

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
Monday, October 6, 2025
9:00 am

Select Board Members Present: Katherine DiMatteo and Jeffrey Baker

Others Present: Michele Giarusso; Liz Kidder

Katherine called the meeting to order at 9:01 am.

Accept Meeting Minutes

Motion: Jeff moved the 9/29/25 meeting minutes with minor amendments. Katherine seconded the motion. Motion unanimously passed.

School Public Forum Update

Katherine debriefed on the school public forum noticing that the setup of the room was good and questioning why everyone could hear the speakers without using the mics compared to town meetings where people complained they cannot hear. The presenters came prepared and for the most part stayed on time except for Pioneer. She counted around 35-40 attendees. Katherine also expressed regret for not stopping Pioneer from presenting as a panel, as they hadn't sought her permission to do so. Melissa Gerry had said she was conducting the presentation.

In thinking about the upcoming meeting on November 5th, she will emphasize the need to prioritize questions from Leyden residents. She expressed concern that the average person does not fully understand the financial aspects of the situation, particularly regarding tax increases. Michele suggested creating a slide showing population statistics from birth to age 18 to illustrate declining enrollment trends. Katherine also suggested that visual aids and handouts might be helpful for future discussions. Michele stated she has some handouts from the Six Town Planning Board. Pam Brown offered childcare services for the next forum, and this offer will be discussed when planning the next forum.

Katherine explained that the Six Town Planning committee cannot provide information on teacher programs or finances as it is not their charge, and the full district agreement is pending approval from DESE. She emphasized that the six-town model is similar to the tech school's structure in considering travel time for the high school students. Continuing the conversation, Katherine explained that under the Six Town Plan, no elementary schools will be closed in the foreseeable future, contrasting this with Pioneer's plan to close elementary schools and consolidate students into the Pioneer Building. She emphasized that Leyden residents were not consulted when their school was closed, and expressed concerns about the potential closure of the Bernardston school and the long bus rides elementary students from Leyden would face. She mentioned that the Bernardston Finance and Select Board meets quarterly with facilities representatives and that Katherine and Michele asked Jane Dutcher to bring up the possibility of having a Leyden representative attend these meetings.

Walk on Hunt Hill with Forester Alison Wright-Hunter Debrief

Katherine reported on the status of her walk with Alison Wright Hunter. They had to walk from Hunt Hill Road down the hill. Michele contacted the abutters, and they both denied access due to animals on the property. The erosion has not changed much since the logging operation was completed. While the logging equipment may have created channels there was not a lot of sediment noticed downstream. During the walk Adam Cormier met Katherine and Alison and said he was planning on logging onto his property. He asked if it would be ok for his loggers and himself to "upgrade" the lower part of the road. He is willing to upgrade himself. Katherine said she would have to discuss it with the rest of the Select Board and get back to him. Katherine would like to have Michele ask town counsel if this is appropriate or not.

She also explained to Adam that while the upper portion of Hunt Hill road is a statutory private way it remains open to the public. She noted that more "Travel at your own risk" signs could be added for safety, and mentioned that loggers might use WS Black's road due to its flat surface. Katherine also compared the road's topography to George Lamb Road, observing similarities in inclines and width. She and Alison looked at the one remaining water bar and the pipe Tony Streeter put into divert rainwater. It is not a culvert and is ok to have. There is no intermittent stream, no wetland and no channel.

Legislative Breakfast Debrief

Katherine reported that Michele and she attended the breakfast last week in Athol. She provided updates on several legislative initiatives, including the Municipal Empowerment Act, which includes provisions for permanent remote public meetings and simplified procurement processes for towns. She noted that the state's revenue is down, potentially affecting the budget, and rural school aid and charter school reimbursement have been cut. She mentioned Chapter 70 review committee and new municipal building bill. Katherine also discussed a new right of first refusal given to the state for chapter land in the bill proposed for farmland preservation. The state's second right of first refusal after a municipality for chapter land was proposed by the Department of Agriculture in order to preserve farmland availability and pricing. Katherine will review the Municipal Empowerment Act and submit written comments by early November.

Town Coordinator Updates

- Michele shared a letter from FEMA and map on the flood plain insurance renewal project. A representative will be in Leyden on October 20th to go over the renewal. Kathrine mentioned Pam Brown, chair of the Open Space Committee, should be invited to the meeting.
- Opioid settlement funds are still coming in, although very small amounts.
- Michele reported she will be submitting an EOI for the West Leyden Road project as well as the small bridge program if we qualify when this new program is announced.
- There will be a conference call with MAEPA and MADEP this coming week for the permitting of the West Leyden Road project.

Select Board Updates

- Katherine will be walking the 8-acre land behind Avery Field with Jim Brodeur to see if a trail could be accessed for ADA compliance.
- Katherine will attend the Building Needs committee and Planning Board meeting.

Agenda Planning

Next meeting October 20 in the morning

- Verizon Pole Hearing
- FEMA representative

Conflict of Interest for Tree Warden

Paperwork submitted by Bill Brooks to have the Tree Warden be a special employee. Bill contacted state ethics commission.

Motion: Katherine moved to acknowledge the conflict of interest with the Tree Warden and Highway Superintendent position. The Tree Warden will be a special employee, and the Highway Superintendent may create work for the Tree Warden. Jeff seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion to adjourn: Jeff moved at 10:22 am. Katherine seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted by: Michele Giarusso