



Board of Selectmen

Ware Town Hall, Meeting Room, 126 Main Street
Regular Meeting Minutes – Tuesday, May 17, 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: Chairman John J. Morrin, Selectman Thomas H. Barnes, Selectman Keith J. Kruckas, Selectman Joshua A. Kusnierz, Town Manager Stuart B. Beckley, Executive Assistant Christopher J. Nolan, Transportation Operations Supervisor Michael Dambrosio, Department of Public Works Director Geoff McAlmond, Robert Swift from CHA Consulting, Ken Willette, Shaun K. Robinson, Ana Burgos, Antonio Porter, Sandy Zebrowski, Kal McCoy, Alex Bergeron, Paul Krasnecky, Gregory Giles

Absent: Vice-Chairman Caitlin M. McCarthy

Present via Zoom: Human Resource Director Justine Caggiano, Stanley Ciukaj from Ware Community Television, Paula Ouimette from Ware River News, Sheila Cuddy from Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVCDC), Jen Healy from QVCDC

Meeting Opened by Chairman Morrin at 7:00 PM.

Opening Remarks, Announcements, and Agenda review by Chair

Selectman Barnes thanked the Ware Fire Department for their response to a number of recent brush fires.

Chairman Morrin encouraged residents to attend the Memorial Day parade.

Consent Agenda

- Approval of April 19, 2022 Meeting Minutes

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

Old Business

- Update of Quarry Street Flood Mitigation
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the resident who wished to speak on this topic had a conflict and would not be present at the meeting.

Selectman Barnes made the motion to table the discussion on Quarry Street Flood Mitigation. Selectman Kruckas seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- **Kiosk Update for Rail Trail**
 - Mr. Beckley announced that kiosks were being constructed for both ends of Ware's segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail (one at the Gibbs Crossing entrance, the other at the Robbins Road entrance), which were estimated to be completed in 4-6 weeks.
 - Mr. Steven Hawk had generously offered to fund the purchase and installation of the kiosks.
 - Selectman Barnes noted that one acceptable expenditure of ARPA funds is for projects involving recreation, and that the Board should approve this use to avoid asking Mr. Hawk to spend his own money.

- **Update on Granby Finance Committee, School Regionalization**
 - Mr. Beckley stated that he had attempted contact with the Granby Finance Committee but had not yet heard back. However, he did speak with a member of the Granby School Committee who stated that their Town is currently considering several options to determine which will be the most beneficial in the long term.
 - Chairman Morrin requested that Mr. Beckley continue trying to contact the Granby Finance Committee.

Selectman Barnes made the motion to table the discussion on school regionalization. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

New Business

- **Approval of Appointment of Alice Atkinson-Bonasio to Historical Commission**

Selectman Barnes made the motion to appoint Alice Atkinson-Bonasio to the Historical Commission. Selectman Kruckas seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- **Approval of Appointment of Ana Burgos to Housing Authority**

Selectman Barnes made the motion to appoint Ana Burgos to the Housing Authority. Selectman Kruckas seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- **Request for Replacement of Town Hall Flagpole and Flag**
 - Selectman Kusnierz noted that the flagpole outside of Town Hall is rusty, which causes the flags that are hung on it to have rust stains. He requested that after Memorial Day, the current flag be removed, and that a new one not be installed until the pole is replaced.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that he had discussed replacing that flagpole with the Parks Director, but while this was planned, there was no estimate on when the Town could expect to have a new one.
 - Mr. Porter asked if the current flagpole could be painted to alleviate the issue.
 - Selectman Kusnierz responded that painting the pole would not solve the underlying problem, and that it would ultimately be a waste of money and effort.
 - Selectman Kruckas expressed disagreement with the proposal to leave the pole bare after Memorial Day, arguing that the current flag should be kept up until the pole is eventually replaced.
 - Chairman Morrin stated that overall, the Board agreed the flagpole required replacement as quickly as possible.

Selectman Barnes made the motion to table the discussion on flagpole replacement to the June 7th meeting. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

Scheduled Appearances

- **7:10 PM- Public Hearing: National Grid/Verizon Pole Petition #30365815 (Coffey Hill Road, Sherman Hill Road, Sczygiel Road, Webster Road)**
 - Mr. Robert Swift from CHA Consulting introduced himself as the meeting's representative for National Grid.
 - He stated that this pole petition calls for a number of pole replacements and installations for the purpose of transporting electricity from a new solar farm development on Monson Turnpike Road.
 - Chairman Morrin asked if any of the poles that were being replaced currently had streetlights on them, and if they did, if National Grid would be re-attaching any streetlights they removed during the process.
 - Mr. Swift responded that National Grid could not re-attach lights that are the Town's property.
 - Selectman Kruckas expressed frustration over the Town needing to pay to reconnect its streetlights each time National Grid completed work on its poles.
 - A resident asked why she had received a notification in the mail for a public hearing regarding Bumpy Hill Road.
 - Mr. Swift responded that he was not familiar with what she was describing, and that it must have been in relation to a public hearing for a separate project.
 - Selectman Kusnierz asked about the size of the proposed new poles in relation to the current ones.
 - Mr. Swift responded that the new poles would be slightly taller.
 - Chairman Morrin stated that the Board would only approve the petition if National Grid agreed to move any lights located on poles that were being taken down to their new respective poles.
 - Mr. Paul Krasnecky asked for clarification that the locations where National Grid had placed stakes in the ground earlier that day were the places they planned to install poles, as he had one placed directly in his front yard.
 - Selectman Kruckas emphasized that the Town did not want poles placed in residents' front yards.
 - Mr. Swift confirmed that the stakes indicated where new poles were proposed.
 - Mr. Krasnecky asked if it would be possible to have this particular pole placement adjusted.
 - Mr. Swift responded that this would involve a full redesign of the plans.
 - Chairman Morrin requested that National Grid redesign the proposal before the public hearing was continued.

Selectman Barnes made the motion to continue the pole petition hearing at the June 7th meeting, after National Grid had conducted a redesign. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- **Approval of DPW Director Appointment: Geoff McAlmond**
 - Mr. Beckley introduced Mr. McAlmond, who was the chosen candidate for the DPW Director position selected by the Town Manager, Human Resource Director, and DPW Supervisors. He spoke highly of Mr. McAlmond's experience in handling water, wastewater, and highway-related matters.
 - Chairman Morrin asked Mr. McAlmond if he also had experience in Facilities Maintenance, as this was another component of his position laid out in the Town Charter.
 - Mr. McAlmond affirmed that he had experience in this matter as well, and was prepared for all aspects of the position.

Selectman Kruckas made the motion to approve the appointment of Geoff McAlmond to the position of DPW Director. Selectman Kusnierz seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

- **Discussion on Quaboag Connector with Transportation Operations Supervisor Michael Dambrosio**
 - Selectman Barnes commented that based on the description of his own position that Mr. Dambrosio

- submitted to the Board, his tasks are quite varied, and he asked if Mr. Dambrosio was ever required to drive passengers himself in the absence of a regular driver.
 - Mr. Dambrosio responded that he had occasionally filled in for drivers during extreme circumstances, but that this did not happen often.
- Mr. Dambrosio stated that he was currently working on coordinating the necessary training for each driver to be certified in CPR, First Aid, and wheelchair lift operation.
 - Chairman Morrin asked if that meant the Quaboag Connector was currently behind the standards it needed to meet for driver training.
 - Mr. Dambrosio responded that after the current week's training, all drivers would be up-to-date on their certifications.
- Selectman Barnes asked Mr. Dambrosio why, despite his hiring, Mr. Beckley was still spending up to 8 hours per week managing operations for the Connector.
 - Mr. Dambrosio responded that the Connector was an intensive operation with several moving parts.
- Selectman Barnes expressed confusion over why the Town held so much responsibility for the Amherst-Worcester Bus Route B79, rather than the PVTA being solely responsible for the route. He also asked why neighboring communities served by the Connector, such as Palmer, did not contribute more to assist with operations.
 - Mr. Dambrosio responded that the B79 was operated as part of a partnership where the bus, fuel, and insurance are the responsibility of the transit system at UMass Amherst, while the bus operators who drive the route are employees of the Town of Ware.
 - Selectman Barnes stated that he felt the B79 should be operated entirely from one of the PVTA's regular garages.
- Mr. Beckley noted that the Quaboag Connector had grown significantly since its launch five years ago.
 - Mr. Dambrosio noted the upcoming launches of two new Connector services; the Route 9 Shuttle, which will be a fixed route running from Belchertown to Spencer, and the Baystate Shuttle, which will travel from Ware to Baystate Wing Hospital in Palmer. The former service had already been through the testing phase, while the latter was simply waiting on some signing of contracts.
- Selectman Barnes asked about the possibility of the Town activating the Sunset Clause of its agreement with the QVDCDC to terminate its share of the Connector.
 - Mr. Beckley stated that the Sunset Clause would not be activated within the foreseeable future.
- Chairman Morrin stated that the Board wished to pry Mr. Beckley away from managing the daily operations of the Connector as much as possible.
- Selectman Kruckas argued that his issue with the Connector was that financially, it was costing Ware a disproportionate amount of money to run, despite serving several other Towns that gave little back in return.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the Town received annual stipends from Palmer and Monson to assist with Connector operations.
- Selectman Barnes asked Mr. Dambrosio for data on his salary.
- A resident stated that he was a regular B79 passenger for three months, and his only issue with the service was it not running frequently enough to meet the needs of residents.
- Chairman Morrin asked if the frequency of runs on this route could be increased.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that the upcoming Route 9 shuttle would help alleviate this issue.
- Mr. Dambrosio noted that the Route 9 shuttle was designed to fill a gap between the service areas of the Worcester Regional Transit Authority and the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority.
- Selectman Barnes stated that on his frequent trips West on Route 9 toward Belchertown and Pelham, he never sees the designated PVTA bus stops being used.
- A resident noted that the B79 only makes one stop in each of the nine communities it travels through, and argued that this was insufficient.

- Mr. Dambrosio stated that the Route 9 shuttle would also alleviate this issue by having a much higher quantity of stops available.
- Selectman Kruckas argued that he still felt the \$9 universal fare to ride the B79 was a bargain for trips as far as Worcester. He also argued that other Towns covered by the Connector should financially contribute to Mr. Beckley's salary, given his amount of time spent managing the service.
- Mr. Dambrosio noted that 60% of the Connector's riders are Ware residents.
 - Selectman Kruckas responded that Ware's taxes are already too high, and that if 40% of passengers come from other Towns, then these other Towns should be contributing to 40% of the Connector's operating costs.
- Selectman Barnes asked about fuel costs for the buses.
 - Mr. Dambrosio confirmed that the buses used on the B79 are fueled at the UMass bus garage at no expense to the Town.
- Selectman Kruckas asked about the chain of command for the Connector on weekends, stating that he met a confused QC driver the past Saturday who claimed he was scheduled to work but had no rides set up, and no supervisor was reachable via phone.
 - Mr. Dambrosio confirmed that he knew about the situation in question, and that it had been resolved after being caused by a scheduling error.

Old Business

- **Update on Allocation of ARPA Funds**
 - Mr. Beckley cited Grants Coordinator Jay Mooney's work on an application for the first round of money from the State Revolving Fund. These were set to be awarded in July of 2024 and the Spring of 2025. Due to the timing, these were agreed to not be an ideal funding source for the influent screen project at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, as this would push project completion back to 2026.
 - Chairman Morrin expressed hesitation with devoting ARPA funds to this project, arguing that it would take too large a share.
 - Selectman Barnes expressed that it would be far more costly if the sewer were to fail due to unnecessary delays, or if the Town were to accumulate fines for environmental violations at the WWTP.
 - Selectman Kruckas expressed agreement with this point, arguing that the risk of sewer failure meant the Town needed to complete this project quickly.
 - Mr. Beckley confirmed that the Town could find other uses for the State Revolving Fund revenue.
 - Chairman Morrin disagreed, noting that since an alternative to funding the project with ARPA money had emerged, the Town should pursue it, despite the delayed timing.
 - Selectman Kruckas argued that inflation was another motivating factor convincing him to support expediting the process with ARPA funds.
 - Chairman Morrin objected to spending this large a portion of the Town's ARPA funds on a single project, and asked Mr. Beckley for his recommendation.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that the Board needed to decide on proposed Revolving Fund allocations by July, and he suggested that the WWTP screen be funded through ARPA instead.
 - Chairman Morrin recommended waiting until the next meeting when all five Board members are present to vote on approving this expenditure from ARPA, and stated that this topic was to be tabled.
 - Mr. Beckley directed the Board to multiple letters that had been received from residents concerned about the rising Cost of Living, and requesting that the Board consider providing some type of relief for struggling residents through ARPA.

- Selectman Kruckas responded that Ware's taxes are too high, which is causing long-time residents to leave. He accused Mr. Beckley of ignoring their plight.
- Chairman Morrin cited specific examples from one resident letter where the writer claimed she was being forced to consider leaving Town because the cost of living had become too high, claiming that surrounding Towns were more financially appealing. Chairman Morrin argued that the Town's rising taxes needed to stop.
- Selectman Kruckas stated that despite the rising taxes, the Town's Police and Fire Departments were still understaffed and under-resourced, and expressed support for a temporary freeze on the establishment of any new Town positions that are not under one of these two departments.
- Selectman Kruckas stated that he was honestly considering leaving due to how expensive living in Ware had become. He argued that when the Town voted to start accepting grant money 35 years ago, it had not considered that grants would also be funded with their tax dollars.
- Chairman Morrin argued that the override process could be the Town's best opportunity to mitigate the problem of rising taxes.
- Selectman Barnes cited a memo he had received from the Massachusetts Municipal Association regarding the guidelines for municipalities to issue premium pay to their essential personnel using ARPA funds.
- Selectman Kruckas defended this use, stating that first responders are currently facing higher demand than they ever have before.
- Selectman Kruckas accused Mr. Beckley of apathy toward residents suffering from Ware's high Cost of Living.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that according to data from the State Department of Revenue, Ware's Cost of Living is lower than average for Massachusetts communities, and its tax rate is merely average.
 - Selectman Kruckas accused Mr. Beckley of using incorrect data, arguing that his income and lack of residence in the Town made him out-of-touch with the plight of Ware taxpayers, and insisting that long-time residents are leaving in response to unaffordability.
 - Chairman Morrin echoed that several people who were born and raised in Ware were leaving for financial reasons.
- A resident argued that himself and other renters suffered from the Town lacking any rent control, and stated that contrary to popular belief, he was paying more in rent to live in Ware than he would in Greater Boston cities such as Cambridge.
 - Selectman Barnes expressed agreement that he knew of communities in Eastern Massachusetts that charged less in taxes, while also offering more services to their residents than Ware.
- Mr. Beckley noted that ARPA could provide relief for the community through funding business expansion, capital improvements, housing costs, and housing repairs, but that it could not be used to pay residents' taxes.
- Selectman Kruckas argued that due to the volatile economy, the Town should fund the WWTP screen, then be very careful about spending the remainder of its ARPA funds.
- Selectman Kusnierz asked how other Board members proposed the Town award its ARPA funds in an equitable fashion.
- One resident suggested using seniority as a basis for decisions involving ARPA money.
- Selectman Kusnierz argued that there was no ethical way of distributing ARPA funds to certain residents or businesses but not others. He stated that he would be abstaining on any vote that called for this, and proposed that ARPA funds be used exclusively to fund Town infrastructure projects.
- Selectman Kusnierz stated that many of the community members who are in most dire need of assistance will never approach the Town to request it, due to personal pride.
- Mr. Beckley noted that while much deliberation had taken place on potential uses for the remainder of its ARPA funds, there was currently no detailed plan for the Town on this matter.
- Selectman Kruckas suggested the Board find a way to purchase a bulk amount of baby formula to distribute to residents in need, citing the current shortage.

- Mr. Beckley confirmed that if the Board approved the funding of the WWTP screen with ARPA, that would leave approximately \$600,000 remaining.
- Selectman Kruckas stated that grant opportunities continued to open for applications to be submitted by Jay Mooney, the Town's Grant Coordinator.
- Selectman Kusnierz expressed appreciation for Mr. Mooney, noting that the Town Planner spoke very highly of him.
- Chairman Morrin requested that Mr. Beckley work on developing an allocation plan for the Board's next meeting concerning the remainder of the Town's ARPA funds.
- **Update on Whistleblower Hotline**
 - Mr. Beckley updated the Board that the number for the whistleblower line was ready to be printed on the next round of employee paychecks, which would go out the following Thursday.
 - Selectman Kusnierz objected to the existence of the whistleblower line, arguing that it was inappropriately set up by the Board for the purpose of hearing complaints against Mr. Beckley.
 - Chairman Morrin ordered Selectman Kusnierz to stop speaking, declaring him out of order.
 - Mr. Beckley cited the Massachusetts General Law regarding whistleblower phone lines.
 - Selectman Kruckas argued that the line was set up due to the observation that accountability for wrongdoing by Town officials only occurs when the issue comes before the Selectmen during an Executive Session.
 - Mr. Beckley stated that the number for the line would be included on the following week's paychecks to Town personnel, which would also include an attached sheet explaining how the line works.
- **Update on East Street Underpass**
 - Mr. Beckley updated the Board that the project to bring the sidewalk of the East Street underpass up to ADA compliance was in progress and expected for completion by the end of June.
- **Discussion on Board/Committee Members' Salaries**
 - Chairman Morrin stated that the list of Towns Mr. Beckley had provided with comparisons of salaries received by Board and Committee members did not entirely consist of Towns that were comparable in size to Ware. He requested that a new list be made, and that Ware's compensation paid to Board and Committee members should be at least average compared with similar-sized Towns.
 - Mr. Beckley asked if the Board was still requesting an annual adjustment be made to these salaries based on changes in cost of living.
 - Chairman Morrin answered that they were.
- **Discussion on Solar PILOT versus Real Value of Equipment**
 - Mr. Beckley stated that the Assessors Office had gathered the data on three of the Town's four solar projects, with the installations at Canadian Tree Expert being too new to have data.
 - Selectman Kruckas stated he had noticed that two of the three sites had almost identical amounts that were paid through the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreement with the Town as would have been if charged on real value, but the third paid \$6,000 less to the Town through PILOT than it would have through taxation.
 - Mr. Beckley confirmed that this was correct.
 - Chairman Morrin asked if this issue could be corrected for the Town to maximize revenue.
 - Selectman Kruckas agreed that this was vital.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the PILOT amount for the site in question on Palmer Road was determined based on having the same value per Megawatt as the site on Upper Church Street. He added that the Department of Revenue requires PILOT agreements to match their real value equivalents as closely as possible, and that abandoning the use of PILOT agreements would likely not have a notable impact on the Town's revenue compared with continuing them.

- Selectman Kruckas expressed suspicion with the finances surrounding the solar development located on Palmer Road, stating that he wants to hear the Town Attorney provide counsel on this situation within two meetings.
- Mr. Beckley stated that an adjustment should be able to be made, and that the PILOT had been arranged with an underestimate of the personal property value for the project.
- Chairman Morrin agreed that this situation needed to be addressed as quickly as possible.
- Selectman Kruckas stated that he is not inherently against solar development but opposes large solar farms that contribute to deforestation of land in Town, arguing that they devalue adjacent properties and can destroy entire neighborhoods.
- Selectman Barnes expressed agreement, noting that marijuana is more profitable for the Town than solar.
- Mr. Giles asked for clarification on the purpose of cannabis mitigation funds.
 - Selectman Kruckas noted that Curaleaf MA Ware Adult-Use currently contributes a certain percentage of their annual revenue to the Town, and that other cannabis retail stores will do the same after opening.
 - Mr. Beckley added that these funds were meant to address the impacts of marijuana, and helped fund a youth substance use prevention program, as well as a recovery center. In the future, these fees may also help fund the water use costs associated with any cultivation facilities that open.

New Business

- **Review of Underride Process**
 - Chairman Morrin voiced support for the underride process, arguing it was the most guaranteed way to slow rising taxes.
 - Mr. Beckley explained that with an underride, the Town could opt to remove a given amount of money from its revenue sources after funding its stabilization and reserve funds.
 - The amount of money would increase 2.5% per year.
 - Chairman Morrin argued that the Town could choose to decrease the amount per year.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the decision on whether to exercise the underride could be a ballot question for voters during either a Regular or Special Election.
 - Selectman Barnes asked if approving the underride could cause an override to be needed in future years.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that this was not the case.
 - Mr. Beckley clarified that the money would increase 2.5% on a smaller quantity of money in future years.
 - Selectman Kruckas voiced support for the underride, stating that it could help stop the exodus of residents from Ware.
 - Chairman Morrin expressed the importance of allowing the voters to decide on whether to use the underride, but also noted that he did not feel a Special Election was necessary.

Old Business

- **Update on Granby Finance Committee, School Regionalization**
 - Selectman Barnes argued in favor of regionalizing the Town's school system for financial benefit.
 - Chairman Morrin argued that the Schools Department should consider awarding premium pay to its teachers for serving as essential workers throughout the pandemic.
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the Town was recently awarded a grant to purchase a digital sign for placement Downtown that would display events and important messages. He thanked Town Planner Rob Watchilla for his work toward his work securing this grant for the Town.

New Business

- **Drone Donation and Training for All Relevant Departments**
 - Mr. Nolan informed the Board that he had placed his notes taken while attending the Federal Aviation Administration's virtual seminar on drone piloting in their packets, and these notes would

also be forwarded to all personnel who would be operating a drone for Town business.

- Selectman Kruckas cautioned against entrusting too many Departments with drone operations, suggesting they be limited to a small number, such as Fire and Conservation.
- **ADA Concerns Regarding Poles in Sidewalks**
 - Selectman Barnes stated that many utility poles in Town are positioned in the sidewalk in a position that does not accommodate people who use wheelchairs, and that Ware risked being sued by the Department of Justice, which he claimed recently happened to the City of Somerville.
 - Selectman Barnes called for all poles in violation of ADA requirements to be adjusted, citing South Street and Morse Ave as two prominent examples.
 - Selectman Barnes also noted that the ADA Commission was seeking a third member.
 - Mr. Beckley acknowledged that some poles present chronic issues, and asked if the ADA Commission would be interested in conducting a survey to determine the poles of highest concern.
 - Selectman Barnes asked if it would be possible to request the utility providers move their poles in the Town's sidewalks to meet ADA compliance.
 - Selectman Barnes asked if the poles along a section of West Street met the requirements.
 - Mr. Beckley answered that according to their measurements, these were in compliance, although it was very close to the minimum space required.
 - Selectman Barnes expressed doubt as to the accuracy of Mr. Beckley's data.
- **New Large Retail Chain Store Considerations**
 - Mr. Beckley noted that the proposal in question was for a Tractor Supply store on West Street, on a piece of land zoned for Residential Business, which would not currently allow such an operation.
 - The Planning Board had instructed the Town Planner to determine what zoning changes would be necessary to allow for the store. Any proposed zoning amendments would require approval by a two-thirds majority at Town Meeting.
 - Selectman Barnes noted that an area of concern which had been brought up contained the wetlands that lay in between properties on Malboeuf Road and the property where the store was proposed.
 - Mr. Beckley explained the process that the proposal must go through, which begins with the Planning Department drafting zoning amendments, which would be sent to the Board of Selectmen along with specific recommendations from both the Planning Board and Conservation Commission. The Board of Selectmen then approve the Planning Board to hold a public hearing on the proposal, before it is sent to the final step of approval by Town Meeting.
 - Mr. Beckley also noted that if approved, use of the site would require MassDOT to perform a curb cut.
- **Request for Water/Sewer Bill Abatement**
 - Mr. Beckley directed the Board to a memo from DPW consultant and former Director Mr. Gilbert St. George-Sorel recommending abatement of a specific property's water and sewer bill, citing an error on the part of the Town.

Selectman Kruckas made the motion to approve the abatement as recommended by Mr. St. George-Sorel. Selectman Morrin requested that an abatement be approved containing an extra \$1,000, to apologize to the property owner for the hassle. Mr. Beckley explained that this was not possible. Selectman Kusnierz seconded the original motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

Chairman Morrin asked why abatements like this one needed to be approved by the Board at all, and suggested the policy be changed.

- **Consideration of Lower Quorum for May 23 Town Meeting**
 - Mr. Beckley confirmed that the Town had been notified by its Attorney that it was still eligible to lower the quorum for Annual Town Meeting under rules that took effect due to the COVID-19

pandemic.

- Chairman Morrin objected to the idea of lowering the quorum.
- Selectman Kruckas argued that the previous four Town Meetings have been shameful, referring to them as a 'disgrace.' He accused the Town Moderator of a 'power trip,' argued that this was why it is difficult to gather enough residents to meet quorum, and asserted that Ware Town Meetings were a dictatorship rather than a democracy.
- Chairman Morrin noted the request for a special meeting of the Board just before Annual Town Meeting to vote on whether to lower the quorum.
- Chairman Morrin stated that alternative forms of governance should be considered.
 - Selectman Barnes asked if switching to a ballot system for residents could be more effective than calling them to a meeting in a specific place and time.
 - Chairman Morrin clarified that he felt Representative Town meeting should be explored as an option.
 - Selectman Kusnierz noted his disagreement, stating that Open Town Meeting is a type of government worth preserving, and while ideally the Town would have no issues meeting its quorum, he argued in favor of lowering the quorum to 50 for this Town Meeting, while working to increase citizen participation in local government moving forward.

Selectman Barnes made the motion to keep the quorum at 100 voters for Town Meeting. Selectman Morrin seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 2 Yes (Selectmen Barnes, Morrin), 1 No (Selectman Kusnierz), 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy), 1 Abstain (Selectman Kruckas).

Comments and Concerns of Citizens

- Selectman Barnes asked at what temperature the Senior Center was required to open to the public as a cooling center.
 - Mr. Beckley answered that there was no law mandating the Senior Center serve as a cooling center, but the Town typically opened it as one during heatwaves, which are defined regionally as three or more sequential days with high temperatures at or above 90 degrees.
- Selectman Barnes stated that he was recently surprised to see the Senior Center closed when he drove by during the early afternoon.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that there was only one recent instance of the Senior Center being closed unexpectedly, and that it is otherwise open for its full schedule.
- Selectman Barnes asked for an update on Chapter 70 education funding from the State.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that the Town was expecting a \$1 million increase in Chapter 70 funding compared with the prior year. Chapter 70 makes up about half of the budget for the Ware Public Schools.
- Selectman Kruckas asked why the school system was being given an additional \$400,000-\$500,000.
 - Mr. Beckley responded that of the Town's approximately \$32 million budget, roughly \$17 million goes to the Ware Public Schools, while \$1.2 million goes to the Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical School District, and another \$1.7 million goes to school transportation.

Town Manager Report

Mr. Beckley noted three important dates in the near future. Town Meeting would be held on May 23rd. The Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act office would be hosting a virtual meeting to discuss the ReSource Waste expansion project on May 26th at 6PM. Finally, the Memorial Day Parade would be held on May 30th.

On Thursday, the Planning Board would be hearing a proposal for a cannabis delivery operation by Pineapple Express, LLC. This would be followed by a Community Outreach meeting on June 2nd, then the presentation of a Host Community Agreement at the Select Board Meeting on June 7th.

A graduation ceremony for the Literacy Project would be held on May 28th at Grenville Park.

Synchronization of the traffic signals on Main Street had been tweaked, but still needed some improvement, which could be anticipated shortly.

Mr. Beckley commended Fire Chief Chris Gagnon for his work organizing a table-top exercise workshop with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency to review the Town's emergency management plan.

COVID cases were spiking in the community and across the region.

New Director of the Quabbin Health District Andrea Crete had just started in her role, and one of her early initiatives was to resume the Town's search for a public health nurse.

Selectman Barnes called for a copy of documents on the State's Winter Recovery Assistance Program that were unintentionally omitted from the Board's packets for discussion on the underpass.

Selectman Kruckas asked about procedures for the record-keeping of Town documents, and who was responsible for overseeing this. Mr. Beckley answered that record-keeping for the Town was ultimately under his control as Town Manager.

Chairman Morrin requested that Mr. Beckley be more communicative of personnel matters with the Board, citing their lack of awareness that another Administrative Assistant had given notice of her resignation in the prior week.

Mr. Beckley noted a last-minute addition by Police Chief Shawn Crevier for the Board to approve his request for an updated Civil Service list in order to fill two vacancies in the department.

Selectman Morrin made the motion to call for an updated Civil Service list for the purpose of hiring two new officers. Selectman Barnes seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Selectman McCarthy).

Mr. Bergeron asked why some of the lower-corner traffic lights had been removed from intersections downtown, stating that these were helpful when solar glare made it difficult to see the ones that sit higher up. He stated that he had specifically noticed this at the light for cars travelling Westbound on Route 9 at Church Street. Mr. Beckley stated that he would investigate this.

Mr. Giles voiced concerns about his property being given a lien during the pandemic which was sold to a company called Tallidge. Mr. Beckley noted that a lien auction happens once per year, and that Tallidge frequently wins them. Mr. Giles argued that as a struggling single father, he felt the Town had not cooperated with him to work out a payment plan for his outstanding tax payments. Mr. Beckley noted that the Town had already agreed to a payment plan with him, but Mr. Giles had consistently refused to meet its conditions. Selectman Kruckas stated that this represented another example of complaints from residents not being communicated to the Selectmen by Mr. Beckley. Mr. Beckley stated that he would provide the Board with the reports concerning Mr. Giles' tax payments and agreements reached, but he did not feel a Board meeting was an appropriate forum for this discussion.

Adjournment

Selectman Barnes made the motion at 9:18 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 McCarthy).

Attest: *Carie Nolan*
Christopher J. Nolan
Executive Assistant to Town Manager