



Board of Selectmen

Ware Town Hall, Meeting Room, 126 Main Street

Regular Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, January 4, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

6:30 p.m. – Executive Session: M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a) Contract Negotiations

7:00 p.m. – Regular Meeting

Instructions for call in option: at or before 7:00 p.m., call the phone number below and when prompted enter the Meeting ID number. The platform is Zoom Meetings.

Join online: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7846041861> (the online option will require a download).

Meeting ID: 784 604 1861

Passcode: 01082

Phone: 929-205-6099

Present: Selectman Thomas H. Barnes, Chairman Keith J. Kruckas, Vice-Chairman John J. Morrin, Town Manager Stuart B. Beckley, Executive Assistant Christopher J. Nolan, Police Chief Shawn Crevier, Fire Chief Christopher Gagnon

Absent: Selectman Nancy J. Talbot

Present via Zoom: Selectman Caitlin M. McCarthy, Lynn Nenni, Kayleigh Goodrow, Eileen Kennedy from Ware River News, Stanley Ciukaj from Ware Community Television

Meeting Opened by Chairman Kruckas as 7:00 PM.

Opening Remarks, Announcements, and Agenda review by Chair

- None

Consent Agenda

- Approval of November 16, 2021, November 23, 2021, and December 7, 2021 Meeting Minutes
- Approval of 2022 Board of Selectmen Meeting Dates (see attached list)
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin asked Selectman Barnes for clarification on a previous comment he made regarding issues with some wording in former minutes.
 - Selectman Barnes answered that he had taken issue with the Town Manager and Executive Assistant's initial handling of his request for a Master Town Calendar, but that the issue had since been resolved.

Selectman Morrin made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

Scheduled Appearances- none

Old Business

- **Discussion on ARPA Funds, Essential Worker Bonuses**
 - Mr. Beckley directed the Board to the packet summary he had provided on this topic, including a timeline of how the pandemic affected the operations of various Town departments.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that some larger cities in the area had been allotting ARPA funds to provide bonuses for their essential workers, but that local towns comparable in size to Ware had not yet taken such measures.
 - He stated that the Governor had placed a cap at \$2,000 per employee for such bonuses.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin interjected that the \$2,000 maximum only applied to municipalities funding non-governmental workers who were deemed essential, and that the Board was following the model implemented by Springfield on this topic.
 - Chairman Kruckas stated that only employees who never had the opportunity to work from home should be considered for bonuses.
 - Mr. Beckley interjected that despite differences in location, all Town employees continued to perform the duties assigned in their job descriptions throughout the pandemic.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin recommended the Board consider utilizing Springfield's model, which implemented a three-tier approach for worker bonuses based on risk exposure.
 - Chief Crevier argued that the Police and Fire Departments never stopped serving the community, despite the risk posed to first responders by the virus, and that the Police and Fire stations were never able to lock their doors from those who needed assistance.
 - Mr. Beckley disputed this, stating that the front door of the Fire Department was locked for a period of several months where visitors were not allowed inside the station.
 - Chief Crevier argued that the Police and Fire Departments do most of their work outside of their own facilities, and that police officers and firefighters risked their own health each day by coming to work to serve the community.
 - Mr. Beckley interjected that Town Hall employees who continued coming to work were also at risk.
 - Selectman McCarthy argued that working in hazardous conditions is a normal expectation made clear to employees of the Police and Fire Departments as part of their jobs, for which they are already compensated fairly.
 - Chief Crevier disputed this, claiming that typical hazardous conditions do not consist of serving the public during a public health emergency that lasts a year and a half.
 - Mr. Beckley reminded the Board that Springfield is a much larger city which received more ARPA funding overall than Ware, warning the Board that the two municipalities were not a fair comparison.
 - Selectman Barnes cited the Town's failure to spend the entirety of its CARES Act funding from the State and expressed fear of this occurring with ARPA money. He also expressed the need to ensure retention of employees from the Police and Fire Departments.
 - Chairman Kruckas commented that Chief Crevier's request for \$10,000/employee in his Department may be a bit steep, but that \$5,000/employee may be more reasonable.
 - Selectman Barnes argued in favor of splitting the difference between these two numbers and opting for a bonus of \$7,500/employee.
 - Mr. Beckley reminded the Board of the Town's custodial staff, for whom bonuses have also been discussed.
 - Chief Crevier stated that full-time employees of the Police Department eligible for the bonuses numbered 18.5, and Chief Gagnon cited 20 of them in the Fire Department.
 - Mr. Beckley calculated that awarding \$7500 to each of these employees would equate to roughly \$300,000 of the Town's ARPA funds spent.
 - He reiterated that the Town was originally awarded just over \$2.9 million in ARPA money, and that \$415,000 had already been approved by the Board before this meeting.

- Chairman Kruckas announced that the Board would focus on approving bonuses for Police and Fire immediately, and focus on ironing out the details for other essential Town personnel to be approved at a future meeting.

Selectman Morrin made the motion to approve the awarding of hazard pay bonuses to each full-time employee of the Police and Fire Departments at a rate of \$7,500/employee. Selectman Kruckas seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

- Chief Crevier inquired when his officers could expect to receive their payments.
- Mr. Beckley predicted that they could be prepared for two paychecks into the future, meaning January 20th.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin requested that Mr. Beckley provide the Board with a fine-tuned list of personnel at the next meeting, with evaluation of who was at the most risk for exposure to the virus on a day-to-day basis.
- Chief Crevier thanked the Board for their support of his Department.
- Mr. Beckley inquired with the Board about their openness to using ARPA funding for purchasing COVID-19 Rapid Test Kits from the State, which was selling them for roughly one-third of store price.
- Chairman Kruckas expressed displeasure with rumors he heard that some of the test kits received by the Town in recent weeks were unintentionally leached to residents of other communities.
- Mr. Beckley expressed the importance of spreading public health awareness, and increasing the ease with which community members can be tested for COVID.
- Selectman Barnes inquired whether rapid tests were regarded as reliable.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin implored him to read up on this topic, and that the current data suggested their reliability was spotty.
- Chairman Kruckas encouraged Mr. Beckley to investigate whether any component of CARES Act spending had been given an extension, and that rapid test kits could be purchased with that if it was still available.
- **Update from Licensing Clerk on Section 12 Liquor Licenses, Hardship Letters, Revenue**
 - Mr. Nolan noted that at their November 16, 2021 Meeting, the Board had approved waiving the Renewal Fee for any Section 12 Liquor Licensee that could produce a hardship letter.
 - Every eligible establishment ended up providing a letter to have their fee waived.
 - Mr. Nolan provided a spreadsheet detailing the revenue that was generated from License Renewal fees versus what was covered by hardship letters.
 - Chairman Kruckas expressed displeasure with the Town's loss of revenue from the acceptance of so many hardship letters, and argued that some have returned to pre-pandemic levels of business.
 - Mr. Nolan stated that if the opportunity to waive license renewal fees were to be approved again in future years, his office could seek to require more stringent documentation of legitimate hardship, such as data on sales revenue or customer traffic.
 - Mr. Nolan also named two alcohol licenses which were not renewed.
 - #03731-RS-1326- Wicked Wings Ware Inc. d/b/a Wicked Wings Co. (closed for business October 2021)
 - #04851-CL-1326- Melha Shriners (announced intention to not renew late December 2021)

New Business

- **Appointment: Elena Palladino, Historical Commission**

Selectman Barnes made the motion to appoint Elena Palladino to the Historical Commission. Selectman

Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

- **Review of Dumpster Fees (527 CMR Section 34)**
 - Chairman Kruckas announced that this discussion had been rescheduled for the January 18, 2022 meeting.


Comments and Concerns of Citizens- none

Town Manager Report

- The Decorations Committee is seeking volunteers for taking down the Holiday Decorations on Saturday, January 8.
- Regional Animal Shelter Update- The Town of Monson acquired a facility that could be converted into the regional animal shelter for a far cheaper cost than rebuilding the current site in Palmer.
 - Chairman Kruckas cited numerous complaints he hears regarding residents' difficulties reaching the Animal Control Officer on the phone. He emphasized the need for her to be given a cell phone to use while on duty.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that both Ware and Monson have offered similar such proposals before.
 - Chairman Kruckas remarked that the Town was paying for a service that it was not receiving, while the Ware Police and Fire Departments are forced to handle animal-related calls themselves.
- Personnel- Interviews for the currently vacant HR Director position are ongoing. The newly-approved Grants Manager position is posted online, but has not drawn as many applicants as would be desired. Laura White will be starting as Administrative Assistant in the Planning & Community Development Department on Monday, January 10.
- Assessors Office- David Burgess, the retired former Assessor with the Town of Amherst, is set to begin helping in the Assessors Office one day a week to partially fill the role of Full-Time Assessor, which has been vacant for several months.
 - Selectman Barnes commented that Deanna Lavigne, Administrative Assistant in the Assessors Office, should be given the proper training should she wish to step into the role herself.
 - Mr. Beckley stated that this possibility was an ongoing discussion with Regional Resource Group.
- Planning & Community Development- The Town recently submitted a grant application for re-surfacing and drainage improvements in the Pleasant Street municipal parking lot, as well as sidewalk improvements on Main and West Streets.
- The DPW was beginning the work of tree maintenance around the Church Street water tank in order to prepare for further stages of the water tank rehabilitation project for this tank, as well as the one on Anderson Road.
- Chairman Kruckas expressed the wish to amend the earlier motion regarding hazard pay stipends for Police and Fire to also include the two members of the Town's custodial staff (at a prorated amount in accordance with their part-time status).
- Chairman Kruckas thanked the community and especially Mr. Clayton Sydla for his dedication in obtaining the new decorative streetlights recently put up Downtown.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin expressed his wish to inform the Finance Committee that his main goal for the new year would be lowering taxes, while also completing as many Capital Improvements as possible. He called for more overall financial transparency, and demanded that an agreement must be reached with Resource Waste for their proposed expansion to generate revenue for the Town.
- Selectman Barnes argued that Disability Awareness Committee member Steven Hawk, who is also serving as the Town's ADA Coordinator, is in need of a Town-issued email address.
 - Mr. Beckley stated that he would work to get this set up.

Adjournment

Selectman Morrin made the motion at 7:52 p.m. to Adjourn the Regular Meeting. Selectman Kruckas seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

Attest: 

Christopher J. Nolan
Executive Assistant to Town Manager