

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
Monday, November 10, 2025
9:00 am

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

Others Present: Michele Giarusso, Pam Brown, Carolyn Asbury, Susan Bobe via remote access.

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

Accept Meeting Minutes

Motion: Katherine moved the 11/03/25 meeting minutes as written with a minor amendment, a word spelled wrong. Jeff seconded the motion and amendment. Motion was unanimously approved.

Updated Flag Policy Approval

The Select Board discussed the town's amended flag policy, focusing on a flag flying on the Right to Farm sign on the town line. They debated whether to maintain the current policy or allow residents to request permission for to fly flags on town property. The board agreed to leave the policy as is but added language allowing residents to request permission for approved flags, including the American flag, Commonwealth flag, and town flag. Katherine will put in Leyden Life one last time stating that the flag on the sign will be removed if no one claims the flag or they can remove themselves.

Motion: Katherine moved V6 version of the flag policy with some additional language Erica is adding. Erica seconded the motion and amendment. Erica and Katherine voted yes, Jeff-no.

Vote on Letters

Motion: Katherine moved to send letters regarding the decision about the lower half of Hunt Hill Road to Miles McCloy and Bruce Dobias's families. Jeff seconded the motion. Unanimous vote.

Regional EMS Meeting Update

Erica and Liz attended the regional EMS meeting. A lot of people who have been working in EMS a long time had a good conversation on what the outcome should be for regionalizing EMS services. There were differences in opinions on whether it should be a hybrid, a fire district or an intermunicipal agreement. FRCOG is studying ambulance service costs and operational data across the region, with a focus on determining the feasibility of maintaining a West County ambulance service. The discussion highlighted challenges around personnel availability, response times, and the need for 24-hour service capabilities, with particular attention to potential locations for a central facility. The group noted that while Colrain Ambulance currently operates as a volunteer service with limited town support, there are concerns about sustainability and the need for alternative models, with Highland Ambulance service cited as a successful multi-town example.

Health Insurance

Susan joined the meeting via remote access. She reported in the 1970s the town voted to accept MGL Ch. 32B allowing the town to enter into the HCGIT. Susan agreed to provide a comparison of GIC health insurance plans to the employees, as the town needs to decide whether to move to GIC by December 1st for a July 2026 start date, or wait until January 2027. Health New England is comparable to the current BCBS plan that is being offered now. No vote will be taken until the employees review the GIC options.

Six Town Regionalization Recap

There were differences of opinions on both sides, there was tension but thoughtful discussion, with Katherine noting that Alan did well answering questions. Greg went off subject at times. There definitely needs to be an

educational campaign going forward. The meeting was well attended, and everyone kept calm. There was thoughtful commentary from the audience.

There was discussion on the process and implications of towns voting to leave or join a regional school district, emphasizing that a district agreement must be approved before any changes can be implemented. The concern was raised about the lack of definitive information on Pioneer's future costs and staffing needs, as well as the potential impact of Act 73 on tuition students from Vermont. Act 73 goes into effect in 2028, and the sustainability of maintaining three small towns with a projected \$100 million new campus project is very concerning especially since we know Leyden's share of FCTS is going to be around \$100,000 per year. The group discussed writing a letter to the Mass School Building Authority (MSBA) to express opposition to a proposed feasibility study for the new school project, citing affordability and lack of town consultation on closing elementary schools as reasons for their stance.

Motion: Katherine moved to send a letter to MSBA that Leyden does not support a feasibility study for PVRSD. Jeff seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously approved.

Chapter 70 Meeting Recap

Katherine and Michele attended the Chapter 70 meeting in Greenfield last Thursday. The message to DESE from pretty much everyone was that the funding of schools is broken, highlighting its reliance on property taxes rather than income, which disproportionately affects smaller towns. Mostly superintendents and school committee members spoke. Katherine found Patricia's presentation on regionalization, off-topic and unconvincing. Some people spoke on addressing the issue of charter schools and their impact on public education. There are more sessions scheduled around the state.

Katherine also mentioned the need for facilitated discussions between the school committee and the towns on the future of our schools and what we can possibly afford as well as regionalization.

Town Coordinator Update

- Michele asked the board to appoint Jason Tuell to the ZBA. Jim Brodeur has communicated with Jasona and Jim would like him to be appointed.

Motion: Katherine moved to appoint Jason Tuell to the ZBA for a 3-year term until FY28. Jeff seconded the motion. Motion Unanimously approved. .

- Discussed scheduling a meeting for the 24th, where Rick Martin, the superintendent of FCTS , would provide an update on the new building project.
- The Assessors will be ready to set the tax rate on November 24th also.
- Michele discussed her bust trip with the Resilient Deerfield Watershed group. They visited Deerfield, Conway, Shelburne, Colrain and Greenfield. The visit to Conway, where they received grant money from the Community Preservation Act to restore the river area by removing knotweed and bittersweet, and installing bars to divert water flow was impressive. In Colrain, FEMA funding after Hurricane Irene they installed natural piers and improve erosion control. Michele also talked about the potential of using knotweed for medicinal purposes and paper production, but emphasized the need for entrepreneurs to harvest this. Greenfield installed 700 trees and a pollinator Garden, which she visited and found to be a positive addition to the area to the old mobile home park that flooded during hurricane Irene. She mentioned seeing knotweed in various locations and was told by the people who worked on these various projects to eradicate the knotweed by cutting is very labor intensive and only lasts one year.

Select Board Updates

- Jeff mentioned it seems like there were more people coming into the meetings to discuss various topics. He was reminded the Select Board has quarterly meetings with department heads and none are due at this time. Last year there was a lot of meetings where they interviewed for a town clerk.

- Erica reported there is sink hole developing on Keets Brook Road right before the bridge and she noticed the 25mph sign was taken down on Keets Brook Road. This means someone had to screw the sign off the post. Michele will share this with Bill Brooks to look into.

Public Comment

- Pam Brown requested the Select Board consider a separate ballot vote for the six-town regional vote so more people in town can vote.
- Pam reported Neighbors helping Neighbors raised \$1300 in gift cards over the weekend and disbursed around \$700 to residents in need. They have \$600 left and would like to disburse the rest. 8.67% of Leyden residents are below the federal poverty level and they figure 50 households may be struggling and receiving some sort of assistance from government programs. She asked if this group could meet in the town office building. The board said yes.
- Carolyn Asbury reported she took the American flag down that was on the sign at the town line due to its disgrace of being tattered and torn. She read the article in Leyden Life and feels whoever put the flag up should take care of the flag respectfully and responsibly. The members explained the flag policy and Carolyn suggested the policy should go into Leyden Life.

Agenda Planning

November 17-evening meeting

- Vote on the revised flag policy
- Possibility of meeting with Orion from Kibilio on PILOT
- Have Susan attend and possibly AJ and Bill about the health insurance

Motion to adjourn: Kathrine moved at 11:27 am. Jeff seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted by: Michele Giarusso