

MINUTES OF TOWN OF BERKLEY SELECTMEN'S MEETING OF 05/08/2025

SELECTMEN IN ATTENDANCE: Tabitha K. McCrohan, Chairwoman, Jennifer Vincent, Clerk

TOPIC		ACTION
	Meeting Called to Order at 6:30 p.m. in the Moitoza-Petley Hearing Room	
Personnel Board:	<p>Board to post for Principal Assessor position contingent on appropriation at Town Meeting; review of matter; votes be taken</p> <p>Tabitha McCrohan TM introduced the need for a new Principal Assessor position due to Gary's upcoming retirement in June. The proposed role is a full-time, 32-hour-per-week position aimed at catching up on past assessments and ensuring compliance with Chapter 61A. Jennifer Vincent (JV) emphasized the importance of investing in town hall staffing, noting that this position is critical for the town's assessment process. The board discussed the salary range, ultimately settling on \$55,000 to \$65,000, contingent on town meeting appropriation. Matthew Chabot (MC) suggested posting the job on multiple platforms, including the MMA website, to attract qualified candidates. The motion was made to post the job for a full-time assessor, and the board voted to approve the proposal.</p> <p>Motion to post the Principal Assessor position at a salary range of \$55,000-\$65,000 contingent on appropriation</p> <p>Board to appoint Bonnie Marshall to the position of Municipal Float Clerk; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>TM moved to appoint Bonnie Marshall to the municipal float clerk position, highlighting her current role as an assistant assessor's clerk. MC explained her current work arrangement, noting she will work 23 hours per week across multiple departments – Mondays in the accountant's office, Wednesdays with the Town Administrator, and Tuesdays and Thursdays with the assessors. Jennifer Vincent contextualized the appointment, explaining that this represents a consolidation of previously separate positions, moving from a 23-hour assistant town accountant and 23-hour administrative assistant to a more flexible staffing approach. The board discussed how this approach helps address current staffing gaps, with the understanding that it puts additional pressure on the town administrator and may impact overall administrative efficiency. The motion to appoint Bonnie Marshall was seconded and approved.</p>	<p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion to post approved</p> <p>JV moved to accept, TM seconded, motion to appoint approved</p>
Appointments:	<p>Board to appoint Robert Cote to the position of Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District Commission Representative; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Tabitha McCrohan moved to appoint Robert Cote as the representative to the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District Commission. Jennifer Vincent thanked Cote for volunteering and suggested a future meeting to discuss regional priorities. The board recognized the importance of regional economic planning, and Cote was unanimously appointed.</p> <p>Board to appoint Mark Horsfall to the position of alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>MC proposed tabling the motion for Mark Horsfall's appointment to the Zoning Board of Appeals, citing some communication issues. The board agreed to table the matter without further discussion.</p> <p>Board to appoint Byron Holmes to the position of Appointee to the Joint Transportation Planning Group; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Tabitha McCrohan moved to appoint Byron Holmes to the Joint Transportation Planning</p>	<p>JV moved to accept, TM seconded, motion to appoint approved</p> <p>JV moved to table, TM seconded, motion to table approved</p>

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	<p>Group. Jennifer Vincent emphasized the importance of having representation in regional planning, noting that with limited board member availability, they rely on residents like Holmes to ensure the town has a voice in regional discussions. The board unanimously approved Holmes' appointment.</p>	JV moved to accept, TM seconded, motion to appoint approved
New Business:	<p>New application form for Berkley Common Field; discussion of inadequacy of current process for the use of the Common ballfield; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>JV proposed a field use policy for the Berkley Common field to address challenges in managing its usage. The policy aimed to prioritize local teams, particularly Berkley Athletic Association (BAA) and local teams, over out-of-town groups. Julie Sunderland, representing BAA, raised concerns about the proposed four-week advance scheduling requirement, noting that game schedules are often finalized closer to game time. TM expressed reservations about over-regulating the field, preferring a "first-come, first-served" approach to ensure accessibility for all residents, including families and casual users. She worried that a strict policy might prevent spontaneous use and create unnecessary administrative burden. After a detailed discussion about scheduling flexibility, potential conflicts, and the importance of community access, the board ultimately decided to maintain the current informal approach without implementing a formal policy, prioritizing simplicity and open access to the field.</p> <p>Board to discuss opening on the Joint Transportation Planning Group, an advisory body to the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board took no action in light of the recent appointment.</p> <p>Board to discuss and potentially act on recent correspondence from the Division of Local Mandates entitled "Request for Waiver of Timeline under M.G.L. c. 29, § 27C, regarding Mandate Determination Request related to the MBTA Communities Act (M.G.L. c. 40A, § 3A)."; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>TM introduced the discussion on the request from the Division of Local Mandates for a waiver of the timeline under MGL Chapter 29 regarding the MBTA Communities Act review. JV explained that the request stems from ongoing lawsuits challenging the unfunded mandate, with the state still working to solidify its ruling. MC noted that the town had previously drafted a letter requesting a fiscal impact assessment. Rob Cote posited additional commentary, suggesting that the fiscal impact study only covers the cost of implementation of the bylaw, not the total fiscal impact to the Town. After discussing the complexities of the mandate and the state's ongoing legal processes, the board considered the extension request. TM suggested a 90-day extension to align with the Attorney General's office ongoing review and to provide more time for clarification. The board agreed to respond with a 90-day extension, recognizing the need for additional time to gather information and understand the full implications of the MBTA Communities Act.</p> <p>Motion to waive original deadline and extend an additional ninety days.</p> <p>Board to review and vote to authorize the signing of a proposal from TextMyGov for municipal communication and engagement services; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>TM introduced the proposal from TextMyGov for municipal communication and engagement services. Jennifer Vincent emphasized the importance of proactive community communication, explaining that the service would be an opt-in text messaging system primarily used for event notifications, meetings, polls, and reminders. She noted the goal is to increase community engagement and participation, starting with basic notifications for town meetings, elections, and important town events. The system would initially be managed by the Board of Selectmen and the town administrator, with potential for future expansion. MC highlighted the need to move beyond traditional communication methods</p>	<p>Information only; No action taken</p> <p>Information only; No action taken</p> <p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p> <p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p>

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	<p>like bulletin board postings. The board discussed the potential benefits of reaching more residents through modern communication technologies and voted to authorize the signing of the proposal.</p> <p>Board to designate the Town of Berkley website (townofberkley.ma.gov) as the official method of posting public meeting notices in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(c), replacing the bulletin board at Berkley Town Hall, 1 North Main Street, Berkley, MA 02779; review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>TM proposed designating the town's new website, townofberkley.ma.gov, as the official method for posting public meeting notices, replacing the traditional bulletin board method. MC explained the practical benefits of this change, noting that it would provide more flexibility for the town clerk, who could now update agenda postings remotely. He clarified that while the website would become the primary posting location for public meetings, public hearing notices would still require physical posting on the outside bulletin board. The change would modernize the town's communication approach and make information more accessible to residents. The board discussed the logistics and potential advantages of the digital transition, ultimately voting to approve the designation of the new website as the official platform for public meeting notices in accordance with state law.</p> <p>Board to review the recommendation of the Library Building Committee regarding Owner's Project Manager (OPM) services for the planning and design of a new Berkley Public Library, and potential vote to award contract for said services. Board to review the matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board voted to table as contract is not settled.</p> <p>Board to discuss potential future solutions for implementing Quiet Zones at South Coast Rail crossings, including initial steps such as diagnostic reviews; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>TM and JV discussed the potential implementation of quiet zones at the South Coast rail crossing. Jennifer Vincent highlighted that funding is available through the MBTA to conduct diagnostic reviews for the two rail crossings. She emphasized that this is the first step towards potentially establishing quiet zones, regardless of whether the town ultimately votes to implement them. MC noted that the funding is provided by the MBTA, meaning no taxpayer money would be spent on the initial diagnostic review. The board saw this as an opportunity to explore potential noise reduction without financial risk, and unanimously voted to approve the initial steps for conducting the diagnostic reviews.</p>	<p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p> <p>JV moved to table, TM seconded, motion to table approved</p> <p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p>
Meeting Minutes:	<p>Board to approve Meeting Minutes of April 3rd, 2025; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board moved to table the minutes April 3rd, 2025</p> <p>Board to approve Meeting Minutes of April 23rd, 2025; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board to approve Executive Session Minutes of April 23rd, 2025; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board to approve Meeting Minutes of April 30th, 2025; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>Board to approve Meeting Minutes of May 3rd, 2025; review of matter; votes may be taken</p>	<p>JV moved to table, TM seconded, motion to table approved</p>

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	<p>The board moved to approve the meeting minutes from April 23 (Executive Session), April 23 (Meeting), April 30, and May 3 en bloc, with MC noting that the minutes from April 3 would be tabled for further review.</p>	<p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p>
Town Administrator Report:	<p>In his Town Administrator report, MC discussed several key updates. He highlighted the completion of a water system extension evaluation, revealing that Berkley could potentially receive water from Taunton without additional pumping equipment, which could significantly assist economic development. This would require additional collaboration and agreement with the City of Taunton and likely an additional funding source. He also announced the upcoming Memorial Day Parade on May 26th, featuring the Somerset-Berkley band, and emphasized the community-building aspect of the event. MC additionally shared progress on the town's new website, townofberkley.ma.gov, noting that the .gov address is now official and the old website will be phased out by month's end. He acknowledged the substantial work required to migrate approximately 500 documents and agendas to the new platform, potentially requiring professional assistance.</p>	<p>Information only; No action taken</p>
Executive Session	<p>Board voted to enter executive session purposes (3) and (2) with the intent to return at 7:20PM.</p> <p>Executive Session: Board to enter into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>Board to enter into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>Board voted to return to open session at 7:41PM.</p>	<p>Roll Call vote JV: Aye; TM: Aye</p> <p>Roll Call vote JV: Aye; TM: Aye</p>
Finance Committee Update:	<p>Finance Committee to present finalized recommendation for the FY2026 Annual Town Meeting budget; review of matter; votes may be taken</p> <p>The meeting transitioned into an intense budget discussion focusing on the town's financial challenges. The conversation centered on the school district's budget, with Matthew Chabot presenting a budget vision that aimed to maintain non-recurring revenue at \$865,000 and avoid a structural deficit. Tabitha McCrohan and Jennifer Vincent engaged in a detailed dialogue about budget constraints, emphasizing the town's critical financial situation. They discussed the potential need for an operating override in 2026, highlighting the severe budget pressures facing the town. The discussion revealed that Berkeley is currently operating with minimal resources, ranking 387th out of 399 districts in per-pupil school spending. The conversation became particularly heated when a library representative (identified as Speaker 1) challenged the board's budgeting process, criticizing the lack of communication and transparency in making budget cuts. He argued that the board was making inconsistent decisions that disproportionately impacted certain departments, particularly the library. Tabitha McCrohan and Jennifer Vincent defended their approach, explaining that the current budget is essentially a "survival budget." They outlined potential scenarios if an override fails, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential closure of the library • Reducing Council on Aging services • Privatizing EMS 	

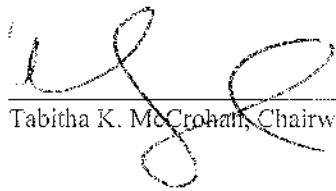
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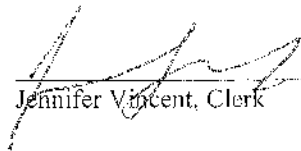
<p>Adjournment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing highway department operations Significant cuts to school staffing <p>The discussion revealed deep concerns about the town's financial sustainability. MC described the current situation as a true deficit, not just a structural one, emphasizing the need for serious fiscal control. Key points of contention included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school budget (initially proposed at \$9.034 million, increased to \$9.18 million) Potential state funding through the Senate supplemental budget The impact of budget cuts on essential services The need for an operating override <p>Dean Larabee delivered a passionate critique of the Board's budgeting process, characterizing it as the "sloppiest budget hearing" he had witnessed in 31 years. He specifically challenged the board's approach to cutting library hours and budget without proper communication with department heads. Larabee argued that the board was making arbitrary cuts across different line items, describing it as "randomly taking \$1,000 from different lines" without a coherent strategy. He emphasized that the budget decisions appeared inconsistent, with some departments potentially gaining staff while others faced significant cuts. The criticism centered on the lack of transparency and communication, particularly regarding the library's budget. Larabee questioned who had been informed about potential hours reductions and expressed concern about the impact on essential services. He stressed that decisions affecting departmental operations should involve direct conversations with department heads. JV and TM acknowledged some of Larabee's points, agreeing that communication could be improved. They explained their ongoing efforts to work with department heads and their intention to present multiple budget scenarios to the town, emphasizing that the current discussions were part of a collaborative process to address the town's financial challenges. The exchange highlighted the tension between fiscal constraints and maintaining essential community services, with Larabee arguing that the current approach of "paper cuts" was not a sustainable solution to the town's financial difficulties.</p> <p>The conversation was marked by passion and frustration, with both sides acknowledging the difficult decisions facing the town. The library representative and board members agreed on the need for better communication and a more transparent approach to budgeting. The discussion concluded with a plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a comprehensive presentation about the town's financial challenges Explore multiple override options Develop a five-year budget plan <p>The overarching message was clear: Berkley is at a critical financial crossroads, requiring difficult choices and potentially significant changes to maintain essential services.</p> <p>No action was taken on the budget recommendation, though the changes of the meeting were reflected in an expense budget totaling \$25,521,173.</p> <p>Adjournment: Board moved to adjourn at 10:25PM</p> <p>*Next Scheduled Meeting is Wednesday, May 21st, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.*</p>	<p>Information only; No action taken</p> <p>JV moved; TM seconded; motion approved</p>
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Tabitha K. McCrohan, Chairwoman



Jennifer Vincent, Clerk



Matthew Chabot, Town Administrator