

Great Barrington Selectboard Meeting via Zoom and in-Person at 334 Main Street
Monday, January 12, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER SELECTBOARD MEETING - Chair Steve Bannon opened the meeting at 5:00pm with Selectboard members Steve Bannon, Ben Elliott, Eric Gabriel, Philip Orenstein, Garfield Reed present.
Also in attendance: Town Manager Liz Hartsgrove
2. POLICE CHIEF SORTI RETIREMENT RECOGNITION
S. Bannon read a proclamation in recognition of Chief Sorti's career and achievements and expressing gratitude for his leadership, dedicated service and commitment to safety and community well-being. State Representative Leigh Davis added her thanks and shared additional recognition from the House of Representatives. Chief Sorti thanked the Town, the community, his fellow officers and his family for their support.
3. POLICE DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION
Chief Sorti introduced Adam Carlotto, the newly appointed Police Chief, and they provided information on the accreditation review process noting the Department was accredited based on its compliance with state policing policies, procedures and standards. The Selectboard offered their congratulations.
4. SELECTBOARD'S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS
 - Members offered their thanks and congratulations to both Chiefs.
 - E. Gabriel reminded residents about the upcoming Farmers Market at the Housy Dome.
 - S. Bannon noted the Henry Knox celebration was great and well attended.
5. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT
L. Hartsgrove stated her full report will be posted online. Highlights included –
 - Snow plowing procedures/guidance for residents is posted on the Town website.
 - Dog License renewals are in progress and can be completed online or by mail.
 - The MA EPA will keep her advised on any issues with water provision in Town.
 - Housatonic Water customer reimbursements have increased significantly due to additional outreach and promotion.
 - The Affordable Housing Trust will present to the Selectboard on February 9 regarding the Prosperity Way project.
 - Town's Seasonal community designation will be discussed in upcoming meetings.
 - The Planning Board is hosting public input on the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
 - Budget process is progressing along with discussions with department heads.
 - Tate Coleman received a scholarship to participate in a rural transit program.
 - Establishing standards/policy on how unofficial meeting materials are presented online may be a topic for Selectboard consideration.
- 2026-001 6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - a. November 17, 2025 – on hold
 - b. December 1, 2025
 - c. December 15, 2025E. Gabriel made a motion to approve the December 1 and 15 minutes; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

7. LICENSES AND PERMITS

2026-002

- a. Application for a Temporary Beer and Wine license by Jessica Eichstedt, GB Fish and Game Association, 338 Long Pond Road for the following events:
 - i. Ice Fishing Derby – Saturday, February 14 from 11am-6pm
 - ii. Ham Shoots – Every Sunday from February 22 through March 29 from 11am-6pm

- The applicant appeared and described the events and how to purchase tickets.

E. Gabriel made a motion to approve a Temporary Beer and Wine license to Jessica Eichstedt for GB Fish and Game Association, 338 Long Pond Road for the Ice Fishing Derby on Saturday, February 14 from 11am-6pm and Ham Shoots every Sunday from February 22 through March 29 from 11am-6pm; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-003

- b. Application for a New Common Victualler license for Sandra Viviana Moreno, Nelson Lozada, and Betsy Pulido, BNG Patisserie LLC, D/B/A Patisserie GB, located at 313 Main Street to operate a café with 26 tables. Proposed hours of operation are: Monday-Sunday, 8am-7pm

- The applicant appeared and stated the patisserie would be similar to the previous business.

E. Gabriel made a motion to approve a new Common Victualler license for Sandra Viviana Moreno, Nelson Lozada, and Betsy Pulido, BNG Patisserie LLC, D/B/A Patisserie GB, located at 313 Main Street to operate a café with 26 tables. Proposed hours of operation are: Monday-Sunday, 8am-7pm pending any and all outstanding signoffs from relevant departments and boards; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-004

- c. Application for a New Common Victualler license by Matthew Scott, Optimal Holdings, LLC, D/B/A SoCo Creamery, located at 5 Railroad Street to operate an ice cream shop with 24 seats. Proposed hours of operation are: Tuesday-Sunday, 12pm-9pm
Continued from December 15, 2025

- The applicant did not appear and the item was not discussed.

2026-005

- d. Application for a New Common Victualler license by Jose Hernandez Vasquez, El Mular LLC, located at 284 Main Street, #8 to operate a café without traditional seating. Proposed hours of operation are: Monday-Sunday, 11am-9pm

- The applicant appeared and stated the restaurant would be similar to the one prior in this location.

E. Gabriel made a motion to approve a new Common Victualler license for Jose Hernandez Vasquez, El Mular LLC, located at 284 Main Street, #8 to operate a café without traditional seating. Proposed hours of operation are: Monday-Sunday, 11am-9pm-7pm pending any and all outstanding signoffs from relevant departments and boards; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-006

- e. Application for a New Driveway permit by White Engineering Inc. on behalf of Melton Sawyer and Mark Zustovich located at 177 Division Street

- Aaron Biasin, White Engineering, appeared and explained the work complies with all driveway standards.

E. Gabriel made a motion to approve the driveway permit for 177 Division Street from White Engineering Inc. on behalf of Melton Sawyer and Mark Zustovich; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-007

f. Application for a New Driveway permit by White Engineering Inc. on behalf of Gregg Navins and Dana Forster-Navins located at 172 Division Street

- A, Biasin described some challenges and approaches to the new driveway due to the property's steep slope noting with switchbacks it is at a 12% incline. S. Bannon relayed input from Fire Chief Turner stating the incline must be no more than 10% and the top of the driveway should have 20-foot area for Fire vehicle turnaround. A. Biasin stated the plan would have to be reconsidered as more grading and clearing would be needed. It was agreed the item should be removed from the agenda.

8. NEW BUSINESS

2026-008

a. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application for housing rehabilitation serving residents of Great Barrington, Egremont, and Stockbridge; Vote to submit grant application and Vote to allocate previous CDBG grant income for contingency.

- C. Rembold, Assistant Town Manager stated the block grant was just awarded to the three towns for FY25 and the FY26 program application has just opened. He described the value and success of the housing rehabilitation program locally which allows low/moderate income residents to keep their homes safe and livable. He stated there are generally a total of 14 projects annually with the maximum cost of \$60,000-\$70,000 per project. The program criteria and resident application process/timing was discussed. Regarding the requested \$25,000 allocation, it was stated some of the homes have liens on them that are paid off at sale so the Town recoups the money – and the money can be used to supplement program funds, if needed. It was added that the program is promoted and there are more applicants than funds available. It was confirmed there are 37 GB residents on the waitlist and in FY24 nine GB residents received assistance.

E. Gabriel made a motion to submit an FY26 regional CDBG grant for housing rehabilitation and to authorize the Town Manager or designee to sign the grant application and associated forms, and further, to allocate \$25,000 from the CDBG miscellaneous income account to use as a contingency for the FY26 Housing Rehabilitation Program; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-009

b. FY26 Vote to grant Trail Easement at Elmwood cemetery to Berkshire Natural Resources Council in accordance with the vote under Article 22 of the May 6, 2024 Annual Town Meeting

- C. Rembold presented stating this was approved at Town Meeting to allow the Town to work with BNRC so trail systems can be connected. He noted work would likely begin in the spring and that an agreement has been prepared.

E. Gabriel made a motion to grant the trail easement to BNRC for continuation of the footpath to form part of the Berkshire County High Road Trail Network as authorized by a two-thirds vote on Article 22 at the May 6, 2024 annual Town Meeting; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-010

c. Vote to accept the affordability restriction for two apartments at 268-278 Main Street in accordance with the vote under Article 18 of the May 3, 2025 Annual Town Meeting

- E. Gabriel recused.

- C. Rembold presented stating the affordable housing restriction is required by the Town’s Community Preservation Commission in order to receive funding and that two units were previously designated as affordable and these are two additional units. It was clarified that eligibility for an affordable unit is judged at the application date and the resident can remain even if income increases.

G. Reed made a motion to accept the affordable housing restrictions as presented in the packet to meet the terms and intent of the FY26 Community Preservation Act grant restricting two units in the building as affordable for a minimum of 15 years; B. Elliott seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 4-0.

2026-011

d. Update from Assistant Town Manager Chris Rembold on the Fiber Installation project in Housatonic

- C. Rembold presented stating the project is complete and Berkshire Fiber Connect has been able to string fiber optic cable reaching the center of Housatonic and making wifi accessible. He added that there will be a press release with information about how customers can connect to the network. It was added that hotspots will be in place by spring. It was noted that Fiber Connect has been working with the two Housing Authority sites and they have been very helpful.
- Michelle Loubert, 70 Division St, asked that go forward boards/committees clarify whether Housatonic village core or greater Housatonic is being referred to. She asked about improvement in internet service in her area – C. Rembold replied it depends where the provider can go and Fiber Connect should be contacted directly.

2026-012

e. Board of Registrars

i. Notice to Republican Party of 2 vacant seats

- L. Hartsgrove stated there are two vacancies which need to be filled to represent the Republican party in election administration so there is equal party representation. She stated the correct process is to contact the Chair of the local party to ask for a list of candidates, and if there are none, it will be up to the Selectboard to make the appointments.

E. Gabriel made a motion for the Town Manager to send a certified notice to the local Republican party chair requesting a list of three qualified party members for appointment consideration within 45 days; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-013

f. Annual Authorization of Fire Department Mutual Aid within Berkshire County Fire Chiefs Association, Inc.

- L. Hartsgrove stated this is an administrative item that does not require Town Meeting vote – only for the Selectboard to authorize mutual aid by adopting MGL Chapter 48.

E. Gabriel made a motion to authorize the GB Fire Department to extend such aid subject to such conditions and restrictions as outlined in MGL Chapter 48, §59A; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

2026-014

g. Annual Town Meeting and Annual Town Election

- i. Vote to open the May 2, 2026 Annual Town Meeting warrant for Citizen Petition on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 8:30am, and close it on Friday, February 13, 2026 at 4:00pm
- ii. Vote on 2026 Town Election Calendar and to hold the Annual Town Election on May 12, 2026

- L. Hartsgrove stated the information is in the packet regarding dates for the Town Meeting and election calendar. She added that once this is formally adopted, time for citizen petitions will open the next day.

E. Gabriel made a motion to open the May 2, 2026 Annual Town Meeting warrant for Citizen Petition on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 8:30am, and close it on Friday, February 13, 2026 at 4:00pm and to vote on the 2026 Town Election Calendar and to hold the Annual Town Election on May 12, 2026; G. Reed seconded, S. Bannon asked for any discussion – there was none. By roll call vote the motion was approved 5-0.

9. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME

- Hilary Goldsmith, 1026 Main St, stated property taxes have increased significantly and there are several large projects in the pipeline. She asked that the Selectboard consider a residential tax exemption that would lower the tax burden on residents.
- John, 151 Christian Hill Rd, urged the Selectboard to revise the 2017 Trust Policy. He added that he had sent the Selectboard additional information on past discussions on the topic and asked that they review. He noted the Policy is increasingly important.
- Erica Mielke, 360 Park St, stated the Trust Policy needs to be revisited – S. Bannon replied we are waiting for Gwen VanSant and Multicultural Bridge to make revisions and present to the Selectboard. She added there will be a community conversation on January 19 at 12:30pm at Multicultural Bridge and she invited Selectboard members to attend and noted Police Chief Carlotto will be there. She also confirmed that the DuBois banners have been discussed.
- M. Loubert expressed concerns about redactions of name/address on meeting materials available to the public – S. Bannon stated it was covered in the Town Manager’s report which is online. M. Loubert continued to state her concerns about the recent Planning Board meeting packet, and although an unredacted version could be viewed at Town Hall, she stated it is difficult with only 48 hours notice. She noted that towns locally do not reference the scam and others have prominent notice on their websites. She suggested the redactions are not good optics and impact openness and transparency.
- Eileen Mooney stated the Newsletter asked state Open Meeting Law/Public Records whether redactions are appropriate.
- Bill Meier, 11 George St, asked the Selectboard to consider the residential tax exemption and noted residents are supportive – S. Bannon stated that is on the next meeting agenda.
- Toby Stanton, 69 Division St, stated he does not have a way to pursue any compensation for his loss without the firemen’s report – S. Bannon asked him to send a summary to the Town Manager and she will look into it.
- M. Loubert stated Toby Stanton spoke at a past meeting and it should be reflected in the minutes.

10. SELECTBOARD’S TIME

- B. Elloitt thanked citizens for keeping the Trust Policy top of mind.

11. MEDIA TIME – No media asked to speak.

Adjournment - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 6:29pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk