

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
Monday, August 25, 2025
5:00 pm

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

Others Present: Michele Giarusso, Rebecca and Daniel Bald, Ginger Robinson, Jack Golden Anders Ferguson, Nate Messer, Carolyn Asbury, Pam Brown, Paul Hake, Susan Bobe, Alice Wozniak

Erica called the meeting to order at 5:01 pm.

Accept Meeting Minutes

Motion: Katherine moved the 8/18/25 meeting minutes with minor amendments. Jeff seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Rebecca Bald-199 East Hill Road

Daniel Bald expressed concerns about their ownership and liability for a triangular piece of land and road as is thought to be their property at 199 East Hill Road. People are using the crossroad with their vehicles and horses. They want to make sure they are not liable should anyone get hurt.

Erica stated the road is still a town road, N. Bernardston Road. The Hine's most likely own the property, and the town will need to hire a land attorney to investigate the property history and ownership, possibly conduct a survey and then get town meeting approval to discontinue the road. The board discussed possible tax adjustments for the property but will need to discuss with the assessors.

Erica stated meanwhile the board will have Bill Brooks inspect this section of road to access for any maintenance issues.

Daniel wanted to make sure the town would continue to not plow that section. Erica assured him that would not be done because of the condition of the road and the type of equipment that the town has for plowing.

MLP Bond Payment

Ginger called the Finance Committee to order at 5:33pm.

Jack shared a history of payments that have been made for our broadband network loan over the past several years. The town initially borrowed \$1,070,000 for its construction, with the MLP taking over loan payments in FY 23. Jack proposed a plan to pay off the loan in 4 years, requiring \$146,000 annually from a combination of MLP retained earnings (\$121,000) and town contributions (\$25,000). The MLP currently has \$200,000 in its stabilization account, with equipment replacement estimated to cost around \$400,000 in 4-6 years. The town holds the loan, and while there's uncertainty about the future of the CAF2 funding program providing \$26,000 annually, the MLP Advisory Committee aims to have the loan paid off within 4 years to avoid more expensive bond financing options. Susan stated the loan must be paid in 4 years or we must have an expensive audit to be able to apply for a long-term bond. Municipalities can only turn over yearly notes for 10 years.

Ginger emphasized the importance of keeping infrastructure costs separate from the tax rate, noting that the current MLP loan payments are being managed without impacting taxes. The group discussed the possibility of the town contributing \$25,000 annually to help pay down the MLP debt, but Ginger raised concerns about the town's ability to cover this amount, especially given its tight capital plan. Jack stated the MLP was seen as a utility essential for the town's operations, and there was debate whether to continue the current separation between town funds and MLP finances.

Ginger proposed to add the loan to the town's long-term capital plan and pay it off over four years. She said she wanted to wait the 4 years and then reassess-there was never an agreement by the Finance Committee to pay off the loan in 4 years. The group agreed that it would be a good idea that after the loan is paid off, any MLP retained earnings would go to stabilization for MLP equipment replacement. They also discussed using

Chapter 90 funds for highway equipment purchases, with Erica noting a recent increase in Chapter 90 money. The group decided to review the financial details during budget season, with Susan agreeing to provide hard numbers on bond requirements and town finances at that time.

The Select Board and Finance Committee will need to embrace this plan in order to pay off the debt in 4 years. There were several alternative suggestions for the MLP such as increasing the monthly rates, but no decisions were made.

Health Insurance Increase

Erica discussed the significant increase in health insurance premiums with Hampshire Trust, which will rise by 20% in October, resulting in a 41.5% total increase. She highlighted the financial impact on the town's budget, noting a deficit of approximately \$5,000-\$9,000 for the current fiscal year. Michele and Susan explained efforts to explore alternatives, including potential membership of the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) for municipal employees, though this would require significant planning and coordination. Michele also mentioned ongoing discussions with state legislators and the need for further advocacy to address rising costs. Susan wondered whether we should consider alternative insurance options during the next budget season. The question was asked if the health insurance could go up again in January and the answer was no one knows for sure.

Ginger moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 7:02 pm. Carolyn seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Town Coordinator Updates

- Michele updated the board she is still trying to meet with FRCOG person on the Complete Streets grant and further information will be coming.
- Aggregation meeting is at 2pm tomorrow for next steps on how to proceed.
- Michele had Jack sign the annual renewal for the MLP liability insurance.

Select Board Updates

- Jeff watched the School Committee meeting and said there were a lot of good updates and good questions asked.
- Katherine mentioned the board would need to come up with a dedication for the annual report. Suggestion and decision is to dedicate the report to all town employees.
- Katherine spoke with the state forester, Alison. Alison does not need to walk the Penfield CR but rather the lower part where logging was done. She and Katherine decided on October 1 to walk the lower part.
- Alison also mentioned there may be a way to receive PILOT money for all the land we have in chapter 61.
- Alice discussed the challenges of obtaining pilot payments. She expressed the need to revise the pilot formula to address disparities in land values between Western Massachusetts and other regions. Alice also addressed issues with Chapter 61 land, noting that farmers often compete for reimbursement, and voiced concerns about the state's financial capacity to provide additional support.
- Katherine will take the lead on the informational session on September 30th for the school forum. She will suggest an agenda for the evening.
- Katherine reported on the E&R grant; a survey will be available, and postcards will be going out within the next week or so explaining how residents can complete the survey.
- Erica and Katherine will both attend the aggregation meeting with Michele via remote access tomorrow.

Agenda Planning

Next meeting September 8th in the morning

- Update on electrical aggregation
- Plan for the September orientation of newly elected and appointed officials
- Complete Streets
- Grants
- School forum plans

Motion to adjourn: Katherine moved at 7:36 pm. Jeff seconded the motion, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by: Michele Giarusso