

## Town of Charlemont, Massachusetts

### SELECT BOARD's "Small Town Summit"

THURSDAY, May 5, 2016, Hawlemont cafeteria, 7:00 P.M.

Present: Select Board – Beth Bandy, Chair, Toby Gould, Sarah Reynolds

List of attendees - see last page

Called to order 7:05pm

1. The Select Board opened with their goals for the evening, to give a quick overview of Charlemont's current priorities, break out into groups to discuss, and see what leverage can they have as small towns.
2. The Select Board briefed all on the current status of their bridges, broadband, ambulance, schools. Sarah Reynolds gave an overview of bridges. The town has 23 bridges over 20'. The under 20' are now being inspected, causing two to be closed within 2 hours, 3<sup>rd</sup> has been inspected, not closed; they have \$5M in priority bridge issues. Trying to approach the subject of not being able to use culverts. Next Toby Gould discussed Broadband and the myriad of obstacles it has faced. Next week Toby will be attending a meeting with the Governor to address Broadband. A comment from the attendees was made that there is no voice from western Mass on MBI. Lastly, the Chair, Beth Bandy gave a brief overview of the Ambulance status. She stated there aren't many options for us as it currently stands. If other towns have a volunteer service and/or are interested in getting involved in a regional solution she asked that they let Charlemont know.
3. The Select Board asked for other issues besides bridges, broadband, ambulance and schools affecting towns? A Buckland representative brought up zip codes; A Heath representative mentioned they have five zip codes in their town. A Hawley representative brought up that half of Hawley is state land, and that it just got a letter from the State saying they're interested in buying 90 acres of land. When asked if other towns have same issues, five hands went up. A Rowe representative brought up unfunded mandates, and decrease of net state aid. Other issues offered were the complications of running a small town, the bureaucracy, the restrictions of open meeting law. Opting to regionalize certain services was brought up, such as emergency services and highway equipment. A Rowe representative brought up that Boston is focused on everything east of Worcester. It was brought up that Secretary Ash encouraged tourism. In regards to schooling, it was determined that their budget makes up 55%-70% of town budgets. Home schooling was mentioned and the broader issue was states that 20% - 30% of the total population don't go to public school. Vocational schools cost \$22k - \$26k per student, worse yet if out of district town.
4. It was decided that attendees would break out into four groups within the cafeteria to discuss: 1. broadband, 2. regional sharing, fire, ambulance, 3. Schools, 4. logistical problems of small towns unfunded mandates, bureaucratic expectations, state land, and zip codes. Attendees were asked to choose the discussion group that interested them.
5. Groups came back together to summarize their discussion findings. **Broadband:** wireless doesn't work. Does the Governor know 7,000 people signed up? What about federal money and the Federal Communications Commission's money for rural towns? Make funding easier. Reduce the cost of make-ready, over-lashing. The Wipro report is useless. Fiber optic development is the key to the future survival for the Hill towns. Communities need internet to do homework, for telehealth. **Regional Shared**

**Services:** Of the obstacles, there is a lack of state support. There's a need for autonomy and local control. Consider regionalizing fire, police, and ambulance. Start with the vision, what do you want it to look like, shared budget, how to have town voice, how to handle personnel issues, blend borders, redundant equipment. An example: New Salem and Wendell now have a FT Chief. They used to have two part-time. Some of those cases will need to address who is in charge. There be a need for a commission to address those broad issues. **Logistical problems of running small towns, unfunded mandates, bureaucratic expectations, state land, and zip codes:** The cost of undeveloped land was considered, and whether there is a point at which the amount needed to maintain diminishes, to where town services are no longer needed. Towns need a core tax base. Payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTS) for state land have seen a slight increase thanks to our legislators but need to increase more. Bureaucratic practices should instead be best practices. Of unfunded mandates, school paperwork and town record keeping cost in personnel and time. Frustrations of school autonomy were brought up. A conversation about how to reduce school transportation costs brought up the idea of what mixing ages can offer a group, for instance elementary and highschool. All agree that Open Meeting Law is a hindrance. Zip Codes are an issue. **Schools:** The school budgets are 55-70% of total town budget. We have no control. Attitude of the school committees is an issue. There have been unfunded mandates – opioid training, bullying training, that have driven up costs, but are not addressing the problems. Regionalization Agreements are an issue. Charter schools, choicing out, home schooling are driving down attendance. Who is reaching out to these students? Schools are overcompensating administration. Town v. school personnel: have janitors, office personnel in town vs. schools paying much more. Why can't we have the same job description. How to use empty buildings.

6. What next: it was decided that an email would go out to all here with the minutes. Towns will summarize their boards' and committees' responses and send feedback. Return back in (1) one month for a stronger statement from all communities. What are the 3-4 things this group can accomplish as realistic goals?
7. The structure of the meetings was discussed. Consider meetings having targeted topics, maybe over the course of the next few months. There are these task forces going on throughout the state. Form a coalition of local task forces. Can they combine forces to have a critical voice to Boston? Someone suggested language "We the people of western MA being of one sound mind..." Send names of task forces on to Charlemont. John Sears of Hawley suggests coming up with some legislative goals. Consider meeting with our state reps to find out what those winnable solutions might be. What legislation should they be working on? After the last election, the Hampshire Council of Governments addressed just this. Another comment was made that the schools and towns should be presenting their issues together as one unified voice. It was voted whether to meet as one group in a month, meet as subcommittees on one topic then return quarterly, meet w/ breakouts/ work groups and then reconvene for updates at end of night. 7 voted for "On one topic". **Action: Majority want to have one meeting with breakouts/ work groups and then reconvene for updates at end of night.** Start meetings with Shelburne's suggestion of town leaders reporting back what their towns' feedback is at the beginning of the meeting. Orient the meetings towards solutions: big wins, legislative priorities, then get together and talk about next steps
8. Next meeting Thursday June 2, 7pm.

ATTENDEES:

Adam Hinds for State Senate		Jenny Gitlitz	
Buckland	Franklin	Rob Riggan	Select Board, Chair
Buckland	Franklin	Dena Willmor	Select Board
Charlemont	Franklin	Carla LaGrassa	
Charlemont	Franklin	Cara Hochhalter	
Deerfield	Franklin	Trevor McDaniel	Select Board
Franklin Regional Council of Governments		Bob Dean	Director of Regional Services
Franklin Regional Council of Governments		Maureen Mullaney	Transportation and GIS Program Manager
Hawley	Franklin	John Sears	Select Board
Hawley	Franklin	Bob MacLean	Select Board
Hawley	Franklin	Kirby (Lark) Thwing	MTRSD School Committee
Heath	Franklin	Sheila Litchfield	Select Board, Chair
Leyden	Franklin	Michele Giarusso	Finance Committee, Chair
Leyden	Franklin	Jeff Neipp	Select Board
Leyden	Franklin	W M Glabach	Select Board
Leyden	Franklin	Lance Fritz	Select Board
Leyden	Franklin	Bob Hardesty	
Middlefield	Hampshire	Joe Kearns	Finance Committee. Gateway Task Force
Plainfield	Hampshire	Tim Walter	Finance Committee
Plainfield	Hampshire	Bob Persing	Finance Committee, Chair
Plainfield	Hampshire	Lew Robbins	Finance Committee
Rep Kulik's district office		Paul Dunphy	Dir of District Office
Rep Mark's district office		Chris Cappucci	Legislative Dir
Rowe	Franklin	Marilyn Wilson	Select Board, Chair
Russell	Hampden	Ruth Kennedy	Gateway Task Force
Russell	Hampden	Derrick Mason	Gateway Task Force
Shelburne	Franklin	John Payne	Finance Committee, BEST school committee
Shelburne	Franklin	Joe Judd	Select Board

The Independent		Ginny Ray	
The Recorder		Diane Broncaccio	
Wendell	Franklin	Doug Tanner	Finance Committee, Chair
Wendell	Franklin	Dan Keller	Select Board
Wendell	Franklin	Al MacIntyre	
	Franklin	A M Comstock	Finance Committee

Meeting Adjourned at 8:30

Respectfully submitted by Peg Dean 5/9/16, revised 5/14/16