



Board of Selectmen

Ware Town Hall, Meeting Room, 126 Main Street

Regular Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, February 1, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.

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 Nancy J. Talbot, Chairman Keith J. Kruckas, Selectman Caitlin M. McCarthy, Vice-Chairman John J. Morrin, Town Manager Stuart B. Beckley, Executive Assistant Christopher J. Nolan, Fire Chief/Emergency Management Director Chris Gagnon, Parks Director John Piechota, William Imbier, Lynn Nenni, Ken Willette, Devin Peterson, Shaun Robinson, Antonio Porter, Kimberly Swarts, Bill Jackson, Alex Bergeron, Jennifer McMartin, Catherine Cascio, Jack Cascio

Absent: None

Present via Zoom: Selectman Thomas H. Barnes, Stanley Ciukaj from Ware Community Television, Eileen Kennedy from Ware River News, Hardwick Town Administrator Nicole Parker, Hardwick Selectman Julie Quink, Terrance Smith

Meeting Opened by Chairman Kruckas at 7:00 PM.

Opening Remarks, Announcements, and Agenda review by Chair

- Chairman Kruckas remarked that Selectman Barnes would be present via Zoom momentarily, but was experiencing technical difficulties.
- Chairman Kruckas apologized for his absence at the previous meeting, citing health issues.
- Chairman Kruckas expressed disapproval with the disorder of the previous meeting, and stated that all would be required to speak in the order of which they are called.

Consent Agenda

- **Approval of January 18, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Selectman Talbot made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Selectman Barnes expressed his dissatisfaction with the January 18 Meeting Minutes, and stated he would like numerous items to be corrected before approval. Chairman Kruckas stated that the Board would be tabling this Consent Agenda to the following meeting.

Scheduled Appearances

- **Town of Hardwick Board of Selectmen- Ambulance Agreement Update & Discussion**

- Chairman Kruckas asked for the officials from the Town of Hardwick to provide the 6-month update listed in the agreement.
- Ms. Parker recognized the progress made by Hardwick's Ambulance Committee, and stated the their Town was considering a wide variety of options.
- She acknowledged the challenges associated with building an ambulance service from scratch in a small town, and thanked the Town of Ware for its agreement to serve residents of their town as well.
- Ms. Parker recognized that Ware's ambulances are currently experiencing an extremely high call volume, and while she could not make any guarantees on a timeline, she recognized that the Ambulance Agreement was a strain on Ware's emergency resources.
- Chairman Kruckas expressed that the situation was not the fault of Ms. Parker, but accused members of the Hardwick Board of Selectmen of being complacent with the current model.
- He argued that the strain being placed on Ware's emergency management services was having an adverse effect on the Town, and that the current setup was unsustainable.
- He expressed that the time Ware's ambulances were spending in Hardwick was causing Ware residents to have longer wait times during emergencies, and that the Agreement was not in the best interest of his community.
- He stated that Ware was experiencing more harm than benefits from this Agreement, and he recommended terminating it.
- Ms. Parker retorted that Hardwick had heavily compensated Ware at the beginning of the Agreement for the service that it was receiving, and that she was determined to see this be the final contract made with Ware for ambulance service.
- Chairman Kruckas responded that this made the Board's decision much easier.
- Chief Gagnon expressed agreement that health resources were very strained in Ware as a result of both the Mary Lane Hospital closure and record-high call volumes.
- He added that between serving Hardwick and transporting to Baystate Wing in Palmer, Ware ambulances were currently spending a great deal of time outside of Town.
- Chief Gagnon expressed his belief that at the start of the Agreement, Hardwick had good intentions to cultivate its own ambulance service. He also emphasized his department's determination to not suddenly leave its neighboring community without service but agreed with Chairman Kruckas about the unsustainability of the current Agreement.
- Chairman Kruckas noted the Board's obligation to vote on this matter before April 1st, which is the 90-day mark before the current Agreement expires.
- He emphasized Ware's flexibility and willingness to assist Hardwick in cultivating its own ambulance service, especially given their determination to not seek renewal this year.
- Hardwick Selectman Quink expressed that the current Agreement provides for five more months of service and expressed her belief that remaining issues could be resolved at the level of the Ambulance Committee, rather than the Board of Selectmen.
- Chairman Kruckas interjected with dissatisfaction, accusing Hardwick of making no progress on this issue.
- Selectman Quink continued that while Ware has the advantage of a full-time Fire Department and Emergency Management staff, Hardwick is a much smaller community with fewer resources.
- Chairman Kruckas interrupted that he felt Hardwick was failing to take action, which could have deadly consequences if delays in service resulting from the Agreement continue.
- Selectman Quink added that the current health-related struggles facing Ware were mutual to both towns and reiterated that Hardwick was making progress with the Ambulance Committee, which she implored to reconvene.
- Chairman Kruckas asked how many meetings the Ambulance Committee had held.

- Selectman Quink estimated that the answer was five or six, but that the Chair would need to be consulted for an exact number.
- Selectman Quink emphasized her openness about her positions on the Hardwick Board of Selectmen, the Ambulance Committee, and her relation to the Baystate Health organization.
- Ms. Parker noted her initial reluctance to enter into the Agreement 6 months prior, but that she had been persuaded by Mr. Beckley and Chief Gagnon to accept it. She recognized Hardwick's progress as slow but steady in finding a solution that does not force them to rely on a neighboring town so heavily.
 - Chairman Kruckas retorted with frustration that more progress had not been made, added that Ware residents pay more in taxes than those in Hardwick, and stated the Board's obligation to make decisions based on what is best for their own community.
- Chairman Kruckas asked Chief Gagnon for an update on staffing within his department.
 - Chief Gagnon responded that staffing has been a continuous challenge, and that with the current high call volume, he regularly has to call in off-duty workers.
 - He added that this poses a safety risk when undersized crews are left to extinguish active structure fires.
 - He also noted that his department is set to hit 3,000 calls by the end of the year if the current volume continues.
- Chairman Kruckas argued that these statistics exemplify the Town's need for mutual aid agreements, rather than service contracts such as the current one with Hardwick.
- Chief Gagnon added that his department continues to break records for high call volume, and that this uptick must be supplemented by adequate staffing.
 - Chairman Kruckas agreed, emphasizing the importance of resolving this issue.
- Chief Gagnon noted that the current call volume of his department for Hardwick specifically was about 200-220 calls per year. He also added that even if the current agreement was terminated, Ware firefighters and paramedics would continue to receive calls for assistance in Hardwick.
- Ms. McMartin asked if Hardwick would continue to rely on Ware for ALS, even if it were able to cultivate its own BLS system.
 - Chief Gagnon responded that this would be the case, and the call volume would still be strenuously high without the current agreement in place.
- Chairman Kruckas remarked that Ware was being forced to keep extra staff on its EMS shifts as a result of the agreement with Hardwick.
 - Chief Gagnon interjected that this was not actually the case.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin remarked on the constant nature of current ambulance calls.
- Ms. McMartin asked if the high call volume was a result of COVID.
 - Chief Gagnon responded that they play a large role in it, with high current levels of COVID-related calls.
- Ms. McMartin remarked on the cyclical nature of the pandemic.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin disputed that a variety of calls involve patients reporting COVID symptoms, even if that is not the medical issue at hand.
- Chief Gagnon added that several residents who formerly would have driven themselves to Mary Lane Hospital are now forced to call for ambulance services, as they lack alternative transportation to Baystate Wing.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin argued that people are aware that transport in an ambulance allows them to bypass the waiting period when they arrive at the hospital.
 - Ms. McMartin disputed this claim, arguing that this was not the case.
- Chairman Kruckas urged residents not to call an ambulance unless dealing with a true medical emergency.
- Mr. Peterson asked about the feasibility of finding a private BLS service.
 - Chief Gagnon responded that Baystate offers some of these services, but that the cost of

- contracting BLS from an external organization would be immense, and that this money would be better spent on building up the Town's existing department.
- Ms. Cascio recognized the aforementioned program from Baystate, noting that it is known as Dispatch Health. She also recommended increasing public awareness on the topic of when to call an ambulance versus when to seek alternative options.
 - Chief Gagnon agreed, noting the difficulty of changing people's behavior when public awareness campaigns have been encouraging people to call 9-1-1 for decades.
- **Parks Commission- Discussion of Pool Options**
 - Mr. Imbier appeared before the Board to ask for an update and discussion on options regarding the town pool. Options among these include replacing the current Reed Pool at the same site, or pursuing a new indoor pool to be constructed with the proposed youth/community center.
 - Selectman McCarthy responded that the youth center project was still being started from scratch, and that the most feasible option appeared to be utilization of the existing pool site.
 - Mr. Piechota answered that the Parks Department had considered its full suite of options.
 - One option would involve eliminating the current pool's deep end to avoid the risk of contact with groundwater.
 - An indoor pool facility would have many benefits, but would also be very expensive to build and maintain, meaning it is not within the Town's budget.
 - Selectman Talbot responded that the Board's hesitation with the indoor pool idea comes from the cost. She asked how communities with indoor pool facilities pay for their maintenance.
 - Selectman Barnes noted that he has spoken with the former operator of the indoor pool at Palmer High School, stating that it came with a high cost of \$1,000 per week for maintenance, which does not include the additional cost of staffing.
 - Selectman Barnes recognized the importance of youth having access to swim lessons, and suggested a program where the Town could partner with Belchertown to transport local youth to their town beach for lessons via the Quaboag Connector.
 - Chairman Kruckas asked if a regional site could be considered, allowing Ware to share access and funding for a pool facility with neighboring communities.
 - Mr. Piechota stated that this option was worth considering.
 - Chairman Kruckas confirmed his support for the idea of an indoor pool, arguing the impracticality of spending millions on a site that can only be used for a few months each year.
 - Selectman McCarthy noted the proposal to place an insulated dome over the existing Reed Pool, allowing it to be used year-round.
 - Mr. Bergeron asked about the possibility of partnering with organizations like the YMCA, the Boys & Girls Club, or Eagle Hill School to bring an indoor pool to the Town, or allow community members access to one nearby.
 - Selectman McCarthy answered that these organizations did not express interest in working with the Town when asked.
 - Mr. Jackson asked why simpler solutions were not being considered, such as the use of less water and thicker concrete materials at the current Reed Pool.
 - Mr. Piechota answered that these solutions would be evaluated after the thorough assessment of the Reed Pool is complete. He argued that the site's issues have been 'band-aided' for several years, and that the pool is now more than 80 years old and structurally unsound.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin recognized the impressive construction of the Reed Pool to have lasted so long, and emphasized the importance of emulating this success with any new construction.
 - Mr. Piechota stated that the Parks Commission concluded its obligation was to prioritize the Reed Pool over any new proposed sites, but that a smaller pool within another facility could be considered in the long-term.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin emphasized the importance of finding a way to ensure the Town's youth

have access to swim lessons this Summer.

- Chairman Kruckas expressed the priority of ensuring the pool is available to the public, not just youth and seniors.

Selectman Talbot made the motion to support the Parks Commission's proposal for an assessment of the current Reed Pool site. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Old Business

- **Discussion on ARPA Funds and Hazard Pay with Finance Committee**

- Mr. Beckley directed the Board to the updated list of essential Town personnel he had provided, and stated that the Finance Committee was calling for a public forum on future allocations of ARPA funds.
- Chairman Kruckas argued that this topic had been over-discussed, and was no longer yielding productive conversation. He expressed support for ending the allocation of hazard pay with those personnel for whom it had already been approved.
- Selectman Talbot recognized that the Finance Committee was in attendance for an in-depth discussion on this topic.
 - Chairman Kruckas objected that the agenda item listed was the same as at the previous meeting, where an agreement had been reached.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin expressed concerns with the Finance Committee's list of recommendations to the Board concerning ARPA funds, arguing that it was not up-to-date and required several deletions.
- Selectman Barnes pointed to the list item concerning upgrades to the East Street underpass, clarifying that these would be paid for with Chapter 90 funds, rather than ARPA.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that the project was eligible for funding from either, but Vice-Chairman Morrin strongly recommended using alternative funding sources to ARPA wherever available.
- Mr. Peterson stated that the Finance Committee was present to determine the Board's openness to holding a public hearing regarding ARPA funds.
 - Chairman Kruckas argued against this, stating that meeting of the Board of Selectmen are already open to the public.
 - Mr. Peterson responded that the community would benefit from better advertising and local promotion of meetings where consequential decisions regarding ARPA money are set to be made.
 - Selectman Talbot agreed, arguing that the Board has failed to narrow down the recommendations on the Finance Committee's list, and that more public input could help with this process.
 - Ms. Nenni noted the Committee's desire to set a more streamlined approval process for the allocation of large sums of grant money, of which there are slated to be several in the near future.
 - Selectman Barnes argued that the Board has several years to decide how to spend these funds, and that it should not rush into rash decisions.
 - Chairman Kruckas stated that the Board had approved the funding for the design phase of the filtration project at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, despite not knowing if an alternative grant for its construction may be received.
 - Mr. Jackson expressed support for the Board's prior decision to award hazard pay to members of its Police and Fire Departments.
 - Ms. McMartin responded that this topic was no longer open for debate.
 - Mr. Smith asked the Board about the possibility of using ARPA funds to help cover the costs associated with transitioning into the WestComm regional dispatch system.
 - Chairman Kruckas noted that WestComm was a grant-funded project, meaning ARPA funding was irrelevant for covering its costs.

- Vice-Chairman Morrin asked about the possibility of using ARPA funds for the cost of COVID-related ambulance calls.
 - Ms. McMartin responded that it would be highly difficult to sift through several months of data and determine which calls specifically were COVID-related.
- Mr. Peterson stated that the Finance Committee was willing to refine its list of recommendations, and that it seemed prudent for the Board of Selectmen not to approve any more allocation of ARPA money until a better approval structure is developed.
- Mr. Beckley stated that interviews for the Grants Coordinator position would begin the following week.
 - Chairman Kruckas reiterated the Board's request to hire an experienced grant-writer with a proven track record.
- Ms. Nenni asked about the possibility of adding ARPA to the discussion at Town Meeting.
 - Chairman Kruckas recognized that ARPA funds are under the legal discretion of the Board of Selectmen, not Town Meeting.
- Ms. Nenni stated that Town Meeting could still be a helpful venue for gathering public input on the matter.
 - Vice-Chairman Morrin disagreed, stating that he felt meetings of the Board of Selectmen were a space that was more conducive to this discussion.
- Vice-Chairman Morrin recommended the Finance Committee to return to its list of recommendations, analyzing inaccuracies on an item-by-item basis.
 - Mr. Beckley answered that it would be possible to have the column of items with other potential funding sources removed if the Board wished.
- Ms. McMartin concurred with the Finance Committee that a more streamlined process for approving allocations of this money would be beneficial.
- Chairman Kruckas stated that the major determinant of future plans for ARPA spending was whether or not the Town qualified for a grant to cover the cost of the WWTP screen project.
- Chairman Kruckas requested that the Board received updated lists from Mr. Beckley and the Finance Committee as future relevant developments occurred.

New Business

- **Certification for Replacement of Voting Equipment**
 - Selectman Talbot presented her recommendation that the Board approve the replacement of the Town's current voting equipment.
 - She recognized that its current equipment was outdated and in need of an upgrade.
 - The replacement equipment would be purchased from a new company, which had a dependable reputation, and would bring the Town more in line with what several other communities use.
 - She added that there would be little to no noticeable change to voters or to the balloting process, and that this was a fairly simple and straightforward update.

Selectman Morrin made the motion for the Town of Ware to authorize the use of the ImageCast voting system, and discontinue the use of the AccuVote system, effective with the April 11, 2022 Annual Town Election. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

- **Set Public Hearing Date for National Grid Pole Petition #30513595 (Church Street)**
 - Chairman Kruckas noted that the following scheduled meeting on February 15 would need to be cancelled, as three Board members would not be available to reach quorum. He suggested the hearing be held at the first meeting in March instead.

Selectman Talbot made the motion to set the public hearing regarding National Grid Pole Petition #30513595 for March 1, 2022 at 7:10 PM. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

- **Notice of Intent to Sell Land Assessed for Agricultural Use (Parcel ID# 43-0-2, Campbell Road)**
 - Mr. Beckley noted that under 61A, the Town was being offered a portion of the parcel, with the offered portion consisting of a house lot, and that the letter from the Planning Board described the lot as being too small for any relevant use relating to conservation or agriculture.

Selectman Talbot made the motion for the Board to waive the right of first refusal regarding Parcel 43-0-2 on Campbell Road. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Comments and Concerns of Citizens

- Selectman Barnes asked for an update on the investigation regarding the taxable status of the Mary Lane Hospital facility.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that this was still being worked out by the Board of Assessors, who had not yet come to a conclusion.
- Selectman Barnes noted that a majority of the Town's budget goes to the School system, and asked about the possibility of regionalization with surrounding towns.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that prior research on this matter had not found the benefits of regionalization to outweigh the costs, but that it could be reinvestigated.
- Selectman Barnes expressed displeasure with the operations of the Quaboag Connector, forwarding a verbal statement he had heard from a driver that the Transportation Operations Supervisor is not reachable during the day, and that Mr. Beckley was still spending too much time devoted to the day-to-day activities of the operation.
 - Chairman Kruckas interjected that these were matters that should be handled outside of the meeting.
- Ms. Cascio stated her wish to express a concern.
 - Chairman Kruckas interrupted that he felt her comments and concerns were already broadcast to the community via her program 'Meeting After the Meeting' on Ware Community Television.
 - Ms. Cascio interjected that she felt the manner in which she was being treated by the Board was unacceptable, and that her concern was in regard to the cancellation of the Water Resources Committee, which she felt the Board had not gone about properly.
 - Mr. Cascio pointedly blamed Chairman Kruckas for embodying an attitude that was not conducive to community engagement, arguing that this is why the Town has had a difficult time with reaching quorum at recent Town Meetings.
 - Chairman Kruckas responded by blaming Mr. and Mrs. Cascio for negative local attitudes, claiming that their show ruins morale by bashing Town officials.
 - Selectman McCarthy called for everyone to calm down and remain professional in the meeting.
 - Mr. Cascio argued that the Board had silenced them by not allowing their comments and concerns to be heard in the meeting.

Town Manager Report

- Departmental Budgets have been submitted, and will be negotiated between the Town Manager and Department Heads over the course of the next month before being sent to the Finance Committee.
- The Governor's Budget was released and was fairly conservative in terms of spending.

- Mr. Beckley thanked Mr. David Fox from the Ware Housing Authority and Aspen Street Rod & Gun Club for the donation of several boxes of PPE to the Town.
- Electrical crews are finishing up work for the project that brought new streetlights to Main Street. The old lights are being considered for removal due to redundancy with the new ones.
- Unfortunately, the Town did not receive the Green Communities grant for which it applied.
- Fortunately, the Town did receive a \$1 million Block Grant as the lead community.
- Mr. Beckley thanked the Fire Department and B.E.C. Plumbing & Heating for their response on a recent morning when the boiler at Town Hall stopped functioning, and the repair process created a smoke leak.
- Mr. Beckley thanked Officer Lu-Ann Czaplá for her years of service with the Police Department, and congratulated her on her upcoming retirement.

- Chairman Kruckas asked about the status of the empty building that previously hosted Otto Florist, stating that he had asked for an update from the Building Department which was never received. He argued that this same building has been a problem for several years, and threatened to take serious action if the Town found itself in the same situation as it has with other vacant Downtown buildings.

Adjournment

Selectman Talbot made the motion at 8:47 p.m. to Adjourn the Regular Meeting. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Attest: Christopher J. Nolan
Executive Assistant to Town Manager