



TOWN OF LEYDEN

Meeting Minutes

Select Board

Where
: Leyden Town Offices – 7 Brattleboro Road

When: March 23, 2026

In Attendance

Members: Erica Jensen, Katherine DiMatteo, Jeff Baker

Audience: Karin Parks, Liz Kidder

Time meeting called to order: 9:00am

It was noted by Liz Kidder who had attempted to join virtually was not able to do so and that since the meeting was posted with a virtual option that was not available, the meeting could not be an official meeting. Chair, Erica Jensen, declared that no votes would be taken at this meeting.

Review of Minutes: No minutes available for review

Motion:

Second:

Vote:

Discussions:

1. Salaries and Stipends:

Stipends: After discussion, it was proposed that no increases would be made to the stipends this year. **ACTION:** To be voted for at the next Select Board meeting.

MLP Manager has asked for an increase to the Manager and Assistant Manager stipend – increase by \$750 and decrease the MLP Board stipend by \$250.

ACTION: Michele to set up an MLP Board meeting to discuss.

Hourly wages: Questions were raised about the COA Administrative Assistant position that will need to be addressed by the COA chair. **ACTION:** Erica will contact Anne Garvey about the tasks done by the Administrative Assistant and how her hours are verified.

Questions were raised about the custodian position: how many hours regularly worked? What tasks are included? **ACTION:** Questions will be directed to custodian during their review.

Erica spoke with Bill Brooks about the budget for the Tree Warden and the hourly rates paid for Highway Department workers when doing tree work. Bill requested that we continue to pay the time-and-a-half hourly wages. As the Highway worker pay increases, this is now a large hourly rate, especially for the Highway Superintendent. It was noted that the Tree Warden does not have to do the physical work, just ensure that trees are identified and schedule the work, so it might be better to have a stipend for the Tree Warden and include an hourly wage and expense line item in the budget. This would not connect the expenses to the Tree Warden position and

give more options on how to spend the budget. The Tree Warden is an elected position and not tied to the Highway Department Superintendent although that has been the recent history.

ACTION: Michele to ask the Tree Warden to attend an upcoming Select Board meeting.

Salaries: Discussion of cost of living percentage. State and FRCOG have not released their numbers yet. Whatever percentage is decided, it will be applied for all salaried workers.

ACTION: Wait for State and FRCOG numbers.

OPED: Erica reported that she has been researching the question of including OPED benefits for full-time workers. Some confusion about whether the Erving court decision about vetted requirements was overturned. She has sent a note to Donna regarding questions raised during the last discussion. Unlikely that this will be decided in this fiscal year.

2. Right to Farm sign:

The decision on moving the sign will be taken up at the next Select Board meeting. The suggested location is the Town Common, replacing the old Police Department sign.

3. Request from COA:

The COA would like to use the Town Hall on two Sundays a month to reopen the Leyden Café. Since this is a COA sponsored activity, they can use the Town Hall. Donations, if collected, will go into the COA Donations account.

ACTION: Erica will notify the COA chair, Anne Garvey.

4. Digital Equity 1 Grant:

Karin Parks reported that she has booked out for the one-on-one training sessions under the GCC Digital Equity grant.

Discussion of the list of possible group workshops to over under Digital Equity 1 grant. The list was prioritized in the following order:

- Getting Comfortable with your Computer. Trainer: Stephanie Stoudenmire
- Smartphone Skills. Trainer: Stephanie Stoudenmire
- Introduction to Digital Tools for Everyday Life: Trainer: Stephanie Stoudenmire
- Protecting your Personal Information online: Trainer: Rich Vaden
- AI for Seniors – Real Confidence with Artificial Intelligence: Trainer: Rich Vaden
- Gmail and Google Suite Basics and Maintenance: Trainer Rich Vaden

Workshops will be held at the Town Office. Karin suggested setting up a set day/time – something like Tech Tuesdays.

ACTION: Michele to contact Donna at GCC with this list of priority workshops and discuss when to schedule, what the next steps are. Karin is to be copied on all correspondence.

5. Digital Equity 2 Grant:

Erica will research iPads under \$500.00. Wi-Fi only models are available at or below this price. Possibly can purchase 10. Training will have to be scheduled after iPads are distributed.

Criteria: 65 or older, computer literate or willing to learn. Under 65 if they qualify for a Federal and/or State assistance program. Selection would be by lottery if more than 10 persons submit a request.

ACTION: Michele to contact Chris Fontaine at PVRSD Tech Office and inquire about iPad vendors that the school uses and if Leyden could purchase through this vendor.

ACTION: Post in Leyden Life in May to solicit interest. When available, promote on website, at the library and town office, North County Notes (Greenfield Recorder) and word of mouth.

6. Select Board Updates

Discussion:

- Katherine reported on the MMA Legislative Breakfast. State in midst of budget season but budget won't be finalized until 7/21/26. The State's revenue estimate for year end is to be up by 2.9%. Governor's proposed budget is \$63B with 3.2% increase in Chapter 70 funds, \$75 per pupil minimum aid, \$20M for rural schools but more schools eligible such as Tech schools and charter schools. 2.5% increase in UGGA. MMA had requested higher amounts in all these budget items.

MMA emphasized how important it is for the Municipal Empowerment Act to pass. Within it there is an OPED Reform Commission, double poles requirements that pressure the electric company to remove those that have been replaced. There are many other changes in this Act that benefits municipalities.

Clean Energy Siting and Permitting has been streamlined to speed things up. Includes small projects under 25KW and storage under 100MWH. One person in each town identified as the coordinator of permits so that permits don't have to be submitted to both planning board and conservation commission separately. New process is to start on October 1, 2026. Guidelines are being developed.

A new solar bylaw is coming from the State.

- Katherine reported on the 3-town meeting. School budget is still of concern. Bernardston is facing a possible 2.5% override. Discussion centered around a strategy for all three towns to have the same message about not recommending the budget. Next meeting scheduled for April 2nd after Select Boards and Finance Committees in each town discuss participation in this strategy.
- Jeff reminded us that the Bernardston Fire Department Open House is April 18th at 11am.
- Erica reported that she received a letter from the PVRSD Superintendent about the withdrawal from their request for a Northfield Elementary Feasibility Study from DESE. Unsure if this needs Leyden's signature, she will confirm with Michele.

7. Public Comments

- Karin Parks asked if a large TV and stand similar to the one in the Town Office be purchased for the downstairs in the Town Hall. This would be used by those holding events downstairs so that the TV does not have to be moved from upstairs. Karin offered that the Library could share the cost.
ACTION: Erica will speak with COA Chair Anne Garvey to determine their interest and ability to purchase.

- Liz Kidder gave an update on the Fire Department Shared Services Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). A one-year MOA is proposed for a fee of \$65,000 to be paid by Leyden to Bernardston. Some additional costs will continue to be borne by Leyden for maintenance of our building and equipment, and insurance. This number represents 23% of Bernardston’s Fire Department budget. Leyden represents 10% of the fire calls that Bernardston responds to. Bernardston Finance Committee Chair is not yet on board with this proposal and fee. Plan B would be that Leyden continues its Fire Department. Plan C would be to call on FRCOG to help with negotiation and calculation of expenses and a fair distribution of payment for services. FRCOG has indicated that they would loop in Colrain to determine interest in a 3-way Intermunicipal Agreement.

Emergency Management Committee is requesting level funding for FY27. Have not spent all of this year’s budget so \$5500 will go back to town.

Planning Board: Floodplain overlay district warrant article will request the town to replace the old overlay district with a revised overlay district based on new mapping of floodplains. Another warrant article that the board will bring forward has to do with small changes to the ADU bylaw passed last year.

MVP Process: the 2.0 process will be implemented. Leyden will be notified about how to maintain eligibility for MVP Action Grants.

New contract is due with Colrain Ambulance.

ACTION: Michele will contact Gary Ponce at Colrain Ambulance to come in to report at an upcoming Select Board meeting.

8. Agenda Planning

- Vote on Right to Farm sign
- Vote on School Budget recommendation to Annual Town Meeting
- Wage and Stipend discussion continued
- Colrain Ambulance Report
- Tree Warden discussion
- E&R Advisory Committee Report
- Town Coordinator Report
- Select Board Report

Next Meeting: March 30, 2026, at 9:00 am

Meeting Adjournment

Motion: Katherine moved
to adjourn at 11:54am

Second: Jeff

Vote: Unanimous

Submitted By: Katherine DiMatteo