

Link to view the February 9, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen

<https://youtu.be/yq-mjOrCoCc>

The February 9, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen was convened at 5:00 p.m. by First Selectman Beth Heller, via WebEx in accordance with SB2012.

Present via roll call: First Selectman Beth Heller; Deputy First Selectman Sheila McCreven, Joseph J. Crisco, Jr.; Paul Kuriakose; Dr. David Lober; and David Vogel.

Present for staff: Mr. Genovese, Administrative Officer/Director of Finance; Ms. Ford, Media Specialist; Mr. Weiner, Town Counsel; Ms. Yagla, Assistant Administrative Officer, and Mrs. Shaw, Clerk

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REMARKS

"Good evening and welcome to the February 2022 Regular Board of Selectmen meeting.

I will begin this evening with the most wonderful news: the Town earned a nearly \$600,000 Community Connectivity Grant, to make bike and pedestrian improvements to the Town Center following a 2020 submission that Betsy worked so very hard on, with volunteers Kate Rozen and Charlotte Sappo. Thank you to everyone involved!

The main focus of the grant is to install a sidewalk on the western side of Newton Road to connect the Amity Regional High School to the Town Center Campus along with upgrading the asphalt sidewalk at the Library lawn. The grant application included additional improvements to pedestrian and cyclist safety including signage and lighting.

This grant was written with input received from more than 300 residents who responded to a bike and pedestrian improvement survey. It will help us make significant safety improvements for so many folks, particularly students, walking to, in, and around our Center, and as we continue to make the Town Campus a more active destination, and a place where more and more people can visit and enjoy the area. In your packet for review and hopefully approval is this "Commitment to Fund Letter," which we will discuss following my remarks.

*I want to let you all know about two changes I have made to the Town's ad hoc Diversity & Inclusion Committee. First, I have changed the name to the Ad Hoc Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. The addition of the word "equity" is important because equity aims to identify and eliminate barriers to participation. Equity is about ensuring that **everyone** has access to the same treatment and opportunities. Without equity we cannot be fully inclusive, and thus we cannot embrace our diversity.*

Also, committee member Robert Reed has had to step down from his role as vice chair, due to time commitments. He will, gladly, remain on the committee. In his place I am appointing Tahera Parvez to serve as vice chair. I'm very excited about the work this group is doing, and I hope to see you all at their inaugural book discussion later this month. Betsy will share details with you as part of her report tonight.

For a few months, we have been discussing a Strategic Plan, and I have decided that the best way to move this project forward is to create a subcommittee of the Board of Selectmen to work on the issue with Tony and Betsy. I have asked, and David Vogel and Sheila McCreven have agreed, to serve on that

committee. Betsy has prepared a draft which is in your packet, for them to review, discuss, and refine, and I am hoping that in the next month or two the full Board will discuss and vote on a final strategic plan to help guide our work.

As a board, we will be making some tough financial decisions soon. To give some context to our budget process, I have asked Tony to provide me with some initial budget numbers for context. From 2016 to 2022 the Town services portion of the budget increased by 3.04% total while at the same time Amity Regional Board of Education increased by 20.5% and the Woodbridge Board of Education grew by 15.32%. Our schools excel at providing the finest education for our children, but unfortunately at a high cost. As you all know, education makes up two-thirds of the Town budget.

If we fund the current requested budget from all town departments and the requested 9.2% increase from the Woodbridge Board of Education, and Amity's 6.63% increase (which is based on Woodbridge's portion of the enrollment), the Town's mill rate will go up by 8.3%. This is obviously something we cannot do.

As I have said for several years, these budget issues are a direct result of the Town's stagnant grand list. Assessor Marsha Benno has just finalized the grand list, and it grew only by 1.7%. This is the first time in 10 years that the grand list has grown by more than 0.8%. This year's growth is primarily due to the increase in value of motor vehicles, not something to get excited about. This growth, or lack thereof, does not even keep up with inflation. If we want to keep our high-quality education and the other services we know and love in this town, we need to grow the grand list by much more, with expansion of our commercial district and more housing. Unfortunately, this problem will only continue to grow if we continue to ignore it. I remain very concerned about our financial future.

I believe that we, as a board, **have an obligation to let voters decide on the Arbor Haven proposed \$9 million project at a referendum.** I have set up a meeting with the Arbor Haven folks, along with Jerry and Tony for next week. I plan to discuss the feedback that we and they have received from the many Boards and Commissions that they have presented to over the past few months.

As you know, to continue to protect Woodbridge residents and others who work, visit, shop and enjoy many of our activities in town, I signed an Emergency Order in early January, requiring everyone wear masks at all indoor establishments, workplaces and public meeting spaces. Next week I plan to review all the data and decide if it is safe to rescind the requirement. [You may read the full order on the Town website.](#) Governor Lamont is planning to rescind the mask mandate for schools on February 28th.

Our Human Services Department does have at-home test kits available for Woodbridge residents who are elderly, vulnerable or disabled and those with non-licensed childcare (a child taken care of by a family member or nanny, but not at a licensed daycare center). Those residents may call to request a COVID-19 at-home test kit through the Human Services office at 203-389-3429. They also have N95 masks available for residents. No walk-ins available; residents MUST call ahead.

Lastly, as a PSA:

An American Red Cross Blood Drive is scheduled for Sunday, March 6 from 11am to 4pm in the Center Building Gymnasium. According to the American Red Cross, Connecticut has a critically low blood supply.

*Prior to the pandemic, a national surplus of blood products would be used to mitigate regional shortages. Currently, there is no national surplus. Every donation helps! This event is sponsored by the American Red Cross and co-hosted by the Nicole Donzello Foundation and Woodbridge Human Services. **Appointments** are required; please visit redcrossblood.org and use sponsor code NDF or call 1-800-733-2767 to make an appointment to help with this state-wide blood shortage.*

Thank you ☺

GRANT AUTHORIZE FIRST SELECTMAN TO EXECUTE CONNECTIVITY

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Crisco – McCreven) to authorize the First Selectman to execute the Commitment to Fund Letter – Community Connectivity Grant for the Woodbridge Bike-Walk Phase I Project. State Project No. 0170-3513GR, CCGP Grant Number: CC22-0167 in the amount of \$599,855.00.

WOODBIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION – Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Budd

Dr. Budd reported that the State Superintendents are waiting for the decision from the Governor re school mask requirements and masks on buses (which is a federal law). It is expected that effective February 28th, the State mandate will be lifted and individual Boards of Education will set policy with input from parents, guardians, and staff.

LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Vogel: Recreation Commission - met on January 24th. He said that the department has been very active in helping to keep people healthy during the pandemic. The pool is open and swim lessons have resumed following all safety protocols. Mr. Vogel particularly mentioned the pool Director Theresa Burr-

Bahn and her work to safely fill all swimming and instruction slots. The Commission approved the hire of an additional swimming instructor. The skating rink is very popular, and some evening skating is planned,

providing the weather cooperates. If the FY23 budget needs to be cut, the fitness center hours will be reduced. Basketball has resumed with 20 players and no spectators. Badminton has also resumed. The FY22 budget is tracking 4.8% ahead of planned. Program fees have been increased to cover the cost fees for credit card use.

Ms. McCreven: Woodbridge Board of Education – held two special meetings to consider changes to the FY23 operating budget; there is another special meeting this evening and the next regular meeting is February 21st. She said that in her role as Liaison to the Woodbridge of Education she will continue to advocate that the Boards of Education and Selectmen work in partnership to arrive at a budget that best supports the sustainable continuation of educational excellence for the children of Woodbridge.

Commission on the Use of Publicly Owned Property – met on January 21st and discussed the work of the housing committee as it relates to publicly owned property; urged everyone to participate in the housing survey that is now live on the Town’s website. Discussed litter on Town property and streets in general and the possibility of a new Town ordinance to back-up the State law. The item will be further discussed at the February 28th meeting. Ms. McCreven asked the clerk to poll members of the Ordinance Committee to ascertain dates in March they are available to meet.

Dr. Lober: Inland Wetlands Agency – acted on remediation of hydra-carbon pollution on 70 Bradley Road; application by Massaro Farm to repair a bridge over a stream; following engineering evaluation, will schedule a public hearing to receive comments re the proposed development on Merritt Avenue.

Human Services Commission – noted that 37% of the Woodbridge population is over 65 years of age. Hope to resume in-person programs on February 14th; still seeking a driver and have checked with local contacts; applied for a \$25,000 AARP Grant to replace an aging former police vehicle; receiving applications for the Youth Services Award; held two internet safety programs; and the Job Bank has a list of teens available for snow shoveling opportunities. The Commission voted to change the title of Senior Services Social Worker to Human Services Social Worker with an expansion of hours from 20/week to 24/week; consolidating of duties provides for cost savings; salary change is covered within the budget.

To comply with a grant application, the Commission developed a clients’ grievance policy modeled after the State ADA Grievance Policy. Planning for the renovation is on-going. IRS tax preparation is available, in person, drive=thru, or via phone.

Conservation Commission – Guest speaker, Woodbridge Land Use Analyst Kristine Sullivan spoke of the roles of the regulatory agencies –The Town Plan and Zoning Commission, Inland Wetland Agency, and the Zoning Board of Appeals - and answered questions. The members discussed the importance of minutes as history of attendance, action taken, and important discussion along a guideline provided by Assistant Administrative Officer Betsy Yagla. Details are chronicled in the video or audio recording of the meeting. The Woodbridge Land Trust and Woodbridge Park Association representatives will attend the next meeting to discuss their proposal for a conservation easement on the former Country Club of Woodbridge property. The Commission will present a proposed tree preservation ordinance to the Board of Selectmen for consideration. Initiating a “trail challenge” to promote use of open space, participants will receive points toward badges. Members visited the site of the proposed development on Merritt Avenue to recommend an area as an open space set-aside ideally connecting with the West River Watershed trail. The Commission members said that they were disheartened to have spent time and effort to review the Arbor Haven Development Proposal and not have their views considered at the last meeting. Ms. Heller told the Board that the Commission’s view is being passed along to Arbor Haven.

Mr. Kuriakose: Economic Development Commission meets tomorrow; Amity Board of Education on Monday.

Mr. Crisco: The Police Commission - met on January 20th - following an executive session the Commission voted to offer the position of patrol officer to Stefano Mauriello contingent on the physical exam; budget is on track; awaiting receipt of a \$26,000 grant to offset overtime costs; Mr. Crisco offered to send the criminal activity report to those who request it. January 3rd, participated in a successful masks and test kits distribution with Betsy Yagla and members of the Human Services Department staff. Officer Lima received a commendation for his work re a carjacking on Lucy Street. The Police IT system is being upgraded. Sargent exams are being administered. The Commission approved the proposed FY23 budget.

Traffic Authority – several residents expressed concern for the safety of children that live on a stretch of road the connects Johnson and Rimmon Roads. Six traffic lights are being upgraded.

MASSARO FARM PAVILION – Request for an 8-24 review, Caty Poole, Bob Tucker

Ms. Poole, and Architect Bob Tucker presented the plans for a pavilion to be constructed on the Massaro Farm. The pavilion will be used for programs and provide a shelter for the volunteers to eat their lunch.

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Lober) to forward the plans for the pavilion on the Massaro Farm to The Town Plan and Zoning Commission for an 8-24 review.

2022 JAG LOCAL VCP GRANT PROGRAM – AUTHORIZE THE FIRST SELECTMAN TO EXECUTE

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Crisco) to authorize the First Selectman to execute the Notice of Grant Award and Assurances and Certificates for the 2022 JAG Local VCP Grant.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/DIRECTOR OF FINANCE’S REPORT – Anthony Genovese

Monthly Report – Mr. Genovese reported that the as of January 31, 2022, he is estimating a year-end budget surplus of \$351,243. Because the current Town budget includes and allocation from fund balance of \$400,000, decrease to fund balance at year end is projected to be \$48,757. Fund balance at 6/30/2022 is estimated to be \$6.7M or 12.92% of annual expenses. A surplus of is expected in Intergovernmental Revenue due a reimbursement in FEMA funds for storm Isaias expenses.

FUNDING REQUESTS

#2122-07 – Interdepartmental Transfer Amount: \$ 2,000.00
To: Human Services – General Prof. Svc. (1410-00/52100)
From: Revenue – Senior Program Fees (1-5-4100/45900)
Purpose: Increased costs due to popularity/demand for frozen meal delivery. There is increased revenue due to the additional sales
(Heller – Crisco) Unanimously Approved

#2122-08 – Allocation Amount: \$ 4,510.00
To: Pool & Gym – CNR-Pool Improvement Reserve (302-5150/57500/POOL) \$2,510
Pool & Gym – Maintenance Supplies (1515-00/55130) \$ 2,000
From: Board of Finance – Contingency (1170/00-56800)
Purpose: Repairs to filtration system and to cover a shortage in the maintenance line of the operating budget.
(Heller – Crisco) Unanimously Approved

TAX REFUNDS

Pursuant to CGS 12-124 to 129 and the recommendation of the Tax Collector, the Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Kuriakose – Vogel) to refund Real Estate taxes in the amount of \$8,870.72 and Motor Vehicle taxes in the amount of \$5,289.56 for a total of \$14,160.28.

UPDATE – POSSIBLE CONVERSION TO A VOICE OVER IP PHONE SYSTEM – Mr. Genovese

Mr. Genovese reported that the Town is considering converting to a “Voice Over IP Phone System”. The current phone system is operating well but there may be some cost savings and advantages to the conversion. More information will be forthcoming.

BEECHER ROAD SCHOOL POOL UPDATE – Mr. Genovese

Mr. Genovese reminded the Board that in 2009 the Town installed safety covers on the pool drains to comply with the Virginia Graham Baker Act. One of the covers has developed a small leak. The Town

has retained an engineering consultant to evaluate the overall condition of the pool and any repairs necessary. The engineer has deemed that the pool is safe for use. A full report is anticipated by the end of March.

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET – Mr. Genovese

Mr. Genovese reported that the Governor's budget has been released. Given an early snapshot, it appears that most of the Town's grant funds are approximately the same with a slight increase proposed in ECS funds. The main issue is the governor's proposal to cap motor vehicle tax at 29 mills (instead of 45 mills). That would shift the tax burden to personal property and real estate. The Governor has proposed to give Woodbridge \$1.3M to offset the reduction in motor vehicle tax revenue. This was proposed before and no motor vehicle offset was received.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Daniel Cowan, 33 Wedgewood Drive – said that the Governor plans to give the Local Boards of Education control over the school mask policy. He urged the First Selectman to rescind the Town's mask mandate so that when the time comes the Woodbridge Board of Education can enact its own policy. He said he also resents the mask mandate and considers it a personal assault.

Daniel Del Prete, 11 Maple Vale Drive – said that the Town Charter was written many years ago and no longer reflects the way residents live. He urged the Board to convene a Charter Revision Commission to review the present Charter and with input from residents revise it to reflect current times. He would like to be a member of that Commission.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT – Update – Mr. Genovese, Ms. Yagla

Mr. Genovese said that the balance of the funds is expected by June 30, 2022. The Town is working on a strategic plan that will be used as a guideline for use of the funds. A public hearing will be held when a list is created.

ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Book discussion - Ms. Yagla reported that the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ad hoc Committee is launching a series of Town-wide book discussions entitled Mosaic: Woodbridge reading in community. The goal is to enrich resident's understanding of the current and historical diversity of the Woodbridge community. The first is a virtual discussion on February 24th of the book "The 1619 Project". A link is found on the Town's website and Face Book page.

Transfer station – She reported that the fee for disposal of bulky waste was increased as of February 1st. The Town is also investigating a "pay as you throw program". There is now a glass recycling container at the transfer station. All glass containers must be clean and free of all labels, and metal or plastic caps and rings.

APPLICATIONS TO HOLD AN EVENT ON TOWN PROPERTY:

Beth-Wood Baseball – The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Crisco) to approve the Beth-Wood Baseball request to hold the April 30, 2022, Opening Day Ceremony on the Green from 8 a.m. to Noon.

Town of Woodbridge and ad hoc Community Council – The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Vogel – McCreven) to approve the ad hoc Community Council request to hold the April 23, 2022, Earth Day events on the Library Lawn and The Green from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Woodbridge Human Services – The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Crisco) to approve the Human Services request to hold a Blood Drive in conjunction with the American Red Cross in The Center gym on Sunday, March 6, 2022, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

TOWN COUNSEL’S REPORT – Mr. Weiner

Siting Council Update - cell tower 118 Newton Road. At the January 12, 2022, meeting the Board of Selectmen authorized joining with the neighbors to appeal the Siting Council’s decision to approve the Verizon cell tower at 118 Newton Road. Atty. Nicholas Bamonte, of the law firm of Berchem and Moses, will file an Intervening Complaint on behalf of the Town.

ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THE TOWN CLERK’S REPORTS

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Vogel) to acknowledge receipt of the Town Clerk’s reports for the month ending January 31, 2022, and cumulative from July 1, 2021, through January 31, 2022.

MINUTES

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – Vogel) to approve the minutes of January 12, 2022, with the inclusion as an addendum, the recommendation, supporting documentation, and resident e-mails from the Conservation Commission recommending that the Board of Selectmen reject the offer from Arbor Haven for the purchase of the former Country Club of Woodbridge and the development thereof.

RESIGNATION

The Board of Selectmen acknowledged receipt of the following resignations:

- Steven Sosensky from the position of Alternate on the Inland Wetlands Agency – to 2025
- Matt Schwartz from the Government Access Television Commission – to 2023
- Deborah Fried from the Police Commission – to 2023
- John Labieniec from the Human Services Commission – to 2023

APPOINTMENT – Inland Wetlands Agency Alternate to 2023

Nominations – Nicholas T. Zito – Nominated by Mr. Vogel, seconded by Dr. Lober

Frank DeLeo – Nominated by Ms. McCreven, seconded by Mr. Crisco

VOTE: Nicholas T. Zito – Aye - Mr. Vogel, Dr. Lober

Nay – Ms. Heller, Ms. McCreven, Mr. Crisco, Mr. Kuriakose

Frank DeLeo – Aye – Ms. Heller, Ms. McCreven, Mr. Crisco, Mr. Kuriakose

Nay – Mr. Vogel

Abstained – Dr. Lober

Ms. Heller declared that Frank DeLeo is appointed to fill the vacancy of Alternate on the Inland Wetlands Agency.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 6:34 p.m. the Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Heller – McCreven) to move into executive session pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes, Section 1-200(6)(D) for discussion of the Arbor Haven proposal to purchase former County Club of Woodbridge property.

At 7:12 p.m. the Board moved out of executive session and returned to the regular meeting.

Ms. Heller stated that no motions were made or votes taken in executive session.

ADJOURNMENT

On a non-debatable motion by Mr. Vogel, seconded by Ms. McCreven, the meeting adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Geraldine S. Shaw, Clerk