

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
Monday, August 4, 2025
9:00 am

Select Board Members Present: Erica Jensen, Katherine DiMatteo and Jeffrey Baker attended via remote access

Others Present: Michele Giarusso, Liz Kidder, Chris Curtis, Arthur Tuttle

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

The board signed the warrants or emailed their approval of the warrants. Katherine raised a concern about the Mass in Motion invoices being on this warrant, noting they were supposed to be paid before June 30th. Michele explained that Bill had not submitted the invoices for payment and was unaware of how to process them from his accounts, but the reimbursed money had already been received. Katherine expressed concern about the timing. Bill was instructed to check with Michele for future Mass in Motion or grant payments.

Accept Meeting Minutes

Motion: Katherine moved the 7/28/25 meeting minutes with minor amendments. Jeff seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Deerfield River Wild Scenic Study

Chris Curtis from the Deerfield River Wild and Scenic River Committee presented a plan from their wild and scenic river study. Chris explained the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program designation process and highlighted the river's outstanding remarkable values, highlighting its recreational, ecological, and historical importance. He detailed various segments of the river and its tributaries that qualify for national wild and scenic status, emphasizing the river's exceptional whitewater boating, trout fishing, and natural resources. The designation goes through a federal process that Congress must pass legislation for. The designation could provide federal funding for river improvement projects, with an advisory committee overseeing its use.

- Katherine asked the question of how does this designation impact properties along the river. Chris replied, the designation does not have any impact on properties. There is a possibility that future grant funding may help some properties by having trails go through people's property with more detailed trails that can be maintained. Katherine mentioned the potential impacts on local zoning and conservation efforts. A member of our Conservation Commission is just retiring from EPA and will hopefully be involved in this should it pass Congress.

Chris explained there has been widespread support from local towns, state organizations, and congressional representatives. Next steps include community meetings, public comment sessions, and legislation drafting. He asked the board to write a letter of support for the designation and will send Michele the template.

Action: Michele will type up the letter for the next board meeting.

MLP Loan Repayment

Erica attended the MLP meeting where Susan presented the MLP loan repayment. The loan must be paid off within 4 years because we have been rolling over the debt each year with some pay off. You can only roll off yearly debt for 10 years. The MLP board proposed a plan to pay approximately \$125,000 annually from retained earnings, with an additional \$25,000 from the town, totaling \$150,000 per year. Susan is

creating a spreadsheet to detail the loan and payoff schedule, while Jack and Anders are developing a one-pager to present the plan to the Select Board and Finance Committee. Erica stated the CAF II money is still unclear whether that is still coming or whether it has been impacted by federal cuts.

Action: Michele will poll the Finance Committee members to see when they can attend a joint meeting with Select Board and MLP managers to discuss the broadband debt payoff plan.

Town Coordinator Updates

- Michele asked the board to vote on the Regional Animal Control Officer contract and the Regional Animal Dog Shelter contract for another year.

Motion: Katherine moved to approve the contracts for the Regional Animal Control Officer and Regional Dog Shelter for one year. Jeff seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Roof and gutters of town office building will be replaced this week.
- Auditor is here to complete FY24 audit.
- Michele called the building inspector to schedule a reinspection visit for our occupancy permits now that the electrical work is done. Current Electric will schedule the outdoor electrical outlet.
- Michele mentioned the increase in health insurance of 20% the Hampshire Group Insurance is planning for starting October 1. She is reaching out to MIIA and Susan to other insurance groups and will report back.
- Michele was asked about the public records request regarding fire department emails coming from the fire chief rather than the hosting company. Erica stated ok to ask the fire chief and fire administrative person to retrieve emails and send them to Michele.
- Michele asked the BOH to remove her as the backup representative to the FRCOG. The BOH to discuss at their meeting on Tuesday.

Select Board Updates

- Jeff thought the public forum was well received. Katherine remarked upon reviewing the meeting on YouTube that everyone should be told to speak into the microphone whether they want to or not. It is something that must be enforced.
- Katherine added, for the future forum we should not stop and ask questions after a few slides have been presented.
Liz noted that while the forum was dry and lengthy, it served as an initial step in the investigation process.
- Katherine noted the next steps are the survey and financial analysis and clarified that the current focus is not on finalizing costs but rather on gathering data for future decisions.
- Leyden Glen-Katherine reported she heard back from Greenfield's mayor and there will be new signs installed in both English and Spanish for no trespassing, no fishing and swimming, no hunting. The DPW will enforce these, but residents can still walk the paths.
- Jeff inquired about the West Leyden Road "bog" project, which Michele explained is in the permitting phase through Gill Engineering. She will have to get abutters permission for the permits to be issued. The grant runs through June 2026 and permitting does take a while.
- Katherine noted on the power point presentation she noticed some Leyden departments were not one third of Bernardston's in total operating expense – which would be expected given Leyden is one third the size of Bernardston. One of Leyden department's that stood out was the highway department. There was discussion that the state probably plows the state highway that runs through Bernardston, so Bernardston highway does not have to worry about plowing and maintenance of route 5 and 10. Katherine questioned whether the Bernardston budget even included the state highways which would make the gap between the Leyden and Bernardston budget even smaller. Erica mentioned she would like to invite Bill to a meeting to discuss his plans for the use of the extra Chapter 90 money we are receiving a total of \$331,000. This money

can be used for the purchasing of equipment and maybe we should look at taking some of this money to put towards future equipment instead of the town putting \$75,000 through raise and appropriate taxes in a stabilization fund each year. We must be transparent and strategic in thinking about this extra money.

- Katherine will attend the 3-town meeting on Thursday with the Six Town Planning Committee.
- Erica would like to discuss with the finance committee the increase in the cost of health insurance to employees and what can be done for the employees. Maybe we will have the finance committee discuss this also when we meet with the MLP.
- Katherine suggested including a discussion on grant priorities for the year, but Michele advised waiting a few weeks due to pending state funding decisions. The group agreed to hold a grant discussion on August 25th.

Agenda Planning Next Meeting

- Devorah Vester

Future Meetings

- Joint Finance Committee and MLP board
- Bill Brooks August 18.
- Grant discussion August 25.

Motion to adjourn: Katherine moved at 10:51 am. Jeff seconded the motion, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by: Michele Giarusso