

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
Monday, April 14, 2025
9:00 am

Select Board Members Present: Katherine DiMatteo, Jeffrey Baker, Erica Jensen

Others Present: Michele Giarusso, Jack Golden, Liz Kidder

Katherine called the meeting to order at 9:00 am.

Accept meeting minutes

Motion: Erica moved to accept Katherine's amended meeting minutes of 4/7/25, Jeff seconded to approve. Motion approved unanimously.

MLP FY26 Budget and Updates

- Jack Golden presented a draft of the MLP budget for FY26. He questioned why last year's CAF II money was not applied to the loan. He did not realize money against the current outstanding loan has to be paid at the time the loan is renegotiated in July. CAF II came in after the loan had already been renegotiated.
- The replacement of the electrical technology inside the hut has increased significantly. The MLP board has been putting money away into the MLP stabilization account thinking replacement costs in approximately 7 years from initial installation would be around \$250,000. Whip City is now estimating around \$500,000.
- CAF II remaining money is uncertain currently. This is federal money due to us for 10 years.
- Explanation of FY 26 budget: Proposing \$107,000 of CAF II money and \$26,000 from the FY26 budget to go towards the outstanding loan in July. Erica suggested taking money from retained earnings to put in the stabilization account as well as some amount go towards the repayment of the loan.
- Stabilization account balance is currently \$163,786.

9:30am Motion: Erica moved to open the MLP meeting. Jeff seconded the motion, approved unanimously.

Motion: Erica moved the FY MLP budget as presented by Jack. Jeff seconded the motion, approved unanimously.

- Jack will redo the budget with recommendations presented today and resend.
- There is an MLP advisory board meeting scheduled for this Thursday to present the budget. Jack would like to postpone this meeting, there is a new person who would like to join the board.

9:35am Motion: Erica moved to adjourn the MLP meeting. Jeff seconded the motion, unanimously approved.

Moderator Update

- Jack would like to meet with the Select Board prior to the annual town meeting for a run through with the new equipment. It was agreed that this would be done on May 12th at 9am. Walk through of warrants would also be done at that time.
ACTION: Equipment will be set up in advance. Michele will find someone who can help do this.

Public Comment

- Liz Kidder announced that the EMS/Franklin County meeting will be held on April 22 at 12:30pm at the Shelburne Falls Fire Station. Also, the Woodlands Partnership meeting to be held on May 12th from 4-5pm via Zoom will have Natalie Blais speak about PILOT payments. ACTION: Erica will attend the EMS/Franklin County Meeting. Katherine will attend the Woodlands Partnership meeting.
- Liz Kidder asked if she could have access to the LEMC computer for Jeff Miller.

Town Coordinator Review

- Michele enjoys doing grant work. Other administrative work and management of workload went well until Janell left the position of administrative assistant. Michele would like someone else to do the minutes.
- Monday closed office hours are helpful, Michele schedules other meetings Tuesday through Thursday but Monday often includes Select Board meetings, and the Town Clerk is now coming in on Monday. Select Board has discussed changing the schedule and will make a decision for July 1st.
- Katherine stated that Michele's communication style is a concern as she has heard expressed to her. Michele stated if there are concerns, they should communicate to her when something happens. Katherine explained that those bringing their concerns to her do not want to be identified and because Michele and they live and work in Leyden, this is uncomfortable. It was noted that Michele needs to lead in setting the tone of communication because she is the hub-contact for all people. Erica explained that there seems to be in Leyden a lot of old gossip, resentments, issues of the past, reluctance to change how things have been done. Michele needs to rise above this and break the patterns, as well as to be flexible with residents who need assistance or help. Michele responded that she would take all of this under consideration as she interacts with others.
- Select Board reviewed the goals and objectives set for Michele after the last review (July 29, 2024) and discussed Michele's report of progress. It was noted that Michele has provided the weekly summaries before the Select Board meetings, and forwarded information that is needed, however often the information is incomplete or still at the last minute. Michele has knowledge of state laws and regulations and other towns' policies/procedures/activities. Expectation is that she would prep the Select Board so their discussions/decisions will be informed by her knowledge.
- Select Board would like information Michele has on file shared with them, what has been provided so far is not adequate. Michele has a lot in her head as she has been employed for several years but in her absence not many people have access to emergency list or all the contacts—other town or state officials, keeping the list up to date as changes occur.
- Other suggestions the Select Board would like Michele to keep up to date and share are the grant list and dates, vendor and utilities/maintenance list and special project information. Michele will send to the Select Board what she has in writing currently. She has the grant list, but this is very uncertain for the future. Already there will be grants not available in the future. Katherine responded that changes are to be expected, and the Select Board understands that grants are fluid but having the list will help committees and boards work in advance of grant deadlines or at least consider projects that might be funded.
- The Select Board suggests a financial team meeting, including finance committee, after the first of the year, so everyone is on the same page about budget items, and various important dates that

impact on the finances of the town. Erica is keeping a budget document, and this should be used as the reference point for the meeting.

Town Coordinator Updates

- The Administrative Assistant phone number and email-Michele asked if the telephone number should be part of the fire department's administrative assistant to answer. Select Board feels no. This phone number can be deleted. The email should be changed to fire admin. email, so people are aware of who they are emailing.
- The treasurer is planning on adding a new service that VADAR Software has developed for people to pay their property and excise taxes online. This is a free service and will be easier than Unipay currently is for the tax collector. The software can also keep track of inspection fees and other fees if the town would like to implement it later.
- Michele is coordinating interviews for various department heads and committee chairs to be interviewed by the Collins Center for the efficiency and regionalization grant.
- The railings for Town Hall kitchen door and Town Office main door have arrived. Cost \$150. Jeff Miller will install.

Select Board Updates

- Katherine wrote to COA chair about the COA Coordinator's pay should be going through payroll and it is a yearly stipend.
- Franklin County Technical School has sent an invitation to all the member towns inviting them to a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new veterinary program. Katherine will try and attend.
- The accountant has sent an email on additional transfer requests that should be added to the special town meeting warrant.
- Six Town Regional Planning Board would like the Select Board to reconsider their request to speak at the annual town meeting. Select Board would like to pass this by the moderator when they meet on May 12. Katherine will put the information in May's edition of Leyden Life.
- Invitation from PVRSD to have a presentation in Leyden on the Ecological Landscape Plan that was done for the Bernardston/Leyden Elementary School. It was decided that since it is related to property in Bernardston, a presentation in Bernardston could be attended by those interested in Leyden.
- Jeff reported there is a new Curriculum Coordinator for Pioneer Valley Regional School District that was introduced at the last school committee meeting.

Potential agenda items for next meeting

- Continuation of West Leyden Road pole hearing
- Review warrant articles.

Motion to adjourn: Jeff moved at 11:41 am. Erica seconded the motion, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by: Michele Giarusso