

CHARLEMONT SELECTBOARD

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 13th, 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, Bob Handsaker, Bill Harker, Johnny Depin, Keegan Lynch, Michael Tatro

Others on phone: Bob Nelson

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

**6:00 pm – Pole Hearing**

In accordance with the provisions of Section 22, Chapter 166, of the Massachusetts General Laws, a public hearing will be held on Monday, April 13, 2026 at 6:00 P.M. at the Charlemont Town Hall, 157 Main Street Charlemont Massachusetts Electric Company d/b/a NATIONAL GRID and Verizon New England, Inc requests permission to locate poles, wires, and fixtures, including the necessary sustaining and protecting fixtures, along and across the following public ways: North Heath Road- National Grid to relocate 1 JO pole on North Heath Road beginning at a point approximately 16' west of the centerline of the intersection of North Heath Road and Park Street install pole #6-50 on North Heath Road ~16' to the sidewalk at 42.630972, -72.868944.

Jared Bellows opened the hearing, read the notice, and outlined the rules, including a five-minute limit for public comment.

- Keegan Lynch said the pole is part of the AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure) initiative, involving smart meters installation. The equipment on the pole would include a small 4D antenna, potentially serving up to 500 customers in the surrounding area.
- Bob Handsaker, MLP Manager, raised concerns about cost, whether the project involves a new or relocated pole, and whether the pole would be taller. Discussion included pole height (typically 45 feet with 7 feet in the ground) and whether adjacent poles are similar.
- Michael Tatro said that in some areas, such as Legate Hill, poles have been replaced with taller ones, and that larger poles may be needed at intersections to support fiber. He noted that the span in question is about 240 feet and would benefit with a midspan.
- Bob noted that in the feeder project, broadband was not required to go through the licensing process and asked if that would apply here. Michael Tatro said he would follow up with Bob Ide.
- Bob Handsaker said the town needs to attach fiber to maintain proper line sag and requested that municipal attachments be allowed, without a licensing fee, along with reimbursement for attachment costs.
- Kim asked whether this involves one pole or multiple poles, she was surprised that National Grid did not send a representative to speak to it.

- Sarah explained that these issues relate to Department of Public Utilities (DPU) regulations, and that Eversource and National Grid have different pricing structures. She noted that third-party attachers are generally responsible for costs with National Grid, and that MLP had had to sign a contract.
- Bob Handsaker said he has advocated for changes to these rules, noting that older laws did not account for municipal light plants.
- Star Atkeson gave public comment, she has strong concern about the negative visual impact of the feeder project, citing the excessive amount of hardware connecting the cabling between the poles which resulted in a Frankenstein/barbed wire look. Especially along the scenic byway. There should be advance notice of the anticipated visual appearance of the infrastructure.
- Star questioned how approval of this pole could reasonably be separated from the antennae equipment intended to be installed on it.
- Star said that there is public concern in Charlemont regarding the installation of antennas and smart meters, and there is currently a citizen's petition on the way to Town Meeting.
- She is perplexed that the board is committed to the Broadband / MLP issue, a cost that everyone shares, when the placement of the antennae can significantly impact a few individual families with property value loss or worse
- She also said that abutter notifications were not clear, as they did not include a description of what the pole would be used for, with no description of antennae proposed for installation on the pole.
- Kim said that broader policy issues and smart meter decisions are outside the scope of the hearing.
- Sarah Reynolds said the Select Board's role is limited to approving pole locations, and that equipment details and attachment issues are handled separately with the utility and the DPU.
- It was noted that the town has an interest in using the pole, which is why third-party attachments seemed to be within the scope of the hearing.
- Smart meters would be installed on homes, with the antenna on the pole, and residents may opt out, at a cost.
- Bob Handsaker noted that there is precedent for the Select Board requesting conditions such as free licensing and covering attachment costs.

Jared Bellows adjourned the hearing at 6:30 PM.

The Board discussed voting with stipulations based on the testimony.

- Kim supported the pole location with conditions related to licensing questions. Wilder supported including stipulations and continuing discussions if needed. They will put the stipulations in and if they are not honored, withdraw them later.
- Kim noted these issues come up frequently and are difficult to address without utility representatives that can speak to it present. Bob Handsaker suggested improving the hearing process with a set platform, or template of questions, to better address third-party attachment costs.
- Regarding the concerns about transmitters, and the Board said it did not intend to dismiss them but noted limits to its authority, saying that a bylaw through the Board of Health would be the way to go.

**Jared Bellows made a motion to approve the pole with the stipulations of allowing municipal attachment without a fee and requiring reimbursement for municipal fiber attachment costs. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.**

#### **Administrators Report:**

1) Street Light Project from National Grid, switch to LED bulbs from High Pressure Sodium Vapor discuss and vote This project had been underway, during the route 2 traffic calming project, but the paperwork was lost by National Grid. They called recently, the incentives for lighting will be expiring in October, so it would be good to get this going again. LED lights will be much cheaper. Star raised concerns about the potential brightness of the light and suggested they be dark sky approved. The Planning Board had attended a presentation recently and it was stated in the master Plan that the Town should comply with Dark Sky recommendations. There was a suggestion to put up a few bulbs to see how they look before doing the complete installation. Wilder spoke of his knowledge of light spectrum and color of light. Star will find out the speaker's name and Wilder was interested in following up with it. The Dark sky consideration could be an even lower wattage which could be cheaper.

2) Housing and Redevelopment Authority quarterly report  
5 units are using the program, estimated to be complete in June 2026.

3) Town Report Dedication

**Jared Bellows made a motion to approve as is. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.**

4) Capital Request from Mohawk Trail Regional High School for Town Meeting Warrant \$8,908.88 for Charlemont's share of a mower and pole lights.

The Capital request for the Mower and parking lot lights got withdrawn because it was submitted too late for some towns.

#### **Liaison Reports:**

1) Selectboard Town Report

Kim talked about the town Report and how she came up with the structure and some of the parts. Jared and Wilder think it was well written and are appreciative of the time and care Kim put into it.

2) School assessment error meeting April 16th 6pm

Wilder Sparks will receive background on chapter 70 ahead of the meeting, might be informative, There is Concern about how the mistake it will be addressed – it was clearly an unintentional mistake, and they want to assure that communication lines remain open.

### **Agenda items (Discussion/Vote):**

1) Deerfield River Wild and Scenic vote on whether to support designation

Kim Blakeslee made a motion in support of the designation, but there was not a second. Wilder had emailed the board his reasons for skepticism of the chapter 7 review. Jared said that he would have wanted their questions answered in writing by the guests who had come to speak to them about it, but that didn't happen, and with all the town infrastructure in the floodplain, and the possible need to expand, he is nervous that it could cause problems.

**Jared Bellows made a motion not to sign the support of the designation. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. Kim Blakeslee opposes. Motion passes with 2 votes.**

2) Special Permit application for Eastern States Cup Bike Race at Berkshire East

They are all set with the application, they do not need the Select Board vote.

3) Town Meeting Warrant Draft review and send to attorney

If more Citizen Petitions come in they will go in at the end, they do not get the same attorney review as the Town articles do. Sarah listed the warrants. Decided on a \$25. fine for dog waste that is not cleaned up.

**Jared Bellows made a motion to approve the draft to send to the attorney. Kim Blakeslee seconded the motion. All in favor.**

4) Budget items outstanding, discussion on salaries.

Assessor's clerk will get \$1.00 raise

Rowe late bus will not be happening; the line will be reduced by \$7,000. to \$0

Will go through budget at next finance committee meeting.

### **Approve and Sign:**

1) Minutes of March 23,2026

Minutes not ready

2) Payroll and Vendor Warrants

**Jared Bellows made a motion to approve and sign the payroll and vendor warrants. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion, all in favor.**

3) KP Law Invoice 157749

**Jared Bellows made a motion to approve and sign the KPLaw invoice. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion, all in favor.**

**Jared Bellows made a motion to adjourn. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion, all in favor.**

**Jared Bellows made a motion to rescind adjournment. Wilder Sparks seconded the motion, all in favor.**

- \*\*Unforeseen in the last 48 hours. Bob Handsaker wanted to touch base on his progress with the DPU public comment opportunity. Bob found another lawyer, that will share a special fixed fee rate to prepare the public comment and be at the DPU hearing and will talk to National Grid. He is in touch with Senator Marks office, connected with Anne Gobi, the plan is to do public comment, watch every public hearing, let them know that it is important to MLP that they know that we don't like the way they are treating 3<sup>rd</sup> party attachers. It will cost between \$5-10,000. The other attorney they had consulted with earlier was going to charge \$16,000.
- The feeder reattachment quote is \$108,000. And there were over \$8,000. in dig safe charges.

- Kim asked if Bob would be willing to write up some standard language for the pole hearings as discussed earlier. Bob thinks it's okay to ask.
- The Board is fine with Bob taking this course of action and think it will pay off.

**Jared Bellows made a motion to adjourn at @7:45 Wilder Sparks seconded the motion. All in favor.**

Document reviewed in the meeting:

- Town Report Dedication Draft
- Letter to Sarah Reynolds from Sharon Pleasant re: CDF-G-2022/2023-Wendell (Lead) Charlemont activities, 3 pages
- Table of Active Street lights for LED Conversion Under Company Program as of August 1, 2021, 4 pages
- Street light comparison cost
- Town of Charlemont Locations of Eligible Active Street Lights for LED Conversion Under Company Program
- 2026 Drat Warrant Article 1-24
- Letter to Charlemont and Hawley from Will Lataille, MTRSD re: Additional Capital Assessment dated Mar 27, 2026, 3 pages
- Charlemont Selectboard Town Report written by Kim Blakeslee
- Letter from Wilder Sparks to the Selectboard re: Considerations on Wild and Scenic Designation
- Special Event Permit Application, Eastern States Cup 2/27/2026
- KP Law invoice