

CHARLEMONT SELECTBOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 23rd, 2026, 6:00 pm

in person and via conference call, Town Hall, 157 Main Street, Charlemont MA

Members in attendance: Kim Blakeslee, Jared Bellows, Wilder Sparks

Others in attendance: Sarah Reynolds, Star Atkeson, Jonathan Mirin, Ellen Landauer, Clay Herbert, Anthony Cammalleri, Jason Pelletier

Jared Bellows called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Appointments:

6:00 pm – Ellen Landauer – re: Smart Meter Roll-Out Information

- Ellen Landauer spoke regarding the imminent rollout of smart meters and shared concerns about potential fire risks. She said smart meter fires are more common than many people realize, noting that last summer and fall's extreme dry spell motivated her to research the issue and communicate her findings.
- She described fires allegedly caused by smart meters and lithium batteries, claiming such fires can reach temperatures of 6,000 degrees.
- She showed a video of a PG&E employee accusing PG&E of knowing that smart meters can start fires. She said power shutoffs and subsequent restoration of service may trigger meter-related fires. Another video from a news broadcast showed meters exploding.
- Ellen said she had emailed a document stating that smart meter fires can occur anywhere from one month to two years after replacement of an analog meter with a smart meter. She also referenced testimony from three forensic experts regarding how such fires began.
- She further stated that utility companies remove smart meters after fires, making it difficult for insurance companies to investigate the cause.
- She noted that she has additional information available and is willing to share it upon request.
- Jonathan Mirin then shared a map of the smart meter rollout. He said orange areas indicate meters using 900 MHz mesh networks, while yellow areas indicate meters communicating with cell towers. He claimed that future 5G infrastructure would involve additional wireless equipment on phone poles, beyond just smart meters.

He also discussed opt-out fees, stating:

- Concerns for low-income households and neighboring property impacts
- More than 500 peer-reviewed studies on related issues (as cited by speakers)
- National Grid: \$42 opt-out fee
- Eversource: \$35 opt-out fee
- Referenced a 2014 DPU ruling and Janet Sinclair regarding opt-out provisions.
- Wilder asked what role the Select Board (SB) could play in the issue. Jonathan Mirin said he had two requests:
 1. That the Select Board send a letter, similar to one from Lee, Massachusetts, supporting a no-fee opt-out option to the legislature.
 2. That the town hold an informational session/ forum with representatives from Eversource / National Grid and Massachusetts for Safe Technology for a public Q&A.

- Jonathan said that the BOH has plenary power to protect public health and could oppose smart meter implementation or advocate for safer fiber-based alternatives. He recommended that the BOH examine the issue closely and consider whether it could override a Department of Public Utilities (DPU) mandate.
- Wilder said he needed no convincing to support signing a letter opposing extra fees to opt out, particularly if residents believe the technology may be dangerous.
- Jared Bellows said he would also support a no-fee opt-out.
- Ellen Landauer pointed out that residents never opted in originally and now are being asked to pay extra if they want to prevent installation of a smart meter.
- Jonathan said he could provide a draft letter to state representatives if the matter advances out of committee and could also prepare a letter for review based on language used by Lee and other Select Boards.
- Wilder responded that he supports that approach and said it was not controversial.
- A forum could bring awareness up. The Board of Health should be approached again.

6:15 pm – Discussion of Budget salaries, Police salaries, Highway Salaries, and full-time salaries.

Jared said that **HWY** employees are paid on the low end. A recent year there was no Cost-of-Living increase which set them back. He'd like to increase each employee's wage by \$2. an hour and bring it to the Finance Committee. One employee has been there for 27 years.

Wilder Sparks made a motion to bring the recommendation to the Finance Committee. Jared Bellows seconded the motion. All in favor.

Kim reported that Police salary figures have already been reviewed and align with what was presented to the Finance Committee. Current budgeting work focuses on overall town tax burden and the town's share of insurance costs, with final figures still pending.

- Kim recommended Option 2, which retains some part-time staffing to ensure coverage during vacation periods.
- Clay Herbert opposed the proposal for 1 full-time Chief and 2 full-time officers, stating it is excessive for Charlemont's needs. He supports a part-time model focused on peak periods (weekends, Friday–Sunday in summer, limited winter coverage) with Tuesday and Thursday evening office hours.
- He cited past experience that fewer full-time hours with targeted scheduling provided effective coverage and questioned whether current proposals reflect actual call volume.
- Clay also suggested forming a Police Advisory Committee to review staffing and proposed higher pay for part-time officers (e.g., \$35/hour or more). Wilder would be happy to see the math on this proposal. He acknowledged recruitment challenges due to training requirements but believes part-time staffing is still feasible, citing potential candidates from corrections and sheriff's departments.
- Jay noted that staffing patterns and recruitment have changed significantly, and the town no longer maintains a large roster of part-time officers, that part-time officers are now almost impossible to recruit due to certification requirements and competition with full-time roles.
- Some towns (including Petersham, Ashfield, and Cummington) were cited as examples of municipalities that have moved to full-time staffing due to similar challenges.

- Discussion also included concerns about response times in rural areas and the importance of consistent coverage, including river patrol responsibilities tied to full-time staffing.
- Kim expressed confidence in the Chief’s planning, noting that there had been extensive meetings and thorough discussions. She stated that she was satisfied with the answers he provided to her questions. Blakeslee emphasized that the Selectboard’s role is to trust the individuals they have hired, to listen, to refer the matter to the Finance Committee for input, and to allow the proposal to move forward to Town Meeting for a decision.

Kim Blakeslee made a motion to present Police Salary Option #2 to the Finance Committee. Seconded by Wilder Sparks. Kim Blakeslee —aye, Wilder Sparks— aye. Jared Bellows abstained.

Administrators Report:

1. Massachusetts Integrated Land Use Strategy

- A presentation on the Massachusetts Integrated Land Use Strategy was given at FRCOG, and a handout was shared for review.
- The state is using this strategy as a tool to prioritize climate, housing, and energy. It’s now being used in grant programs like MassWorks and the community one-stop website.
- Wilder noted this can create conflicts when state priorities don’t match local needs, such as solar projects versus protecting farmland.
- Sarah gave the Little Red Schoolhouse as an example. The tool identified the land as a good spot for energy development, but locally it’s seen as a historic area with open fields along a scenic byway, where a solar project would not be appropriate.

2) Host Community Equity Submission approval of minimum municipal equity standards

The policy the Town submitted has been accepted as the “minimum municipal standards”

3) Green Communities Grant Application for Highway Lighting Replacement

Jared Bellows made a motion to sign the grant. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

4) Broadband Indirect Costs Memo of Understanding- review and approval

The Board looked over the Broadband MOU regarding indirect costs such as electricity, accounting, Treasurer and Administrator time, and financing.

Jared Bellows made a motion that they all sign the Broadband Memo of Understanding. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion, All in favor.

Liaison Reports:

1) School Enrollment calculation error for Charlemont and Hawley- Meeting in April

Sarah asked Bill Lataille for ten years’ worth of budget requests. They would like to do the tutorial that Ken is willing to give on Chapter 70 assessment calculation. On April 8th the Mohawk Budget subcommittee will present data to all 8 Towns.

Agenda items (Discussion/Vote):

1) Amongst The Oaks Seasonal Liquor license, 42 Burrington Road Charlemont

The building department made an error, the license is not for a building but rather a tent, therefore the tent has been inspected and permitted.

Jared Bellows made a motion to sign the Seasonal Amongst the Oaks permit. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

2) Annual Liquor License Report for the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission

Jared Bellows made a motion to sign the ABCC renewal certification report. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

3) Berkshire Highlands Pentathlon Special Event Application

Jared Bellows made a motion that Kim sign as co-chair. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

4) Re-appoint Rob Lingle Animal Inspector

Jared Bellows made a motion to reappoint Rob Lingle Animal Inspector. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

5) Planning Board Zoning Bylaws for Accessory Dwelling Units and Social Equity Marijuana licenses

Jared Bellows made a motion to sign the letter to the Planning Board regarding the ADU and marijuana Social Equity bylaw revisions. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

Approve and Sign:

1) Minutes of March 2, 2026

Jared Bellows made a motion to approve the March 2nd minutes as written. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

2) Payroll and Vendor Warrants

Jared Bellows made a motion to approve the payroll and vendor warrants. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

3) Vacation Request from the Assessors Clerk

Kim Blakelee made a motion to approve the vacation request. Jared Bellows seconded the motion. All in favor.

Next meeting will be held on April 13th.

Jared Bellows made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:35. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.

Documents viewed in the meeting:

- Agenda for March 23rd, 2026
- March 11th, 2026, FinComm and SB Meeting Minutes
- March 2nd, 2026, SB Meeting Minutes
- Letter to Planning Board, from Select Board dated March 23, 2026, re: Proposed revisions to Charlemont Zoning bylaw
- FY21-FY25 Assessment calculation explanations from Mohawk, 19 pages
- Green communities Competitive grant program Attachment C certification of Application, signed by Jared Bellows 3/23/2026
- Letter from Michael Cahill, Department of Agricultural Resources, to Nominating Authority, re: Nomination of inspector of animals dated March 6, 2026, and nomination form

- Letter to MTRSD Member Town Administrators from Bill Lataille dated March 12, 2026, re: update to February 6, 2025 Assessment Calculation Error Information, 2 pages
- FY 25 Highway department Wage Survey
- Massachusetts Integrated Land Use Strategy (MILUS) handout
- Email to Sarah Reynolds from Brendon Simons. Dated February 23, 2026, Re: Town of Charlemont – Host Community Equity (HCME) Application
- Letter to MTRSD Member Town Administrators from Bill Lataille re: Assessment calculation error
- ADU Zoning bylaw revision, 3 pages
- Social Equity amendment to Marijuana bylaw 4 pages
- Email from Carlene Hayden to SelectBoard re: vacation request dated March 17, 2026
- 2 Informational handouts about smart meter fires and smart meter health dangers 2 pages each
- Flyer for a smart meter informational session in Lee Monday, March 23, 2026
- Clay Herbert’s handout re: police staffing