



TOWN OF LEYDEN

Meeting Minutes

Select Board

Where : Leyden Town Offices – 7 Brattleboro Road

When: April 13, 2026, at 9:00 AM

In Attendance

Members: Erica Jensen, Katherine DiMatteo, Jeff Baker

Audience: Liz Kidder, Jack Golden, Gary Ponce, George Stephens

Time meeting called to order: 8:58 AM

Select Board reviewed and signed the bi-weekly warrants.

Review of Minutes:

No minutes to review

Discussion:

1. Colrain Ambulance Service

Gary Ponce presented information on the service provided to Leyden from 4/3/25 to 4/3/26. In that time there was 32 calls of which 23 were patient contacts and 7 mutual aid requests. There may have been 4 calls that were over 30 minutes, however more information is needed on the mutual aid requests to determine this. Mutual aid is called when Colrain Ambulance can't get out. The average call time was 22.5 minutes. Of those over 30 minutes, 2 were in the winter. Longer times and mutual aid requests are due to those times when the crew is not yet working at the ambulance service and if there is anyone to do overnights.

There are currently 24 employees with 9 making up most of the calls. It is difficult to have those qualified as paramedics as the pay rate competition is fierce. Paramedic pay was increased 14% and is barely competitive. The Ambulance Service is reimbursed at only 2.5% from Federal and State programs. Colrain Ambulance is competing for paramedics with all of Western Mass, especially those offering full time work plus benefits and retirement.

The ambulance rebuild is not yet completed, probably not until Oct or Nov or even February 2027. A new ambulance costs about \$425,000 now and it takes 2-3 years to have one delivered. There are limited businesses that build and rebuild ambulances in the country due to mergers or takeovers.

The contract for the next year – 8/7/25 to 8/7/26 – will be sent with a few minor changes. Fee will remain the same at \$12,500 annually. Erica noted that we are still getting invoices from

ComStar for calls. Gary asked to be informed when that happens, it shouldn't happen and he will deal with them. Gary is working on having more time to do administration. He is about a year and a half from retiring from his full-time job.

2. MLP Budget

Jack Golden presented the budget for FY27 which is similar to past years. He requested that the wages for the manager and assistant manager be increased because they have not had an increase in 3 years. To balance this increase, Jack proposed lowering the stipend for the MLP board since its role has changed with the formation of the MLP advisory committee. The proposed proposal is to add \$500 each for the manager and assistant manager and reduce the board stipend by \$250 each. Jack noted that his workload as manager has not decreased as there are projects that come up and given consideration of cost of living. The assistant manager does the finance work, and everything related to the hut.

Other changes in the budget: Middle mile expenses are called out in the ISP line, not under infrastructure and called backhaul as has appeared in the past. The 3 lines that make up the middle mile is reduced to \$7,980 due to redundancy improvements. It had been \$14,000 for only one line. The 3 lines are billed by Wired West for one line and Whip City for two lines.

Income is \$350,426 in the proposed budget. This is an estimate based on 297 internet users in the current year at \$85 a month. Retained earnings will be approximately \$124,227.

Loan debt payment has fluctuated. Treasurer has recommended that \$145,000 is put toward the loan (principle and interest) so that the loan can be paid down in 4 years when the bond period ends. To do this, Jack is proposing to use the retained earnings plus \$25,758 from the town's free cash to pay the loan. The CAF II money of \$ 27,628 be moved into broadband stabilization for future improvements to the hut or emergency repairs. The generator problem this past winter highlighted the issue of emergencies and MLP does not have funds to handle an emergency right now. Jack expects that rates for broadband can be reduced as retained earning increase after loan is paid off.

MOTION: Jeff moved to close the Select Board meeting and to convene the MLP Board meeting at 10:25 am EST. Katherine seconded the motion. Approved unanimously.

Jack requested that the MLP manager wage be increased to \$5,500 from \$5,000; assistant manager wages be increased to \$2,000 from \$1,500; and MLP board member stipends decrease to \$750 from \$1,000.

MOTION: Katherine moved to accept the request for increased wages and decreased stipends as presented. Jeff seconded the motion. Erica recused herself from the vote due to a conflict of

interest based on her interest in filling the assistant manager position. Katherine and Jeff approved the motion.

Jack noted that his appointment term ends in June 2026. He is interested in continuing as MLP manager. Some time in the future he will step down and wants to have the assistant manager position filled by someone who can move into the manager position.

MOTION: Katherine made a motion to adjourn the MLP board meeting and to reconvene the Select Board meeting at 10:34 am EST. Jeff seconded the motion. Approved unanimously.

3. Town Clerk Budget

George joined the meeting to discuss his proposed budget for FY27. Erica noted that the budget is much higher than any past year. There are some items in the Town Clerk budget that do not have to be there as they are included under other budget line items: \$500 for printing of town report, \$300 for furniture and fixtures. Erica suggested that the dinner meal for election workers be cut down to \$100 for each election and cut one conference.

George defended the postage amount due to increased cost and multiple mailings. The required election worker training is estimated for 10 people. There is one coming up in Deerfield and there are 3 people signed up now. Number of elections has increased for FY27 with a Primary, a State/Federal election, and two special elections – one for Franklin County Technical School and possible one for the Six-Town School Regionalization vote. Plus the annual town election in June 2027. There is some reimbursement from the State for that election and possibly the primary, and the Franklin County Technical School election will be reimbursed. These reimbursements have not been considered in the proposed cost.

Although an increase was requested for hourly wage for Town Clerk, the Select Board will propose a 2.8% increase over the blended rate for 2026, so it is in line with other COLA wage increases.

4. Select Board Updates

Katherine was asked if the dumpster at the town offices can be used by the Leyden Road Clean-up crew. A date has not been set for the clean-up, but it will be a week-long effort initiated by a group associated with Neighbors helping Neighbors. There was consensus that the dumpster can be used.

ACTION: Michele should be alerted since there may be more trash than one dumpster can hold. If the dumpster is emptied mid-week than it might be sufficient. Michele should coordinate.

Katherine noted that the staff should be informed of the COLA increase before the warrant is posted and rumors start to fly.

ACTION: Erica will inform them after the budget is finalized.

Katherine updated everyone on the Herron Habitat trail initiative. Recreation Committee has supported. Conway School of Landscape Design has been contacted and there is interest in

submitting a proposed study done by the students however the scope of the project is small, they have asked if there is interest in including Avery Field as well. Katherine, Steve Richter and Pam Brown will meet with Emily from the Conway School on Tuesday 4/14 to walk around. Improvements to Avery Field would fit into the grant criteria.

Katherine reported on the three-town meeting. Productive with fewer people attending from the town officials and from the school committee. Some old ground was covered but there was more of a dialogue with Melissa Gerry, chair of the school committee. Bernardston's Select Board and Finance Committee have unanimously voted to not recommend the PVRSD budget. Northfield Finance Committee has also voted to not recommend it.

Katherine asked if we want a presentation on the MassCare warrant article at the Annual Town Meeting. Erica did not believe it would be necessary since it is not binding vote, however we can discuss when we do a walk-through of the warrant and town meeting with the moderator.

Jeff announced that a PVRSD Facebook page has been set up. He has not received a call back from the Veterans office.

Erica noted that the ADA grant opens on May 1. She clarified that the decision about who recommends stipends was taken up a few years back. The Finance Committee recommends the stipends for elected officials because the Select Board would have a conflict of interest. Select Board recommends all other stipends and wages. There is new information about Franklin Technical School for the building project that may reduce the bond amount and the town's assessment. We have not been notified yet; she will try to find out what the new amount will be.

Erica presented the topic of mail-in voting for the town election. Pros and cons were discussed. **MOTION:** Jeff moved and Katherine seconded a motion to opt-out of mail-in ballots for the town election. Approved unanimously.

Erica proposed that the Tree Warden hourly rate be capped at the FY26 rate to keep the hourly rate from continuously escalating.

MOTION: Katherine moved and Jeff seconded a motion to cap the hourly rate for the Tree Warden at the FY26 rate.

Erica presented her response to the Library Trustees' request that we reconsider the Librarian wage increase. The town has been bringing it up each year by 5% and this year although it is not a lot of dollars, it would be consistent to stay with the 5% increase. The comparison done by the Trustees with other towns is somewhat misleading as the towns are all different in population size, number of hours the libraries are open, and if the librarians have a master's degree in

library science or similar. It was the consensus of the Select Board to stick with our decision of a 5% increase.

ACTION: Michele to confirm that Janell will be at the Town Meeting to handle the virtual participants.

Next Meeting: April 21, 2026, at 5:00 pm

Agenda items: OPEB, Budget, Request to update town history on the website, draft of town meeting warrants.

ACTION: Michele to ask Nan Ralsted, chair of Historical Commission, Morgan Thomas and to attend the Select Board meeting for the town history agenda item.

Meeting Adjournment

Motion: Katherine moved
to adjourn at 12:18 pm

Second: Jeff

Vote: Unanimous

Submitted By: Katherine DiMatteo