has requested.

Neither board nor Mr. Rembold recommends **Southern Berkshire Community Center's** request for \$100,000. This is the first year it requested funds.

Borrowing \$3 million for a temporary **Brookside Bridge** apparently will be on the warrant but neither board nor Mr. Rembold voted for or against that funding. They would, they seemed to agree, let town meeting voters decide that.

More information about providing a bridge might be known by town meeting, Mr. Rembold said.

Cuts in Capital Budget

Both boards agreed to deduct a proposed \$150,000 for the **State Road Fire Station** from the building and grounds section of the capital budget.

A pickup truck and a pump station upgrade on Avery Lane were deducted from the **wastewater** (sewer department) budget.

Notes from Earlier Meetings

At the March 11 meeting, the selectmen voted 4-0 and the Finance Committee, 4-1, to approve the budget for **Mason and Ramsdell libraries**.

Finance Committee chairman Philip Orenstein cast the vote against the budget. When discussion began, he said he would like to consider some cutbacks. He did not propose any, however.

Are Two Libraries Needed?

Ms. Cerna of the Finance Committee questioned if two libraries — Mason in Great Barrington and Ramsdell in Housatonic — are needed.

She loves Ramsdell, she said, but is having only one library a viable option?

Mr. Bannon said a year-long study would be needed to consider closing Ramsdell and this year's budget would not be affected.

If Ms. Cerna is suggesting this, he'll leave the meeting, he stated.

Sharon Shaloo, chairman of the Board of Library Trustees, said she doubted if one library would work. She called it a "compromise of social justice" not to have a library in Housatonic.

BHRSC Okays A Lower Budget

ALL 10 MEMBERS of the Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee voted March 6 to approve a budget that is \$250,800 less than originally proposed.

That means the school district's three towns will be asked to approve a gross operating budget of \$37,204,010, which is \$2,164,252, or 6.18%, more than this fiscal year.

The operating and capital budget with assessments to the towns is reproduced in this NEWSletter.

In a memo to the committee, district superintendent Peter Dillon responded to a finance subcommittee directive to cut \$200,000 from the budget with a memo describing his proposed cuts.

Those cuts include reducing:

-A special education program by \$80,000 "due to student enrollment changes";

-Middle school text and supplies budgets by \$10,000 from each with specifics to be determined by the principal "based on an analysis of 5-year history of spending";

-Middle school professional development by \$13,000;

-The high school assistant principal for CVTE (career vocational technical education) for \$107,500.

-A salary contingency of \$40,000 that is not needed due to program changes, Mr. Dillon wrote.

Additional reductions are for supplies, \$5,000 for school committee dues, and hardware of \$5,000 for Muddy Brook.

Teaching Positions Reinstated

Other changes in the recommended budget include reinstituting a grade 3 teacher "offset by the reduction of the Curriculum purchase, for one year. Net reduction of \$643." The purchase refers to new texts.

The position of a part-time physical education teacher at Monument was reinstated for "an additional cost of \$33,343.

At the Feb. 27 public hearing, district teachers had protested eliminating the two teaching positions.

Another change is listing the position of certified occupational therapy assistant as paid by an IDEA grant. Mr. Dillon wrote that "it was omitted in error from the presentation of reductions on February 13th."

There was no discussion on any motion.

During the meeting, committee member Diane Singer of Great Barrington said people have many concerns about the school budget. Mr. Dillon said bigger changes need to happen, including with how the state determines the formula for town assessments.

The meeting lasted about 15 minutes.

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gift for neighbors and relatives.**

HWW, Conservation Commission, 546 Main Plan

IS THE STATE DEPARTMENT of Environmental Protection investigating **Housatonic Water Works?**

Yes, according to an email from Sean Gonsalves, a project analyst with DEP's Western regional office.

In a March 24 email to responding to a NEWSletter public records request for documents, he wrote:

"MassDEP is withholding three documents as exempt under the "investigatory" exemption at M.G.L. c. 4, § 7(26)(f). The three documents are emails and a letter between MassDEP and HWWC regarding enforcement. This matter is under active investigation and enforcement by MassDEP. The "investigatory" exemption at M.G.L. c. 4, § 7(26)(f) applies to the noted documents because they relate to an on-going investigation of potential violations of Commonwealth laws and regulations, and release of this information to the public could undermine the Commonwealth's ability to enforce such laws and regulations. The materials constitute evidence in an active investigation, and their disclosure could interfere with enforcement proceedings."

THE NEWSletter has asked the Secretary of State's Public Records Division to determine that the documents are indeed able to be withheld.

It's also filed a complaint that two documents supposedly requiring redactions were completely black — even the date was redacted, not just any sensitive material.

THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION has given **Housatonic Water Works** conditional approval for a 1,500-square-foot building with associated site work, pipes and septic system to house a new water treatment plant within the buffer zone of Long Pond.

Jim Mercer, an owner and treasurer of HWW, told commissioners that the "project is for construction of a building and installation of a green sand filtration system," according to Stacy Ostrow's minutes of the Jan. 22 meetings.

Commissioners agreed that the plant's proposed location is the most logical and would not have a significant impact, the minutes state.

The unanimous approval included conditions that before work on the project starts, the commission will receive a plan showing delineation of the resource area, limit of work, where erosion controls will be placed, distance of the proposed building from the resource area, and location of material storage areas and how they will be protected.

Berkshire Mountain Bakery Plan

Also during the Jan. 22 meeting, the six commissioners approved a plan for Berkshire Mountain Bakery at 367 Park St., Housatonic, to cut down and remove two dead ash trees and two invasive Norway maple trees.

A condition is that within 90 days the commission will get an as-built survey that includes topography of existing resource areas and identifies trees with a diameter/breast height of four inches.

Enforcement Orders

Commission agent Shepley Evans said an enforcement order has been issued and recorded for 3 Knob Hill Road for unpermitted topping of several trees in the buffer zone and mapped Scenic Mountain region next to Mansfield Pond. The owner will provide a restoration plan.

An enforcement order has also been issued for 263 Long Pond Road for cutting and forest mulching in wetland resource areas and buffer zones at that property and Pfeiffer Arboretum at 249, similar to violations on the properties in 2013, Mr. Evans reported.

He said the damage is from extensive cutting and mowing. The new property owners will hire a restoration professional.

A certificate of compliance was issued for work at 15 Cottage St.

Present at the meeting were members Andy Didio, Michael Lanoue, Andrew Mankin, David Shanahan, Ashlee VanDeusen and chairman Kate Van Olst. Absent was Tom Ferris.

The commission's next meeting is **April 23** at 6:30 p.m.

AT ITS MARCH 10 MEETING, the Selectboard continued to **April 14** a hearing on requests for special permits from AM MGMT 2 LLC of Pittsfield.

The requested special permits are for a **reduction of the percentage of nonresidential space for mixed-use development at 546 Main St. and to build in a water quality protection overlay district.**

The developer wants to build a 20-unit residential mixed-use project at the corner of Main and Mahaiwe Street.

The hearing may be continued to after town elections in May when the board again will have five members. It now has four as Leigh Davis resigned when she was elected this district's state representative, and Garfield Reed announced that he was recusing himself from the hearing because he has personal relationships with some of the property's abutters.

Special permits require four favorable votes from a five-member board. The number of board members is determined by the number of seats set when the board is created. It does not change if a seat is vacant.

Planning Board: Don't Grant Waiver

Planning Board members reviewed the project at their Feb. 27 meeting and voted unanimously to recommend that the Selectboard not grant the requested waiver to reduce the size of the commercial space.

They agreed to send a favorable recommendation for the special permit to build in a water quality district.

Board chairman Brandee Nelson noted that 25% of the square footage is required for commercial, or nonresidential, use. With plans showing the ground floor at 6,820 square feet, the required commercial space should be 1,705 square feet, she said.

The only mixed use would be one office space of 480 square feet, which board members agreed does not comply with mixed-use requirements, even with a waiver.

Board Has Other Concerns

Board members also had concerns about the design, including that the building would face and be accessible from Mahaiwe Street.

"This building is offensive to me and to the town," Pedro Pachano stated. He continued:

"It's a cynical building that just comes in and takes advantage of a pricing situation and gives us the worst possible solution. ... This building completely turns its shoulder to the street."

Mr. Scalise, the applicant's engineer, said board members' comments about the design would take time to revise for the Planning Board's required site plan review.

When he presented the plan to the Planning Board, Mr. Scalise said it had been revised to address Design Advisory Committee concerns about building façade. THE NEWSletter for December reported on those concerns.

Residents Want Traffic Study

Barbara Matz said during citizens' speak time that she and other residents of Mahaiwe Street are concerned about the project and feel a traffic study is needed.

Mahaiwe Street is narrow, a popular walking route and residential, with many children, Mrs. Matz said.

PLANNING BOARD members told the **Housatonic Improvement Committee** Feb. 27 that it is pleased to work with it on a possible proposal for the former Cook property in Housatonic, now referred to as **426 Park St.**

Angela Lomanto, HIC chairman, and Scott Shortt, vice chairman, reported on architectural teams' ideas for the building. Those proposals are for apartments, perhaps with some commercial use, they said.

The property lacks room for adequate parking, they noted.

Chris Rembold, interim town manager and director of planning and development, said that while the Planning Board is the special permit granting authority for the Housatonic mill overlay district that includes 426 Park St., the Selectboard would issue a request for proposals for the property's redevelopment.

Planning Board members suggested the HIC work with abutters on possible parking areas and prepare a report for the selectmen.

(NEWS continues on page 6)

Planning Board, Affordable Housing Trust, GBHA

Hearing on Proposed Zoning

The Planning Board held a public hearing March 13 on proposed changes to the town's Zoning Bylaws.

Board members agreed to discuss changes to the proposed bylaws and decisions on having them on the town meeting warrant at its March 27 meeting as board chairman Nelson was not present.

Board members seemed to disagree on some requirements. That included possibly reducing parking requirements in the proposed **Residential Cluster Development**, which would replace Planned Unit Residential Development.

Zoning for Simon's Rock Campus

Adding a new Campus Overlay District attracted the most resident participation. The bylaw is intended to facilitate reuse of the **Simon's Rock college campus** property.

The college has announced it will close this spring and is available for sale. All its buildings are now allowed because they are part of an educational use but that ends once the college closes.

Several people said they do not want the college's Kilpatrick Athletic Center to close. One person wanted the Planning Board to acquire it. Board members explained that they can't acquire it or require public use.

Pedro Pachano explained that while he is consulting with a private group about the campus's future, he is not involved in anything financial.

The Planning Board has very limited power over what happens so residents should take their concerns to the selectmen and perhaps the acting town manager could reach out to Simon's Rock, he suggested.

"Go to town meeting and vote your conscience," he advised the audience.

Later in the meeting, after most people had left, the campus again came up for discussion as it was discussed whether a Kimball Farms-type use should be allowed, with age-restricted, transitional living.

Members seemed to agree this should be allowed and to consider it at the next meeting.

Also to be discussed is whether commercial amusement and fast-food establishments should be allowed and increasing the number of multi-unit dwelling units in a structure from eight to 16.

Less Open Space in Some Projects?

The third proposal calls for reducing the amount of open space from 50% to 25% and reducing parking requirements from 1.5 to 1 space per dwelling unit for **multi-unit dwelling projects**.

Alan and Estelle Bogdonoff of Mahaiwe Street questioned how that would affect the general appearance of Great Barrington.

"Fifty percent to 25% is a big jump. Save the look of Great Barrington!" Mrs. Bogdonoff told the board.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST members unanimously approved providing

its first payment under an **Accessory Dwelling Unit** pilot program.

The ADU pilot program provides interest-free loans to Great Barrington homeowners for financial help to build or renovate housing on property that is their primary residence and will be for at least 10 years.

Construct, which administers the program for the Housing Trust, had recommended approval of \$100,000 for an applicant. Only the amount was identified; the applicant and property were not.

The AHT board had budgeted \$150,000 for the pilot program, which has now ended. The remaining \$50,000 will be available for other projects, members agreed March 18.

More information about that and other programs is on the town website at **town-ofgb.org** and the Trust's website at **gbhousing.org**.

Present at the March 18 meeting were co-chair Ananda Timpane, Selectboard representative Garfield Reed, Bill Cooke, Joe Method and Peter Most. Co-chair Fred Clark and Krysia Kurczya were absent.

The Trust's next meeting is **April 15** at 6:30 p.m.

THE GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY Board of Commissioners has new officers.

Eileen Mooney (me) resigned as chairman during the January meeting. (I had called Phil Orenstein, the board's vice chairman, in December and asked that he become chairman. I put new elections on the agenda for the January meeting. At that meeting, however, for health reasons, I resigned from the board.)

At the Selectboard's Feb. 24 meeting, the selectmen and remaining authority members Mr. Orenstein and Jackie Sinico voted to name former Maureen Meier to the board to serve until town elections **May 13**. Ms. Sinico is the tenant organization-nominated, Selectboard-appointed tenant representative on the GBHA board.

The board still has two vacancies, one for someone appointed by the governor's office and the other elected.

After Mr. Orenstein was elected chairman at the March 18 GBHA board meeting, he nominated Ms. Meier as treasurer. They voted for her; Ms. Sinico voted against.

Replace Dewey Court Heating System

During the meeting, the three agreed to sign a contract for financial assistance of \$870,261 from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to electrify the fossil fuel heating system at the GBHA's Dewey Court in Sheffield.

Board members agreed Mr. Orenstein should sign the contract once he knows whether funds are just for the heating system. If other projects are included, he should return to the committee, they said.

They voted to increase director Nancy Messina's salary from \$64,309 to \$67,721, retroactive to Jan. 15. Ms. Messina began as director last July.

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SUBSCRIBERS CAN SIGN UP to receive information from the sources listed below, including minutes of all board meetings and obituaries when THE NEWSletter receives them from the funeral home.

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On the list are:

-1Berkshire, BEAT, Berkshire Black Economic Council, Berkshire Community Land Trust, Chamber of Commerce, CHP;

-Clinton Church Restoration/W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Freedom and Democracy, Community Development Corp., Construct, Cultural District,

-Dewey Hall (for the sourdough contest), District Attorney, Farmers Market, Great Barrington Historical Society;

-RSYP, Schumacher Center for a New Economics, Claire Teague Senior Center, Train Campaign, and Volunteers in Medicine.

Feel free to suggest more.

Everyone gets information about town libraries and the Attorney General's Division of Open Government. That's because the libraries serve all ages and the Division oversees the Open Meeting Law, which helps ensure government transparency.

According to EOHLC's job description for the position, the director works 26 hours a week in what it considers a part-time position.

EOHLC and tenants' rents fund a housing authority. The GBHA is budgeted to receive \$790,394 in operating receipts, according to the present budget.

Budget for New Fiscal Year?

Mr. Orenstein noted that the authority's fiscal year ends March 31 and asked when the board will review the new budget. Ms. Messina said she plans to meet with the accountant in April.

Cons. Comm. OK To Trim Trees?

Ms. Messina said Conservation Commission is needed to trim trees at Flag Rock because agent Shepley Evans is concerned about heavy machinery needed for the work.

Mr. Orenstein said he will talk with Mr. Evans about that.

The affected property is near a stream so the Conservation Commission requires filing a notice of intent, with engineering plans.

Why Trees Would Be Cut

EOHLC's regional capital assistance team, or RCAT, has said it will pay to have trees near family houses cut down so that the buildings get more sunlight to help prevent mold in them. Two former tenants have successfully sued the GBHA because mold meant they could not live in their units.

Trip to Kentucky Results in Ideas for Monument

EIGHT PEOPLE ASSOCIATED with the Berkshire Hills Regional School District visited STEAM Academy, a grade 9-12 school in Lexington, Ky., and Eminence School in Eminence, Ky., from Oct. 21 through 24.

(According to STEAM Academy's website, STEAM stands for Student ownership of learning, Technological responsibility and expertise, Empowerment through internships, Authentic STEM inquiry learning, and Mastery of expectations.)

The trip was funded by the Barr Foundation for schools "interested in redesigning the high school experience" and ready "to apply new strategies in their own schools."

Going on the trip were school committee member Diane Singer; Monument Mountain Regional High School assistant principal Ian Brown and students Marty Kellar, grade 12, and Olivia Mauke, grade 10; and Monument teachers Valri Ivy, science, Steve Estelle, math and business, Tom Roy, computer science, and Aaron Fisher, engineering.

Want To Redesign Programs

According to information they provided the Innovative Schools Learning Excursion, run by Next Generation Learning Challenges, they went on the trip because they want to redesign programs "to help increase our level of student engagement; we have seen our students become more passive in their approach to education lately."

Why Less Student Engagement

"We believe the decrease in student engagement has two main factors that we can help to change: the isolation and less social nature of online learning, and the lack of obvious connections that their education has with their lives," they wrote.

"Our end goal is to see our students become more engaged in Monument, both inside and outside of the classroom. We want to find ways to make their high school experiences relevant to the present and the future."

'Some Key Takeaways'

"Some of our key takeaways involve setting realistic goals ... This feels very different than 'let's change everything all at once,' or 'let's get everyone in the school to buy in to XD,' both of which have been the more recent patterns at Monument."

Some Goals

The team would like to start an off-shoot of STEAM's having students and teachers work together for a few days on a topic that isn't usually a part of the curriculum, such as revamping a section of the school grounds, learning how to quilt or creating a short film, Ms. Ivy said.

STEAM does this for a week but at Monument it would probably start with a day or two, she told THE NEWSletter.

Other suggestions include:

- Promoting and strengthening the current dual enrollment options available to Monument students.

- Finding a way to transport students to classes at Berkshire Community College would increase students' access to the free college courses.

- Creating a printed diagram for parents, teachers and students that outlines the current pathways would increase awareness of the many options available at Monument.

Visible Impacts From Trip

Ms. Ivy wrote:

"Some highly successful changes that have recently occurred included a recent assembly at DuBois Middle School for the middle school students and teachers.

Teachers and students from Monument outlined the current classes and pathways that are available, and middle school teachers reported that many of their students were very excited at the options that await them at Monument.

"Also, the current high school students are selecting their classes for next year using a new menu that clearly labels which classes will potentially earn them college credit.

"Meanwhile, whenever possible, Monument teachers are making connections between their curriculum and authentic/real-world learning, showing students how their school subjects relate to life after high school.

"Project-Based Learning (PBL) is occurring in many classes, where the focus is on creating a solution to a problem, rather than simply memorizing facts. The team would like to see PBL increase, as well as adding a skills seminar to support freshmen as they transition from Du Bois to Monument.

"The trip was inspiring for everyone on the team, but the most valuable piece was the time for the teachers, administration, school committee member, and students to meet and discuss tangible and impactful ways to improve their school and to increase student engagement.

"Some highly visible progress has already been made, especially around the career pathways and dual-enrollment options, and the team plans to continue promoting small but meaningful changes at Monument."



Monument Once Had 'Mini-Course Week'

Bill Fields of Housatonic, a retired history teacher at Monument Mountain Regional High School, is now on the Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee. He recalls when the high school had something similar to the STEAM program described in the accompanying article.

Here's his recollection of the Monument program:

In the mid-1970's, Monument had "Mini-Course Week."

The normal academic schedule was modified for that week and students were able to take and teach various courses, both academic and nonacademic.

Some of the courses were ballroom dancing, seeing the Berkshires by bike, how to juggle, stick ball, three -on-three basketball, history of rock and roll, basic car repair, how to knit, how to play cards, how to sing, horseback riding, and many more.

It was held in early May, as I recall, and courses were 90 minutes and students signed up for them much like registering for courses in college. I believe it lasted for four years and was cancelled due to lack of student attendance during that week.

The first two years were very successful due to the work that a joint committee of students and teachers put into organizing and scheduling all of the courses. Joe Wood was principal during the first year of this alternate high school week and actually taught the stick ball course.



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**TRITOWN
CONNECTOR**

AN AFFAIR PUBLIC SERVICE, INC.

Police Report for February

GREAT BARRINGTON POLICE can be reached by calling 911 for an emergency or 528-0306. Police handle ambulance dispatch.

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

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.

February Police Report

The following is from the month's police report. It does not include all police actions.

Seventeen collisions involving two-vehicles and one with three vehicles were reported in February.

A driver was arrested for leaving the scene of an accident.

A deer was hit on Christian Hill Road.

Police stopped 43 vehicles, resulting in 42 citations/warnings being issued. The remaining driver was told to remove snow covering the vehicle's rear window.

A driver came to a stop on a crosswalk on Front Street, Housatonic, then tried to back up to exit the crosswalk and backed into another vehicle, causing that second vehicle's airbags to deploy. The second vehicle was towed from the scene while the first vehicle had minor damage, according to the police report.

Radar Used on 16 Town Streets

Radar was run seven times on Old Stockbridge Road; four times each on East Street and Stockbridge Road; three times each on North Plain, Egremont Plain and Stockbridge roads and Main Street;

Also, twice each on Park Street, Housatonic, and Taconic Avenue; and once each, VanDeusenville, Monument Valley, Alford, South Main and Seekonk roads, Fountain Pond and Main Street, Housatonic.

Police unlocked 15 vehicles.

Archer, the department's comfort dog, visited the preschool at Berkshire South Community Center and Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School during February.

Someone told police that a caller using a New Jersey telephone exchange claimed to be a border patrol agent with a package having her name and illegal substances. When the woman who was called said she wanted to have her local police join the call, the caller hung up.

Want to meet Archer, the police department's comfort dog? Just call the station at 528-0306 for an appointment.



In a reported breaking-and-entering, someone was said to enter a house through an unlocked second-story window.

Police helped install a car seat.

A skier was found unconscious at Ski Butternut on State Road and was taken to Fairview Hospital.

A bat was captured in a house on Hollenbeck Avenue.

A fox was seen on Squaw Peak Road.

Arrests During February

THE NEWSletter identifies people who are arrested but not those who receive a summons.

-Morgan Victoria Neales, 25, of Great Barrington, operating under the influence of liquor, negligent operations of a motor vehicle, leaving the scene of property damage and destruction of property.

-Steven Amarrol, 58, Rayham, disturbing the peace, and protective custody.

-Carlos Alfredo Hernandez, 50, Pittsfield, strangulation or suffocation, domestic assault and battery with an intimate partner.

-Richard Minacci, 62, homeless, trespass at different locations.

-Samuel R. Del Melo, 34, Great Barrington, cruelty to an animal (a dog).

-David A. Bachand, 40, Pittsfield, domestic assault and battery on an intimate partner.

-Delmar J. Grant, 41, Becket, violation of an abuse-prevention order, strangulation or suffocation, kidnapping and assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.

-Elizabeth Fanous, 47, Suffield, Conn., protective custody, vandalize jail property.

-Christian Dwayne Johnson, 48, Springfield, operating under the influence of liquor, second offense, negligent operation of a motor vehicle, marked lane operation, assault and battery on a police officer, resisting arrest.

-Brandon Liew, 23, Flushing, N.Y., shoplifting at Fairgrounds Plaza.

-Daisy Delacy, 33, North Egremont, shoplifting at Bizalion's.

-Claudio Lopez, 21, Pittsfield, operating without a license.

How To Reach Officials

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. His email is

Paul.Mark@masenate.gov

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

STATE REP. LEIGH DAVIS has not scheduled office hours but is at 413-854-4623 or leigh.davis@mahouse.gov

Her aide, Serena Keenan, is at serena.keenan@mahouse.gov

Fire Report

THE GREAT BARRINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT responded to 99 calls during February. The station on State Road responded to 97 of the calls and Housatonic's station to two.

Calls included providing mutual aid to Sheffield for a fire that destroyed Joe Wilkinson Excavating Inc. at 1551 Boardman St., Sheffield, the evening of Feb. 24.

Firefighters assisted emergency medical services 70 times.

Sixteen calls were for false alarms for release of hazardous materials or carbon monoxide or fire alarms activated because of malfunction or unintentionally.

Emotional Distress?

Text 988, the suicide and crisis lifeline. Free and confidential emotional support is available 24/7. Veterans can press 1; for Spanish, press 2. Chat and more information are at 988lifeline.org/chat.

GBAHTF

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

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

It emails obituaries when it receives them to subscribers who requested them.

Dr. John A. Bellizzi Jr.

Dr. John Anthony Bellizzi Jr., 79, of South Egremont died March 15.

He received a degree in chemistry from Georgetown University and a medical degree from the University of Virginia. He trained at Washington (D.C.) Hospital Center and Roosevelt-St. Luke's in New York.

He served in the National Health Service Corps and was on the faculty of the University of Connecticut Medical School, where he started community-supported clinics in Hartford based on the National Health Service Corps model.

Dr. Bellizzi practiced internal medicine in Great Barrington for 20 years.

He pursued a mid-career fellowship in infectious diseases at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. After a summer medical mission trip to Rwanda, where he worked in a women's health clinic, Dr. Bellizzi was an infectious disease specialist on the faculty of Froedert Health and the Medical College of Wisconsin and, later, at Albany (N.Y.) Medical Center.

He shared his medical expertise through Volunteers in Medicine.

Dr. Bellizzi leaves his wife, Linda; his children, Matt Bellizzi of Honeoye Falls, N.Y., Susie Cirone of Lunenburg and Ben Bellizzi of San Luis Obispo, Calif.; six grandsons; and his sisters, Janet Bellizzi Connors, Diane Bellizzi Lee and Carol Bellizzi.

Finnerty-Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to the American Red Cross or Doctors Without Borders.

Pamela M. Drumm

Pamela M. Drumm, 79, formerly of Great Barrington, died Jan. 17 in Canaan, Conn.

She graduated from Kent School in 1963 and Hobart and William Smith College in 1967 with a degree in math and philosophy.

Mrs. Drumm worked for Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia before moving to Great Barrington, where she lived for more than 60 years.

She worked at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge for many years and retired in 2011 from a career in insurance at Wheeler & Taylor.

Mrs. Drumm was a Sunday school teacher and Girl Scout troop leader, among other volunteer activities that included being a guardian for a resident and a member of the Human Rights Committee at Berkshire Meadows and president of the board of Bostwick Gardens.

Mrs. Drumm leaves her husband of 31 years, William C Drumm; her daughter, Jennifer Sigafoes Phelan; her brothers, Geoffrey Middleton and Mark Middleton; her stepson, William M Drumm; her stepdaugh-

ter, Kathleen Drumm; and three grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her parents, Pierce Middleton and Jane Scofield, and her brother, Christopher Middleton.

Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to St Paul's Episcopal Church and CurePSP at psp.org.

Felipe 'Phil' G. Garcia

Felipe "Phil" G. Garcia, 86, of Sheffield died March 10 at Berkshire Medical Center.

He was born in Colon, Republic of Panama, and came to the United States to attend Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie Mellon University. He received a degree in electrical engineering in 1960.

He was an engineer with Phelps Dodge in New Jersey when he was drafted into the Army in 1961. He was a translator and clerk at Fort Belvoir, Va., for three years.

He became a United States citizen in 1966.

Mr. Garcia was an electrical engineer in New Jersey, California and New York, researching high-voltage transmission cables. He retired from the Electric Power Research Institute in 1995, when he and his family moved to Sheffield.

For 10 years, he was a substitute teacher at Monument Mountain Regional High School and taught Spanish, science, math and woodshop.

Mr. Garcia leaves his wife of 57 years, Betsy, and his daughter, Rebecca Turner of Egremont.

He was predeceased by his son, David Garcia; his sister, Emilie del Rey Garcia, and his niece.

Birches Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Memorial donations are suggested to the Sheffield American Legion or the Sheffield Fire Department through the funeral home.

Richard B. Jamieson

Richard B. Jamieson, 67, of Ashley Falls, died March 10.

He owned and operated Rick Jamieson Auto Repair and was a drag racer.

Mr. Jamieson leaves his wife, Lisa; four sons, Richard Jr., Neil, Max and Alex; three grandchildren and a great-granddaughter.

He was predeceased by his mother, Marilyn Barney-Lamoreaux; his stepfather, Archie Barney; and his father, Richard Jamieson.

Finnerty-Stevens Funeral Home handled arrangements.

Kathleen Whitbeck

Kathleen "Kathy" Whitbeck, 64, of Mount Washington died March 2.

The former Kathleen Rossi, she graduated with high honors in 1979 from Mount Everett Regional High School.

She then was innkeeper at The Williamsville Inn before moving to North Conway,

N.H., where she and her husband operated an inn.

After six years, they moved back to Great Barrington. For the next 35 years, Mrs. Whitbeck was vice president of operations of Pinnacle Hospitality Group.

In 2007, she and her husband moved into a home they had built on Mount Washington.

Mrs. Whitbeck leaves David, her husband of 37 years. She was predeceased by her parents and her brother, Donald "Peter" Rossi Jr.

Birches-Roy Funeral Home handled arrangements.

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.

-Estate of Bruce W. Castino & Jade Castino to Benedi Realty LLC, 24 North St., Great Barrington, \$350,000.

-Martin B. Albert & Anne M. Johnston-Albert to Jack A. Davenport & Michelle M. Gomez, 3 Berkshire Heights Road, Great Barrington, \$2.05 million.

-Jeffrey Taylor to Naomi Blumenthal & Ronald Blumenthal, trustees, Quality Time Remaining Revocable Trust, 97 Alford Road, Great Barrington, \$450,000.

-Winnie M. Chen to Nora Cromwell, 273 State Road, Great Barrington, \$460,000.

-Westward Properties LLC to GB Holdings LLC, 9 East Baldwin Hill Road, Egremont, \$1.1 million.

-Donald O. Platt to Joseph O. Cooney & Jessie M. Cooney, unit 10, 80 Taconic Ave., Great Barrington, \$630,000.

-Amy L. Foster & Brian R. Foster to Woo Yee Guo & Amy Joyce, 33 Grove St., Great Barrington, \$655,000.

Stockbridge

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

-Irene Bernstein-Pechmeze to Charles R. Gillett, unit 4, 57 Main St., Stockbridge, \$350,000.

-AIS Properties LLC to Joshua A.H. Nemery & Mark Nemery, 8 Bean Hill Road, Stockbridge, \$1.55 million.

-Charles A. Blaine & Maryann Blaine to Kent Higgins, 46 Prospect Hill Road, Stockbridge, \$225,000.

Building Permits of \$70,000 or more will return in the next issue.

BERKSHIRE HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Operating Budget & Capital

revised as of 3/6/2025

FY 26 Budget

	SC Adopted 2024-2025	Proposed 2025-2026	Difference	
			Amount	%
Gross Operating Budget	35,039,758	37,204,010	2,164,252	6.18%
Less: School Choice Tuition Income	(1,300,000)	(1,400,000)		
Regular Tuition Income	(725,000)	(725,000)		
Net Operating Budget	33,014,758	35,079,010	2,064,252	6.25%
Gross Capital Budget	533,750	33,750	(500,000)	-93.68%
	33,548,508	35,112,760	1,564,252	4.66%
Less:				
Chapter 70 Aid	(3,398,268)	(3,466,218)		
Chapter 71 Transportation Aid	(850,000)	(1,000,000)		
Medicaid Reimbursement	(75,000)	(100,000)		
Transfer from E & D	(617,000)	(617,000)		
Interest Income	(15,000)	(50,000)		
Miscellaneous Income	(32,000)	(32,000)		
	(4,987,268)	(5,265,218)	277,950	5.57%
Net Assessments to Member Towns	28,561,240	29,847,542	1,286,302	4.5%
Allocation of Assessments by Town				
	SC Adopted 2024-2025	Proposed 2025-2026	Change	
Great Barrington	21,040,872	22,209,548	1,168,676	5.55%
Stockbridge	3,866,686	4,089,347	222,661	5.76%
West Stockbridge	3,653,683	3,548,647	(105,035)	-2.87%
Total	28,561,240	29,847,542	1,286,302	4.50%

Calculation of 2025-26 Assessments

	Allocation Percent	M/LC	Amount Above M/LC	Total
Great Barrington	74.6988%	9,169,459	13,040,089	22,209,548
Stockbridge	13.2530%	1,775,785	2,313,562	4,089,347
West Stockbridge	12.0482%	1,445,406	2,103,241	3,548,647
Total	100.0000%	12,390,650	17,456,892	29,847,542

M/LC numbers from DOE web page on 01/22/2025

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Interim Town Manager

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TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

March 21, 2025

To: Selectboard and Finance Committee

From: Interim Town Manager

Re: Updates/Supplement to Proposed FY26 Budget for March 25, 2025 meeting

The enclosed packet contains updated FY26 budget sheets reflecting cuts of over \$343,000.

At the March 11 budget meeting, I informed the boards that we were over the levy limit by \$141,404, and I recommended the boards make cuts or offsets of approximately \$241,404 in order to come in under the level limit with a \$100,000 cushion. The boards did not do so, and did not make any indication of whether they would like to see budget cuts or if they would rely on reserve funds (e.g., free cash) to close the gap to avoid a Proposition 2 1/2 override.

Therefore, earlier this week, I drafted additional budget cuts. My goal was to reduce the operating budget without reducing staff or relying on free cash reserve.

Included in these cuts and adjustments are department budgets as well as board, committee, and service budgets. The board, committee, and service budgets have not been reviewed with those groups. All of these departmental budgets have been discussed with the department heads, and they concur that their departments could operate with the proposed additional reductions.

These reductions cut right to the bone; they leave little or no room for error or unanticipated cost increases. Therefore, I also proposed to increase the Finance Committee reserve line in order to preserve some flexibility.

These cuts make it possible to:

- maintain current staff levels;
- fund an anticipated \$100,000 snow and ice deficit;
- not require additional free cash to reduce the levy;
- avoid a Proposition 2 1/2 override;
- fund the Ambulance at the requested level for FY26; and,
- creates excess levy capacity of approximately \$100,000 to return to past year levels and to safeguard future financial stability.

None of these cuts are easy. They will result in reduced flexibility within departments, and they will reduce services to our residents.

Budget updates/supplement for 3-25-2025 meeting
p. 2 of 4

Following are the proposed cuts versus the 3/11/25 proposed budget, and some possible implications of these additional cuts or changes:

1. Selectboard / TM: Reduced by \$13,250. Reductions to contingency means less salary flexibility across all town departments; reductions in expense lines provide less room if advertising and legal costs increase more than usual.
2. Finance Committee: Increased the Reserve Fund by \$50,000, in order to be able to address emergencies or unforeseen increases that departments are now less able to absorb.
3. Accountant: No change.
4. Technology: Reduced by \$5,000. Leaves less room for repairs and maintenance of tech (computers, hardware, phones, etc.).
5. Assessors: Reduced by \$15,000. If contracted services are more than anticipated, it may be possible to move funds around during the year or at year-end.
6. Collector/Treasurer: Reduced by \$1,200. Reduces the office supplies and equipment budgets specifically, but leaves less room overall to absorb changes to tax title, postage, or other expenses.
7. Human Resources: Reduced by \$1,250. Funds only 1, not 2, bilingual language stipends.
8. Town Clerk: Reduced by \$6,448. Could mean less town Code is published, fewer old records conserved, and so forth. Retains budget for two town meetings in FY26, but not more than that.
9. Conservation, Planning Board, ZBA: No changes.
10. Planning/Community Development: Reduced by \$2,600.
11. Buildings & Grounds: Reduced by \$76,500. This is a bit of a risk if electricity, heating costs, and building repairs needs increase. It makes the budget less able to absorb increases. This is one of the main reasons we propose an increase to the Finance Committee Reserve account.
12. Police, Fire, Emergency Management, Building Inspector / Dept., & Animal Control: No changes.
13. DPW Highway: Reduced by \$5,067. Contracted services, tree services and vehicle gas/diesel are all reduced. It will be difficult to absorb any increases, and difficult to absorb higher than normal snow and ice costs next winter. These reductions are another key reason to increase the Finance Committee reserve.
14. DPW *Transfer Station*: Reduced by \$72,456, one of the largest cuts. This reduction means a cessation of service. It means closing the transfer station to public use. Citizens would be required to use private haulers. The transfer station would be for Town operations only. The landfill still needs to be monitored and those costs have increased. Public hazardous waste collection events are funded and could still continue.

Budget updates/supplement for 3-25-2025 meeting
p. 3 of 4

15. Board of Health: Reduced by \$450. This could mean less beach testing in the summer. If a beach is closed for water quality issues, we could not test more frequently in hopes of opening the beach sooner. See also Parks & Recreation, below.
16. Comm. Services: No change.
17. Council on Aging: Reduced by \$2,963. This means less money for equipment maintenance (kitchen, copier, etc.), activities, supplies, and travel/training.
18. Veterans: Reduced by \$44,687. In the overall FY26 budget as proposed, with the exception of the Ambulance assessment, no other outside organization is funded by Town operations. The reduction here is similar; it means no funding towards the costs or lease of the Housatonic Legion/VFW or the Great Barrington VFW.¹ The Town could provide meeting space in existing Town buildings if required by law. Benefits (line 57700) and the District (line 57701) budgets are reduced as discussed at the last meeting.
19. Libraries: Reduced by \$14,130. This means less for materials, but the library will still meet the mandate for material expenditures this year.
20. Parks & Recreation: Reduced by \$110,950. This is largest reduction and means eliminating youth services and lifeguards, the weed mat at Lake Mansfield, and proposed camera operations. This is a cessation of service at Lake Mansfield and the skate park. However, the parks themselves would remain open and maintained because Town staff does not need to be reduced.
21. Various Boards: Reduced by \$20,000, and eliminated entirely. This means no Town appropriation for maintenance of historic monuments and statues, no web-hosting of the downtown walking tour app, and no funding for the Agricultural Commission, DuBois Legacy Committee, or Tree Committee.
22. Celebrations and Events: Reduced by \$2,500. Maintains some funds for bandstand program and events such as parades.
23. Debt and Retirement: No change
24. Insurance: Allocation from Wastewater increased by \$812.
25. Wastewater: Allocation to General Fund reduced by \$812.
26. **Overall General Fund Town operating budget**: Reduced by \$343,639. Increase over FY25 is only \$56,614, or 0.35%. Provides a \$102,000 cushion under the levy limit.

¹ To be clear, MGL states that a Town may appropriate funds to lease a space for Veterans groups. It does not state that the Town must appropriate public funds to pay bills of private groups. I am concerned that funding private organizations directly could be a violation of the Anti-Aid Amendment, which prohibits the use of public funds for the purpose of maintaining or aiding any institution or charitable or religious undertaking that is not publicly owned. Also, our historical contribution appears to be much higher than other area Towns make to their posts. On a related note, the Selectboard may consider additional veteran's tax exemptions for the Town Meeting warrant; these would be allowable direct benefits to veterans (but a reduction in Town revenue).

Budget updates/supplement for 3-25-2025 meeting
p. 4 of 4

If the proposed reductions are not accepted, then the funds to reinstate these items must come from offsets elsewhere in the budget or from Free Cash, and NOT by increasing the tax levy, or we will have to use stabilization funds or seek an override.

Special Articles:

27. Ambulance: This budget makes it possible to fully fund the ambulance at the requested \$304,909.11, rather than my previous recommendation to level fund it at \$205,326. The funding comes from Free Cash.

28. Brookside Bridge: At this time there is no change to Mass DOT's plan to advertise the replacement bridge construction until 2030, but we are aware of a \$500,000 earmark approved in a state bond bill for a temporary bridge. Given the long timeline until the permanent replacement is even begun, it is not unreasonable to seek a capital authorization at Town Meeting for up to \$2 million. That would provide a total of \$2.5 million to stand up temporary emergency services on the east side and/or to erect a temporary bridge through the existing bridge. ** At this time we still do not know if any of this is feasible. But our engineers are working on it, and we should have answers in time for Town Meeting.

Capital:

29. Capital: no changes.

Christopher Rembold
Interim Town Manager

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TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

March 7, 2025

To: Selectboard and Finance Committee

From: Interim Town Manager

Re: Updates/Supplement to Proposed FY26 Budget for March 11, 2025 meeting

The enclosed packet contains updated FY26 budget sheets for the March 11 meeting. The operating budget is increased slightly. Following are the major changes, assumptions and points of the updated budget:

1. School: This budget uses the recently reduced school assessment to GB, \$22,209,548, or an increase of 5.6% over FY25. This is a significant and welcome reduction to the Great Barrington tax levy.
2. New Growth: After review with the Assessor, new growth is estimated at \$50,000, down from previously estimated \$200,000.
3. Snow & Ice: It's been a tough winter and we estimate a snow and ice deficit of at least \$100,000 that will need to be raised on the taxes. If DPW can use funds within its department to cover that deficit, and/or if other departments or the reserve fund (if any remains) can cover the deficit, then the amount needed to be raised on the FY26 levy will decrease. Please keep in mind that because we are budgeting revenues and expenses closer, there will be considerably less revenue from departmental turn backs to make up a snow and ice deficit.
4. Free Cash: Finally, our free cash has been certified, at \$12.35 million (over \$5 million of that is cannabis community impact fund, and is not available to use for general purposes). This budget already recommends using \$4,122,326 (to reduce the levy and to fund special articles), leaving approximately \$3,227,817 available for general purposes.

Town Operating Budget Changes:

5. Technology: increased by \$30,695 from original proposal due to switching from office desktop software to Microsoft 365. We have reviewed the idea of shifting to cloud with our IT Consultant, who advised it was not possible. Local servers are still required as many essential programs such as the assessor's software that are not yet cloud-based.
6. Town Clerk: increased by \$1,735 to pay for new poll pads for elections.

Budget updates/supplement for 3-11-2025 meeting
p. 2 of 3

7. Buildings & Grounds: following up on a discussion on Feb. 12, you will see that line 52410 and 52700 are going to be replaced by "Buildings Repairs" and "Grounds Repairs," respectively. This will help track the expenses more accurately. There is no overall change to this budget.
8. Building Inspector / Dept.: The building department will be taken on by Stockbridge as the lead community, so GB's cost this year decreases over \$220,000. This is the largest decrease we have made since the original proposal and shows a reduction in force by 4 FTE.
9. DPW Highway and *Transfer Station*: You'll note a decrease in the Highway budget due to costs being shifted to and shown in a new Transfer Station division. This will better track the costs associated with the operations of the transfer station as a service. This also results in an increase of \$3,500 for Kiosk Annual Operation to the overall DPW Highway budget.
10. Parks & Recreation: It is now my recommendation to fund the camera operations. This is an increase of \$7,500.
11. Retirement: This is increased by \$65,005 to account for certain contractual obligations for retirement account contributions that were missed in the original proposal.
12. Insurance: This is increased by \$107,718 to account for some miscalculations.
13. Wastewater: The insurance line is increased to account for overall insurance miscalculations in the original version.
14. Overall Town operating budget is down slightly from the original proposal, now an increase of only \$416,653 from FY25 (was an increase of \$423,766).

Capital:

15. The buildings and grounds budget is slightly decreased, as we removed the Ramsdell Library item. That will be held until we know more about the construction grant.
16. The vehicles and equipment budgets are unchanged. We discussed moving one of the Freightliners to a future year, but we have decided to request it this year since they take so long to build and deliver.
17. The street and road budget is decreased. Some road paving techniques are more cost effective than we had originally estimated, and the Brookside Bridge cost has been moved to the Special Articles section.

Special Articles:

18. Ambulance: This proposes to level fund the ambulance at last years' allocation, which was \$205,326 versus the requested \$304,909.11. This decrease does not impact the Tax Levy, but it would increase the free cash that is available. If the amount is increased back to the original request, the funds would come from free cash, so free cash available for other uses would decrease. *Please note*, the Ambulance service indicated to me that the requested level is the fee necessary to run the service, and that a lesser amount than the requested \$304,909.11 would mean they would not continue as our 911 ambulance provider after 6/30/25.

Budget updates/supplement for 3-11-2025 meeting
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19. Brookside Bridge: A \$3 million amount is indicated here, but not recommended. There are still many unknowns. It is still unclear if temporary bridge is feasible, what the cost might be, and how long it would stay in service until a new bridge is built by Mass DOT. We have learned that Mass DOT does not plan to advertise its construction contract until 2030.

Levy Limit & Override:

We are still over the limit by \$141,404. That is a much better than was estimated at our first meeting after the school budget was released, but at this point an override is still required.

To avoid an override, we must achieve at least \$141,404 in offsets (or cuts). I strongly recommend we try to achieve \$100,000 more in offsets (or cuts) than is necessary, in order to ensure a viable cushion in the levy capacity (to account for potential changes of State Aid – which has not yet been passed – or other factors that could potentially impact our tax levy). We should also plan on increasing the cushion slowly year by year to return to past year levels to safeguard future financial stability.

The following options are available to achieve this:

- a. The snow and ice deficit decreases and/or is absorbed by departments;
- b. New growth increases more than the \$50,000 estimated;
- c. And, we employ some of the following options:
 - i. We cut the Town operating budget even further.
 - ii. We use more free cash to decrease the tax levy. As noted in item 4. On page 1 of this memo, there will be approximately \$3,227,817 available for general purposes including using more to reduce the levy. I recommend keeping at least \$2.8 million in the free cash account. Keep in mind that free cash will be substantially less next year for reasons that we have previously stated, so it is recommended that we are judicious in use of free cash.
 - iii. We use stabilization funds (Tab 10) to decrease the tax levy.
 - iv. We use capital stabilization funds (Tab 10) to pay debt service to decrease the tax levy.

Thank you.

PLEASE NOTE: The projections on this and the next three pages may change after the Finance Committee holds its April 8 public hearing and it and the Selectboard vote on recommendations to voters at the May 3 town meeting. Those voters will determine what is spent. This issue of THE NEWSletter has more information about budget discussion.

Fiscal 2026 Budget Projection

	FY2025 Town Meeting Budget	FY2025 Budget at Tax Rate	FY2026 Proposed Budget	\$ Change from FY25 Tax Rate	% Change from FY25 Tax Rate
REVENUE:					
Tax Levy	\$ 30,073,275	\$ 30,006,724	\$ 30,851,929	\$ 845,205	2.8%
State Aid	\$ 1,428,855	\$ 1,433,081	\$ 1,734,174	\$ 301,093	21.0%
Local Receipts	\$ 2,865,036	\$ 2,865,250	\$ 2,865,250	\$ -	0.0%
Enterprise Funds	\$ 3,153,295	\$ 4,303,295	\$ 3,223,373	\$ (1,079,922)	-25.1%
Free Cash to Reduce Tax Levy	\$ 3,675,000	\$ 3,675,000	\$ 3,775,000	\$ 100,000	2.7%
Retained Earnings/Enterprise Funds	\$ 1,150,000	\$ -	\$ 1,150,000	\$ 1,150,000	100.0%
Community Preservation Funds	\$ 1,320,000	\$ 1,242,000	\$ 976,063	\$ (285,937)	-21.4%
Free Cash for Special Article/Capital Equipment Funding	\$ 240,882	\$ 240,882	\$ 347,326	\$ 106,444	44.2%
Other Available Funds (Grants, Reserve Funds, etc.)	\$ 1,190,000	\$ 900,000	\$ 7,040,000	\$ 6,140,000	682.2%
Capital Expenditure Exclusions to Reduce Tax Levy	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 155,000	\$ 155,000	-
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 45,096,343	\$ 44,766,232	\$ 52,218,115	\$ 7,296,883	16.3%
TO BE RAISED:					
Town Budget	\$ 16,378,408	\$ 16,379,408	\$ 16,779,660	\$ 400,252	2.4%
School Budget Assessment	\$ 21,040,872	\$ 21,040,872	\$ 22,209,548	\$ 1,168,676	5.6%
Special Articles & Capital (Tax Levy)	\$ 330,359	\$ 330,359	\$ 155,000	\$ (175,359)	-53.1%
From Free Cash	\$ 240,882	\$ 240,882	\$ 347,326	\$ 106,444	44.2%
From Other Available Funds (Grants, Reserve Funds, etc.)	\$ 1,190,000	\$ 900,000	\$ 6,980,000	\$ 6,080,000	675.6%
Enterprise Fund (Wastewater)	\$ 3,153,295	\$ 4,303,295	\$ 3,223,373	\$ (1,079,922)	-25.1%
From Retained Earnings (Wastewater)	\$ 1,150,000	\$ -	\$ 1,150,000	\$ 1,150,000	100.0%
Community Preservation Funds	\$ 1,320,000	\$ 1,242,000	\$ 976,063	\$ (265,937)	-21.4%
Total Appropriations	\$ 44,803,816	\$ 44,436,816	\$ 51,820,979	\$ 7,384,154	
OTHER AMOUNTS:					
Amounts certified for tax title purposes	\$ -	\$ 25,000	\$ -	\$ (25,000)	0.0%
State Offsets	\$ 18,448	\$ 20,607	\$ 19,554	\$ (1,053)	-5.1%
Snow & Ice Deficit (estimate)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	0.0%
Berkshire Regional Planning Assessment	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	-
Other Deficits to be Raised (Grants, etc.)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%
	\$ 18,448	\$ 45,607	\$ 119,554	\$ 73,947	162.1%
State Assessments	\$ 74,079	\$ 77,329	\$ 77,591	\$ 262	0.3%
Abatelements/Exemptions	\$ 200,000	\$ 206,480	\$ 200,000	\$ (6,480)	-3.1%
TOTAL TO BE RAISED	\$ 45,096,343	\$ 44,766,232	\$ 52,218,115	\$ 7,451,883	16.6%

UPDATED 03/07/25

TAB 5

Estimated Tax Rate Calculation, Levy Limit and Free Cash Historicals

Estimated Tax Rate Calculation	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026
Total Assessed Valuation	1,691,449,482	1,860,810,837	2,001,677,517	2,175,977,048	2,175,977,048 *
Amount to Be Raised by Taxes/Levy	\$25,134,939	\$26,181,608	\$27,803,301	\$30,006,724	\$30,851,929
Estimated Tax Rate @ Town Meeting	\$16.22	\$15.44	\$14.60	\$15.02	\$14.18
Actual Tax Rate	\$14.86	\$14.07	\$13.89	\$13.79	
Tax Rate increase(decrease) over Prior Year	-\$1.13	-\$0.79	-\$0.18	-\$0.10	\$0.39
Taxes per \$100,000 Assessed Value	\$1.486	\$1.407	\$1.389	\$1.379	\$1.418
Tax increase(decrease) on \$100,000 of AV	-\$113.00	-\$79.00	-\$18.00	-\$10.00	\$38.84

*based off of prior year assessed values

Levy Limit Increase	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026
Prior Year Levy Limit	\$ 24,555,636	\$ 25,753,823	\$ 26,787,463	\$ 27,756,484	\$ 28,741,977
Plus 2.5%	\$ 25,169,527	\$ 26,397,668	\$ 27,457,150	\$ 28,450,396	\$ 29,460,527
New Growth	\$ 584,296	\$ 389,794	\$ 299,333	\$ 291,581	\$ 50,000 *
Current Year/Estimated Levy Limit	\$ 25,753,823	\$ 26,787,463	\$ 27,756,484	\$ 28,741,977	\$ 29,510,527
Debt Exclusions	\$ 1,374,492	\$ 1,361,971	\$ 1,315,399	\$ 1,282,891	\$ 1,200,000 *
Current Year/Estimated Maximum Levy Limit	\$ 27,128,315	\$ 28,149,434	\$ 29,071,883	\$ 30,024,868	\$ 30,710,525
Current Year/Estimated Tax Levy	\$ 25,134,939	\$ 26,140,126	\$ 27,644,927	\$ 30,006,724	\$ 30,751,929
Snow & Ice Deficit (to be raised on Tax Recap)	\$ -	\$ 41,482	\$ 158,374	\$ -	\$ 100,000
Total Amount Under Levy	\$ (1,993,376)	\$ (1,967,826)	\$ (1,268,582)	\$ (18,145)	\$ 141,404 **

**estimate

**PENDING ANTICIPATED CHANGES TO SCHOOL ASSESSMENT

Free Cash Balance* & Uses	Certified Free Cash Balance	Town Meeting Appropriated Free Cash	Total Unappropriated Free Cash	General Fund Portion Unappropriated Free Cash	Cannabis Community Impact Fund Portion Unappropriated Free Cash
FY25	\$ 12,357,371	\$ 4,122,326	\$ 8,235,045	\$ 3,227,817	\$ 5,007,228
FY24	\$ 10,170,990	\$ 3,915,882	\$ 6,255,108		
FY23	\$ 10,318,568	\$ 5,623,394	\$ 4,695,174		
FY22	\$ 6,481,554	\$ 4,708,000	\$ 1,773,554		
FY21	\$ 5,614,845	\$ 4,372,200	\$ 1,242,645		
FY20	\$ 2,931,025	\$ 2,529,000	\$ 402,025		
FY19	\$ 3,515,497	\$ 2,950,000	\$ 565,497		
FY18	\$ 1,928,130	\$ 1,542,504	\$ 385,626		
FY17	\$ 3,077,407	\$ 2,540,000	\$ 537,407		
FY16	\$ 2,696,949	\$ 2,150,000	\$ 546,949		
FY15	\$ 2,926,075	\$ 2,350,000	\$ 576,075		

* Free Cash is certified from the prior fiscal year's operations

UPDATED 03/07/25

TAB 6

FISCAL YEAR 2026 PROPOSED BUDGET SUMMARY

Department	FY2025		FY2026		FY2026		FY2026		Increase/ Decrease (FY25-FY26)	% Change (FY25-FY26)	% of G.F.	
	Town Meeting Vote	Level-Service Budget Request	Level-Funded Budget Request	Town Manager Recommended							FY25 voted	FY26 TM Recomm
Selectboard/Town Manager: 01122	\$ 473,409	\$ 487,000	\$ 473,400	\$ 473,400	\$	(9)	0.00%				2.9%	2.8%
Finance Committee: 01131	100,200	100,200	100,200	100,200	\$	-	0.00%				0.6%	0.6%
Town Accountant: 01135	204,425	214,665	209,885	212,110	\$	7,685	3.76%				1.7%	1.3%
Technology: 01136	330,500	350,395	333,695	381,195	\$	30,695	9.29%				2.0%	2.2%
Assessors: 01141	234,611	217,890	217,840	217,840	\$	(16,771)	-7.15%				1.4%	1.3%
Collector/Treasurer: 01146	275,931	286,114	281,596	281,596	\$	5,665	2.05%				1.7%	1.7%
Human Resources: 01152	78,934	86,108	83,758	83,758	\$	4,824	6.11%				0.5%	0.5%
Town Clerk: 01161	158,944	163,825	162,123	163,858	\$	4,914	3.09%				1.0%	1.0%
Conservation: 01171	47,173	48,505	47,805	47,555	\$	382	0.81%				0.3%	0.3%
Planning Board: 01175	6,610	6,610	6,610	6,360	\$	(250)	-3.78%				0.0%	0.0%
Zoning Board of Appeals: 01176	1,250	1,250	1,250	-	\$	(1,250)	-100.00%				0.0%	0.0%
Planning/Community Development: 01177	180,510	184,695	174,695	171,695	\$	(8,815)	-4.88%				1.1%	1.0%
Total General Government	\$ 2,092,497	\$ 2,147,257	\$ 2,092,857	\$ 2,119,567	\$	27,070	1.29%				12.8%	12.6%
Police Department: 01210	\$ 2,138,261	\$ 2,209,165	\$ 2,145,111	\$ 2,192,540	\$	54,279	2.54%				13.1%	13.1%
Fire Department: 01220	897,477	897,169	897,169	909,669	\$	12,192	1.36%				5.5%	5.4%
Emergency Management: 01230	24,461	28,461	24,461	24,461	\$	-	0.00%				0.1%	0.1%
Building Inspector: 01241	473,901	486,583	478,860	237,400	\$	(236,501)	-49.91%				2.9%	1.4%
Animal Control Officer: 01292	11,000	11,000	11,000	12,000	\$	1,000	9.09%				0.1%	0.1%
Total Public Safety	\$ 3,545,100	\$ 3,632,378	\$ 3,556,601	\$ 3,376,070	\$	(189,030)	-4.77%				21.6%	20.1%
Buildings and Grounds: 01192	\$ 1,003,838	\$ 1,176,021	\$ 1,103,916	\$ 1,111,103	\$	107,265	10.69%				6.1%	6.6%
DPW - Highway: 01422	1,990,234	2,091,165	1,957,837	1,890,539	\$	(159,695)	-8.02%				12.2%	10.9%
DPW - Transfer Station: 01425	-	-	-	156,921	\$	156,921	100.00%				0.0%	0.9%
Total Public Works	\$ 2,994,072	\$ 3,267,186	\$ 3,061,753	\$ 3,098,563	\$	104,491	3.49%				18.3%	18.5%
Health Department: 01511	\$ 146,443	\$ 151,746	\$ 146,446	\$ 147,246	\$	803	0.55%				0.9%	0.9%
Community Services: 01528	-	-	-	-	\$	-	0.00%				0.0%	0.0%
Council on Aging: 01541	246,766	250,620	246,766	243,780	\$	(2,986)	-1.21%				1.5%	1.5%
Veterans' Affairs: 01543	176,429	193,515	193,515	176,429	\$	-	0.00%				1.1%	1.1%
Libraries: 01610	654,955	671,762	655,372	663,512	\$	8,557	1.31%				4.0%	4.0%
Parks & Recreation: 01650	83,825	159,850	28,850	125,800	\$	41,975	50.07%				0.5%	0.7%
Boards & Commissions: 01691	21,000	40,000	40,000	20,000	\$	(1,000)	-4.76%				0.1%	0.1%
Celebrations & Events: 01693	\$ 12,500	\$ 12,500	\$ 12,500	\$ 9,500	\$	(3,000)	-24.00%				0.1%	0.1%
Total Cultural / Recreation / Human Services	\$ 1,341,918	\$ 1,479,993	\$ 1,323,449	\$ 1,386,267	\$	44,349	3.30%				8.2%	8.3%
Debt Service: 01752	\$ 3,378,034	\$ 3,598,685	\$ 3,598,685	\$ 3,598,685	\$	220,651	6.53%				20.6%	21.4%
Retirement: 01911	\$ 1,230,281	\$ 1,286,464	\$ 1,261,185	1,295,285	\$	65,004	5.28%				7.5%	7.7%
Insurance: 01945	\$ 1,797,506	\$ 1,744,496	\$ 1,744,715	1,905,223	\$	107,718	5.99%				11.0%	11.4%
Total Insurance / Debt / Retirement	\$ 6,405,821	\$ 6,629,645	\$ 6,604,585	\$ 6,799,193	\$	393,373	6.14%				39.1%	40.5%
Total General Fund Budget	\$ 16,379,408	\$ 17,156,459	\$ 16,639,245	\$ 16,779,660	\$	400,253	2.44%				100.0%	100.0%
Total Enterprise Fund Budget	\$ 3,153,295	\$ 3,272,349	\$ 3,231,345	\$ 3,223,373	\$	70,078	2.22%					
Total School Assessment	\$ 21,040,872	\$ 22,396,892	\$ 22,209,548	\$ 22,209,548	\$	1,168,676	5.55%					