



Board of Selectmen

Ware Town Hall, Meeting Room, 126 Main Street

Regular Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, August 17, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

6:15 p.m. – Executive Session: M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a) #2, #3 Negotiations, Litigation

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

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, Selectman Keith J. Kruckas, Selectman Caitlin M. McCarthy, Selectman John J. Morrin, Town Manager Stewart Beckley, Executive Assistant Christopher Nolan, Director of Planning and Community Development Rob Watchilla, SK Robinson of Community Development Authority, Director of Emergency Management Chris Gagnon, Police Chief Shawn Crevier

Present Via Zoom: Rhiannon Gresty of Community Development Authority, Tina Higney of Ware Cultural Council, Judy LaValley of Ware Cultural Council

Absent: Selectman Nancy J. Talbot

Meeting Opened by Chairman Kruckas at 7:00 pm.

Opening Remarks, Announcements, and Agenda review by Chair

Selectman Barnes noted his appreciation for the Ware's first responders due to their fast response-time, dignity, and professionalism when responding to a call of his on Saturday about a distressed individual, thanking the Chief of Police and Chief of Fire Department specifically. Selectman McCarthy noted that Shiloh's Walk will be held in Grenville Park at 12:30 pm on August 28, where all are encouraged to join and proceeds will benefit Shiloh's family, who are paying for him to attend the Center of Hope. Selectman McCarthy also noted that Rock the Park will be held that same night with food trucks, a beer garden, live music, and more. Vice-Chairman Morrin noted that the Health Director has recommended universal masking in schools, and invited anyone with comments to attend the school committee meeting the following evening. Chairman Kruckas noted the previously-approved Host Community agreements where recent developments have led to a number of complaints about changing venue locations, and that anyone with concerns should reach out to a Select Board member.

Consent Agenda

- **Approval of July 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

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

Scheduled Appearances

- **Executive Assistant Christopher Nolan**

Chris was introduced to the Board, and Mr. Beckley announced he will be starting in his position as Executive Assistant on August 23.

- **Director of Planning and Community Development Rob Watchilla**

Selectman Barnes made motion to appoint Rob as Director of Planning and Community Development. Vice-Chairman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

Special Note

Chairman Kruckas wished to read a letter from the Town of Hadley, MA Police Department. Addressed to Police Chief Crevier and Town Manager Beckley, the letter expressed gratitude for the actions of a Ware Police Officer who successfully intervened in a road rage incident in Hadley Monday morning involving multiple people, one of whom wielded a knife. The letter noted that one suspect was arrested, but no one was hurt because of the intervention of the Ware officer. Chairman Kruckas congratulated the police chief on running such a fine, effective department.

Old Business

- **Report from Water Resources Committee**

Selectman Barnes noted that the Board has insufficient data to proceed any further on this matter, and they are also waiting for the scheduled discussion on water and sewer rates. Selectman Barnes noted that another meeting is scheduled for September 14, and Chairman Kruckas agreed that any decisions made before this meeting risk being insufficient. The Board agreed to table this matter to the September 21 Board meeting. Mr. Beckley noted that the contractor, Tighe & Bond, has expressed desire to formalize the capital improvements needed for the wastewater system to account for this in the rate. Chairman Kruckas noted that this would be reason to finalize the information as soon as possible. Selectman Barnes noted that a recurring problem has been items such as masks and disposable wipes clogging pipes. Chairman Kruckas noted that a new filtration system is needed to solve that issue. Mr. Beckley argued that this would not be covered by the first round of CARES Act funds and would need to wait for the second round. Chairman Kruckas and Selectman Barnes questioned why this was the case when the town has ample money left over from the first round. Mr. Beckley stated that the first round of funds is strictly to be used on matters related to health, but he could inquire with the state. Chairman Kruckas asked what the deadline is for spending the first round of grant money, which Mr. Beckley answered is October 29. Vice-Chairman Morrin asked Mr. Beckley if there was currently a plan for spending the remaining grant money, noting that anything not used before the deadline will need to be returned. Mr. Beckley noted that it is difficult to find ways to spend this much money that are approved under the narrow restrictions of what it is allowed to fund. Mr. Beckley noted the remaining money will be essential for stocking up on PPE if the town experiences another spike in COVID cases. Mr. Beckley noted he will be attending a small-town administrator's meeting where this topic will be discussed.

- **Proposed Increase to Ambulance Billing Rates**

Director of Emergency Management Chris Gagnon was invited for questions regarding his recommended increases to ambulance billing rates. He mentioned that the rate increases specifically relate to patients who are transported without a healthcare contract. The changes would also raise the fees that Ware charges nearby towns for ALS intercepts when they have no ambulance service available. Mr. Gagnon noted that the Town's ambulance billing rates have not changed in four years. Chairman Kruckas agreed that with the high costs of performing health services today, these changes are needed.

Mr. Gagnon additionally noted that the Fire Department was recently awarded a grant from Baystate Wing, with a portion earmarked for paramedic training. Selectman Barnes inquired how paramedics will navigate the upcoming two-year Three Mile Bridge replacement project, and Mr. Gagnon discussed the possibility for a traffic preemption system in addition to detouring ambulances down other roads. Chairman Kruckas inquired whether the transition of emergency services to Wing Hospital has improved, and Mr. Gagnon replied that despite a rocky start with long ER wait times, Baystate Health has been receptive to the department's concerns.

Selectman Morrin made the motion to approve Director Gagnon's recommended billing rate increases . Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

- **Coronavirus Spending: CARES and ARPA Sources**

Mr. Beckley reiterated that though PPE is likely to account for a portion of the leftover grant funds, there is still a large some of money remaining. One proposal is to purchase security cameras for Town Hall, the Fire Station, and Grenville Park. The Cemetery Commission is also in the process of laying out the next plot of land to extend current grounds. Another proposal would include buying a digital, programmable announcement sign to place in the town center. Mr. Beckley emphasized again that the first round of CARES money is highly limited by the state for what it is allowed to fund, while the second round leaves the Town much more discretion. Mr. Beckley expressed the need for the Board to punctually construct a plan for spending the grant money, as matters such as stronger wastewater filtration are badly needed. Regarding the Reed Pool, Mr. Beckley noted the Town Parks Manager recently met with an engineering company that assesses pools, who should be sending their assessment of viable options by next week. The assessment will be used to consider whether new pool construction should utilize the current site, or move to a new location, such as by the senior center. Vice-Chairman Morrin inquired whether the first round of CARES money could be used for previously-mentioned chairs and tables at the park. Mr. Beckley did not believe the state would approve this, but agreed to consult them about it. Vice-Chairman Morrin also questioned whether additional cameras could be considered for other parks in town besides Grenville, to which Mr. Beckley answered that a wide range of sites are being considered and the most viable options will be considered for cameras.

New Business

- **Police Chief Request to Call for List of Officers**

Chief Crevier has requested the Select Board to authorize Town Manager Stuart Beckley to request the civil service list for two hires. The new list should be finalized by September 1.

Selectman Morrin made the motion to call for a list of officers for the chief. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

- **Police Chief Request for Use of Banas Farm for Training**

Chief Crevier noted that the area around Banas Farm has recently attracted people who go there to shoot firearms, which the Department feels should not be happening. While this was formerly an acceptable place to shoot, Chairman Kruckas acknowledged this is no longer the case with the rail trail being so close. The board gave the Chief verbal consent to begin enforcement against target shooting in that area, though in-season hunting is fine as long as all laws are followed. The Police Department will publicize warnings about this behavior before

enforcement.

The chief additionally mentioned incoming funds from a body camera grant, in addition to successful negotiations with the Hampshire County Sheriff to waive lockup fees for all towns in the county.

Chairman Kruckas mentioned that he noticed a high volume of recent calls to Ware Police have involved complaints about dogs, which he feels is a waste of the officers' resources. Chairman Kruckas, Chief Crevier, and Mr. Beckley all agreed that the current animal control situation is troublesome, with the lead office in Palmer being unreachable much of the time. Chairman Kruckas expressed desire to meet with Palmer officials to construct another plan that will not have to utilize so much time from Ware officers.

- **Downtown Improvement Committee Update**

Chairman Morrin proposed that a list be created of brick-and-mortar businesses in town after a number of complaints that these businesses have been missing out on opportunities. Selectman McCarthy proposed the idea that local business leaders be invited to Town Hall in order to speak with town officials and improve relations between the two. Selectman Barnes added that the aforementioned digital announcement board, if installed, could help publicize town businesses.

- **Appointments**

- **SK Robinson, Community Development Authority**
 - **Selectman Kruckas made the motion to appoint Attorney SK Robinson to the Community Development Authority. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).**
- **Rhiannon Gresty, Community Development Authority**
 - **Selectman Kruckas made the motion to appoint Rhiannon Gresty to the Community Development Authority. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).**
- **Tina Higney, Ware Cultural Council**
- **Judy LaValley, Ware Cultural Council**

Selectman McCarthy made the motion to re-appoint Tina Higney and Judy LaValley to the Ware Cultural Council. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

Comments and Concerns of Citizens

- Selectman Morrin inquired about the status of the Blighted Property Bylaw. Mr. Beckley answered that this will be based on the discretion of the Town's new attorney, based on the comments of the old one, who had commented that the current law is overly complicated and needs simplification.
- Selectman Barnes noted that a constituent complained to him that individual homeowners in the Town pay more in taxes than a million-dollar business does. He asserted that in 15 years, his own property taxes have doubled, and this takes an unfair toll on lower-income and fixed-income families who get priced out of the Town. Mr. Beckley noted that while Ware's tax rate as a percentage is very high, the amount of revenue generated from it is well below state average. Mr. Beckley also noted an ongoing project on which he is working with the Assessor's assistant and a GIS company to map the differences in property values between different sections of town.
- Selectman Morrin asked about the status of the regional dispatch. Mr. Gagnon noted that the data transfer is well underway and slated to be operational by early Fall. He acknowledged that grant money is funding a

portion of the service fees and new hardware. Chairman Kruckas remarked that the regional dispatch could also help provide solutions to the dog complaint issue.

- Selectman Morrin asked about plans for developing newly vacant space on Parker Street from which dangerous buildings were recently removed. Mr. Beckley noted the town's ongoing process of acquiring the property, which will then be filled and cemented to establish a small parking area.
- Selectman Morrin questioned why the updated Town employee policies could not be found online. Mr. Beckley stated that this would be handled.
- Selectman Morrin asked for an updated solar project list. Mr. Beckley agreed and noted that two recent solar projects have come online and now generate revenue for the Town, with a third one expected soon.
- Selectman Kruckas commended the Town for another successful 4th of July celebration at Grenville Park, but questioned why more has not been done to obtain the High School grounds as a venue for these, where there is less tree cover and fireworks could be more prominent. Mr. Beckley answered that the school committee objected when they were previously held there, but another plan in the future might be approved if modifications were made. Chairman Kruckas and Vice-Chairman Morrin supported this idea.
- Selectman McCarthy noted that herself, Mr. Beckley, and the School Superintendent were continuing to make progress on establishing a local youth center. Mr. Beckley added that the current stage of planning involves incorporating feedback from surveys that will be given out to students in the Ware Public Schools early this school year.

Town Manager Report

- The Town Manager and Planning Department have recently applied for a technical grant for the Hospital facility. Surveys later this year are expected to ask residents both about their health services, in addition to what they would like to see done with the old facility.
- Mr. Beckley mentioned the Green Communities Committee, which has secured a grant that will convert the middle school to LED lighting, while a grant from National Grid will cover the cost of this process for the elementary and high schools.
- The Reed Pool: A recent meeting with the engineering firm that recently assessed the pool went well, and the Town is expecting their feedback soon, which will be incorporated into plans at a future town meeting.
- Construction Update: A base coat has now been laid on Main Street, and the DPW has come through with a sweeper to clean up excess dust, which was the source of numerous complaints. Additionally, the upper Bank Street reconstruction project scheduled for this year will likely be pushed to the spring, as the DPW director has cited difficulty with obtaining materials. Chairman Kruckas asked if it would be possible to cut concrete beneath the underpass and install ADA access before the winter snow. Mr. Beckley said this can be expected.
- COVID-19 Restrictions: At this time, there are no changes to Town policy around masks or social distancing, but the Board of Health is continuously monitoring the decisions of other nearby towns to determine if a return to stricter guidelines is necessary.
- Dangerous Dog Complaint: Mr. Beckley has been in communication with dog's new owner, who maintains that the dog is kept inside during the day and always leashed and muzzled during outdoor walks.
- July Flooding: Mr. Gagnon spoke on the flooding experienced in July for which the Town declared a State of Emergency. The state has submitted information to FEMA about the damages, and if a declaration is made, federal funds could be used to help reimburse property owners who experienced damages. However, he noted this process is still in the very early stages and is not guaranteed. The Director of Emergency Management also warned that a number of properties in the area of Quarry Street are considered very vulnerable to flooding right now, as significant rainfall continues to inflict stress on the nearby dam. He recommended that the town begin drafting an evacuation plan for that neighborhood in case sudden torrential rain causes the dam to breach. Chairman Kruckas inquired about whether people in the neighborhood have been recommended to buy flood insurance, and Mr. Beckley confirmed that MEMA is in the process of evaluating the situation.
- Chairman Kruckas asked about the possibility of the town using COVID grant money to purchase a small number of drones, which could be used by a variety of town departments, but especially the Fire

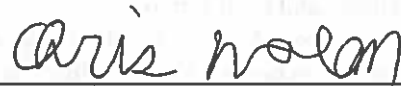
Department. Selectman Barnes agreed this was a promising idea, and the Board planned to discuss the matter later.

- Chairman Kruckas inquired about the status of a building on Main Street that has been in disrepair for multiple years, which the owner promised to revitalize but then continued to leave neglected. Mr. Beckley confirmed that the owner has been ordered to have the building demolished, but is waiting to see if the state will provide him with a grant for demolition. Chairman Kruckas noted that the Town had helped him apply for that grant, and he expressed displeasure with the Town's willingness to help neglectful landlords before its own residents. Mr. Beckley stated that helping the owner ensure the building gets demolished is a better option than allowing the abandoned building to continue decaying, but Chairman Kruckas maintained that this sets a bad precedent that other neglectful property owners in the town will take note of, in addition to increased grant money from the state causing everyone's taxes to rise. Vice-Chairman Morrin interjected to argue that since Town residents pay taxes to the state anyway, he would rather see the money come back to restore Ware's downtown than have it go to other communities. Selectman Barnes expressed agreement with this point, noting that towns such as Spencer and Gardner have cleaned up their downtowns nicely in the recent past. Vice-Chairman Morrin concluded that this entire scenario offers proof of why the Town needs an updated Blighted Building Bylaw. Chairman Kruckas expressed his frustration with a perceived repetitive cycle of stories like this one.

Adjournment

Selectman Kruckas made the motion at 8:15 p.m. to Adjourn the Regular Meeting. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman Talbot).

Attest:



Executive Assistant to Town Manager