

**MINUTES**  
**WILLIAMSTOWN BOARD OF SELECTMEN**  
**October 27, 2008**  
**7:00 P.M.**

**Present:** Jane B. Allen, Chairman, Tom Costley, Richard Steege, David Rempell, Ronald Turbin

**Others Present:** Alice Bratcher, Joyce Walsh, Mr. & Mrs. Bob White, Joan Cummings, Christine Walsh, Steven Lane, Ken Swiatek, Peter Milanesi, Leslie Reed-Evans, Peter Fohlin, Kathy Poirot

- 1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING STATEMENT:** None
- 2. SELECTMEN MINUTES:** October 14, 2008 – Mr. Costley moved to approve the October 14, 2008 minutes. Mr. Rempell seconded and the motion carried unanimously.
- 3. PETITIONER'S REQUEST:**
- 4. ITEMS FOR SELECTMEN'S CONSIDERATION:**

**A.** Blair Lot - Assessors parcel 305-2, a/k/a the "Blair Lot", is a 235 acre town-owned parcel between Route 7 and Route 43. This parcel was acquired by the Town via tax taking many years ago. The Blair Lot abuts the Green River Wildlife Management Area owned and managed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW).

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) has the mission to "maintain the diversity and abundance of the Commonwealth's habitats, wildlife, fishes, and wild plants, including the preservation and recovery of rare and endangered species." To accomplish this mission the DFW has a land acquisition program that acquires property for the preservation of open space land to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat. DFW has approached the selectmen to express an interest in the acquisition and protection of the Blair property. State funds to acquire and protect that land are currently available.

The Board of Selectmen requested that town committees, such as the Conservation Commission and Planning Board, be made aware of this expression of interest, and that [their members] communicate [their] opinion on this matter. For additional information [they] may contact Peter Milanesi, Right of Way Agent for the DFW Western Wildlife District, or Leslie Reed-Evans at WRLF.

**B.** Set Population Estimates for Seasonal Liquor Licenses 2009 – Mr. Turbin moved to set a seasonal population estimate of an additional 5,000. There was no second and the motion failed.

**C** Letter to the Public on Question 1- Ms. Allen presented a Letter to the Public, in support of a vote taken at the Board's October 14 meeting, explaining the negative impact it would have on our community if Question 1 (the elimination of the state income tax) on the November 4 ballot were to pass. She asked that the Board vote to approve the letter and send it to the media for publication as a letter to the editor. Mr.

Rempell moved to approve the letter and send it to the media for publication. Mr. Costley seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**D. Confirmation of Appointment to Conservation Commission – Rex Lybrand – Mr. Rempell** moved to confirm the appointment of Rex Lybrand to the Conservation Commission. Mr. Turbin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**E. Water & Sewer Warrant – Mr. Rempell** moved to approve the water and sewer warrant for the amount of \$127,555.63. Mr. Turbin seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

**F. Finances –** The Town Manager presented an overview of the town's finances to the Board, highlighting motor vehicle excise tax revenue and property tax revenue. He said motor vehicle excise tax revenues equal 3.9% of the town's revenues and they are down 5% from FY08 revenues. He added the town carries \$640,000 in the budget from excise tax and so far \$643,151 has been billed. The next large excise tax commitment will be in February 2009. Since the town only carries the \$640,000 in the budget, any additional revenue is a benefit to the town. Mr. Fohlin said there is no insightful or intelligent answer to why the number of tax bills has decreased from 5926 bills in FY08 to 5830 bills in FY09.

Despite a decrease in excise tax revenue, Mr. Fohlin said residential selling prices in town continue to be strong with homes selling at 99 percent of the median assessed value in the third quarter of 2008. He added that since January 2007 there have been six foreclosures that were attributed to the owner's own circumstances and not to the general collapse of the local real estate market.

Mr. Fohlin spoke about the town's second largest revenue, state aid. He said the town receives \$2.3 million mostly from Chapter 70 and education, in addition to a large chunk from the lottery. While local aid has survived the first round of state budget cuts, there is concern among local municipalities that aid may be cut in the middle of FY09. Mr. Fohlin said the town is fine for the rest of this year pending what the governor and legislature do about local aid. He said he looked at the list of cuts that were made in 2003, when former Governor Mitt Romney cut local aid, to see if similar cuts could be made if needed. In 2003 Williamstown cut \$91,000. Mr. Fohlin said the town had no plan for the possibility of the Proposition 1 approved because you can't make a plan for losing 70 percent of state aid.

## **5. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT:**

**6. OTHER BUSINESS:** Mr. Turbin announced he was appointed to serve as the Northern Berkshire representative to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization. He said that one of the projects on the agency's list is to repair the retaining wall on the Route 2 corridor on the Taconic Trail.

Ms. Allen announced a program at the Milne Library on October 29 – Lowering Your Electric Bill, Trick or Treat hours are October 31 from 6-7:30, the Haunted Williamstown event at the Eastlawn Cemetery is October 31, 7-9 pm and November 1, 6-9, and voting will be at the elementary school on November 4, 7 am – 8 pm.

The next selectmen meeting is on Monday, November 10, 2008 at 7 p.m.

**7. ADJOURN:** Mr. Rempell moved to adjourn at 8:40 p.m. Mr. Steege seconded and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Ronald Turbin, Secretary

RT/kp