

# Meeting Minutes

## Town of Adams Board of Selectmen

TOWN CLERK

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### Board of Selectmen Meeting

November 5, 2014

On the Above date the Board of Selectmen held a meeting at Town Hall at 7:00 p.m. **Chairman Arthur Harrington** presided. Present were **Members John Duval, Joseph Nowak, Jeffrey Snoonian,** and **Vice Chairman Richard Blanchard.** Also in attendance were **Interim Town Administrator Donna Cesan** and **Town Counsel, Edmund St. John III.**

**Meeting called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Harrington.**

**The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.**

**Chairman Harrington** advised that there was information that would be provided during the meeting on the *Energy Aggregation Program* this evening, and though it is not required to be a Public Hearing, he wanted to open that topic up to public questions and comments so all thoughts and concerns would be addressed.

### READING OF THE MINUTES

- **October 29, 2014**

***Motion made by Member Snoonian to waive the reading of the minutes of October 29, 2014 and approve as written***

***Second by Member Duval***

***Unanimous vote***

***Motion passed***

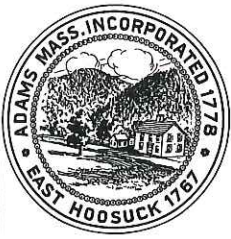
### CITIZEN'S CONFERENCE

#### ***Collection for Homeless Veterans***

**Jeff Lefebvre** will be placing a box at Town Hall from November 15, 2014 until the middle of January 2015 to collect necessary items for homeless veterans. Accepted are new bedding supplies, sheets, blankets, face cloths, bath and hand towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, mouthwash, shampoo, soaps, shower shoes, disposable razors, and similar personal items.

#### ***Community Development Block Grant***

**Jeff Lefebvre** said there was approximately \$3 Million in *Community Development Block Grant* (CDBG) money given out for the *Jones Block*, the *Hardware Store*, and the old *5 & 10*. He wanted to know what the Town needs to do to make the recipients make changes. He commented that the Town has been working with *Topia Arts* for ten years. He advised he wasn't sure whether to come to the Town or to call the State to find out what the next step would be. He said the businesses come in, take money, and leave the Town with a mess.



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In most of the cases, the recipient has met the obligations of the grant. The actions taken matched the requirements and there is nothing that the Town can do. The Town uses *Block Grant* money to help businesses to be successful by counseling, and help them to define what they would like to do and how to be successful doing it. It doesn't guarantee that the business will be successful. Unforeseen things happen and at times impact business success.

The purpose of the funding Mr. Lefebvre mentioned was to eliminate blighting conditions. The *Jones Block* property met the conditions and objectives of the grant because blighting conditions were eliminated. There are new facades, and historic facades were completely renovated. A continuous dialogue is occurring with all of the property owners to fill the buildings to get them back to productive use. It is an incremental process, and not negligence on the part of the land owners. Businesses need to plan far enough in advance to be able to have funding to carry them through tough financial times, and this does not always happen.

It was suggested that Mr. Lefebvre attend and participate in the new Downtown initiative that the Board of Selectmen is launching, and to bring his concerns to this process so new approaches can be developed in a more successful way.

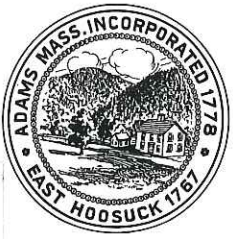
### ***Tax Rate***

**John Potter** noted that his taxes have gone up, and Adams shouldn't try to keep up with the big cities which have more industry. He said he felt Adams doesn't have to be the "*Pride of the Berkshires*" or the "*Pride of the State*". He suggests the Town slow down on expenditures, but also noted that insurance rates go up and there are essential capital improvements in Town. He pointed out that Adams doesn't have the number of businesses drawing extra income for taxes that other towns like Great Barrington and Pittsfield do. He said he has older tenants for whom he cannot raise rent to offset the taxes. Many houses in town need repair that people cannot afford to do. He said he realized the Board does not raise taxes unless it needs to happen. The taxes have gone up significantly over the last 3 years, the taxes cannot keep rising the way they are going, and he implored the Board to find a solution.

The budget and taxes go through a review process every year. The Town Administrator develops a budget and brings it to the Board of Selectmen. The schools also present their budget to the Board of Selectmen for review. The Select Board inspects it carefully to make recommendations for any changes. It then goes to the Finance Committee, where both the Town of Adams and the Schools present their budgets. The final check on the budget is at the Annual Town Meeting where it gets ratified. All of these reviews happen to keep the budget in check. No single group or person responsible, and the budget process is designed so the public has many opportunities to give input when the budget is being developed.

There is a school project that is in the high point for the payback on the loan that was taken out, which was exempted from proposition 2 ½. The rate will begin to go down as the Town progresses through the payback of the loan.





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The Board of Selectmen will again scrutinize the budget very carefully when it is presented by the Town Administrator. The Town is doing the best that they can for the community, and citizens are encouraged to come to the public meetings when the budget is being reviewed, and to go to the finance committee during their budget meetings, as well as attending Town Meeting. Citizens are encouraged to give input to their Town Meeting Member, who votes.

**Vice Chairman Blanchard** informed that the Townspeople voted in a \$40 Million project, and the payments are hitting now. He pointed out that though the tax rate is high; if the citizens look at the State website the average tax bill for Adams is 19<sup>th</sup> from the top, or 13<sup>th</sup> from the bottom of the list, basically the middle of the road for the State. Property values are so low that it is challenging to pay the higher tax rate.

### ***Extended Treasurer/Tax Collector Office Hours***

**Kelly Rice, Treasurer/Tax Collector** announced that to assist citizens in coming in to pay taxes, she is extending office hours until November 17, 2014.

### ***Public Auction of Properties***

**Kelly Rice** advised that the Town of Adams will have a public auction to auction off 13 properties on Monday, December 1, 2014 at 5:00 p.m. at the Adams Visitor Center at 3 Hoosac Street. Bidders must have \$2,500 to \$5,000 minimum certified check to have on hand to bid on properties, which is refundable unless a purchase takes place.

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

*There was no Public Hearing at this meeting*

## **OLD BUSINESS**

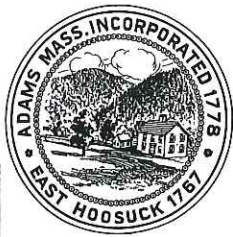
*There was no Old Business discussed at this meeting*

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### ***Information on Energy Aggregation Program from Colonial Power Group***

**Mark Cappadonna** from Colonial Power, a privately owned energy company, gave information about the Municipal Aggregation program. Recently 10 local communities banded together for a municipal aggregation program, which allows the Town to group their residents together and shop for a better rate in the energy marketplace.

In 1997 the State restructured its electricity model. National Grid is a distribution company and no longer supplies energy; they just take care of the poles and wires. However, if residents have not made a choice they will distribute energy. National Grid bids for rates every 6 months, in



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March and September. The two days a year that National Grid goes out to bid the energy rates go up and giant suppliers are the only groups that can bid then. Municipal Aggregation can go out to bid any month of the year and take advantage of the best rates. Residential energy loads are very small and large companies are not interested in working with individuals, but rather a large user.

The choice of the Town to enter into the aggregation program would require it to pass at Town Meeting. The Town would then develop a plan with a consultant at no cost to the Town, who will then take the plan through the state process at the Department of Energy Resources (DOER). The DOER will submit an approval letter, which would then need to be filed with the Department of Public Utilities (DPU). Once approved, everyone on basic service in Town will have their service needs brought out to the marketplace for bidding. There can be many different energy options at this point, and the Town can choose options of greener power sources, and to choose which price at the kW hour rate would be best. The Town could enter into a contract if they wish and if the basic rates go below the aggregation rate the individual resident can opt out at any time.

Municipal Aggregation is an opt-out program. If the Town chooses to go with Municipal Aggregation to attempt to get a better rate, all of the residents will be part of it unless they individually choose to opt out. Residents will be educated about the program, notified that they have the opportunity to opt out if they wish, by phone call or going to the website to opt out. A phone number will be provided to the Town to refer residents who have questions or need more information. If no choice to opt out is made, residents will automatically be part of the program. If opting out, they go back to the basic rates, or other choices may be made individually to secure different power sources or rates.

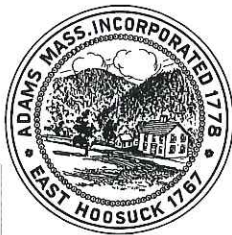
There would not need to be additional staff added to manage this process, but it would take up Town Administrator time. The contract may be able to be extended or the Town can go back to the basic rates at the end of the contract. The residents and the Town will not be sold off to other companies in this process, but they would be switched to the new service provider.

The possibility exists that the aggregation rate could go above National Grid rates, and overall historically it has been shown that savings take place, where National Grid rates change every 6 months and can be lower or higher but they average out. If a resident wishes to take advantage of the lower rate in this circumstance, they can opt out of the program.

**Peter Coussoule** inquired what the price per kW hour is for Colonial Power at the moment. He also asked to have a hard copy of the solar savings provided to him. Mr. Coussoule inquired if the program could be one town at a time or if it was a combination of multiple towns.

Colonial Power is not a supplier, but rates would change day by day, similar to the stock market. Every day there is a different price for energy, hour to hour and minute to minute. The price for the aggregation for the Berkshires is currently 12.191 cents per kW hour. Next month National Grid will cost 16.273 cents per kW hour, up from .08277 cents per kW hour now. The supply has gone up 98% and the rate increase was approved by the Department of Public Utilities on September 23, 2014. The local aggregation is a 1-year fixed rate. The Select Board and Town Administrator would manage the process and get the best possible rates for the residents.





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Bringing several towns together brings down the transactional cost. Colonial Power Group has a broker's license, but is an aggregator. Colonial Power Group does not make electricity, but would have the energy sources available for bid to try to drive down costs. The Town would then select who they wish to get the energy from. They will walk the Town through the process and get them through the DPU at no cost to the Town. The Town would not be committed until they go out to bid.

**Jeff Lefebvre** asked when this could be put before the *Special Town Meeting*.

The process would take a minimum of 3 to 5 months before it would be ready for discussion at a Special Town Meeting. The percentage of savings would depend on when the program goes out to bid, but will likely be very dramatic due to the imminent increase. The savings will likely be large for the next 2 to 3 years given the market and the natural gas capacity issue. It is likely that the timing of this program will coincide with the Regular Town Meeting in June. If information is ready before that point and the Town wants to go in that direction a Special Town Meeting can be called.

**Mr. Cappadonna** suggested the Town reach out to the Towns of Williamstown, Clarksburg, and Florida or other towns in the program to get their feedback.

### **SUBCOMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS**

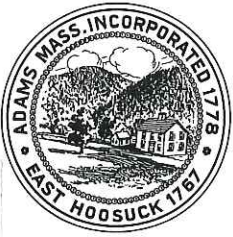
#### ***Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting***

**Member Duval** attended the BMPO Meeting and there was discussion about the *Mount Greylock Scenic Byway Summit Improvement Project*. He got additional information, and said it has six different stages, including exterior masonry, sealant, relocation equipment for a new ramp, restoration of the memorial chamber and finishing doors and windows, construction services, interpretive development and Bascom Lodge construction to be carried out by the DCR. This is going out for public comment, and then the construction will begin.

#### ***Regional Transportation Plan***

**Member Duval** informed the Board that there is development ongoing for a new Regional Transportation Plan for the County. The last plan developed and approved was in 2012, so the process is starting over again. Goals and objectives were put together from the last plan, and the committee will provide any additional input before it is reviewed and approved. The goals are to

- Protect sensitive environments in open space using federal and state funding
- Preserve and enhance community accountability
- Enhance regional economic development
- Promote efficient land use development and transportation system management
- Maintain and approve mobility and accessibility of the transportation system
- Improve transportation safety and security



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Hopefully the *Rail Trail* system extending from Vermont to Connecticut is included, as it is safer to be on the rail trail than the roadway. The Rail Trail also addresses the economic development issue as Adams, Cheshire and Lanesborough have seen benefits to local shops from having the Rail Trail, especially in good weather when people utilize the trail.

### ***Berkshire County Selectmen's Association***

The Berkshire County Fall Meeting and Dinner for Selectmen will be held at the *Skyline Country Club* on November 6, 2014 and a gift from the Town of Adams will be donated for a raffle.

### **ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

#### ***New Phone System***

Valley Communications will start the installation of the new phone system on Monday, November 10, 2014. Staff will be trained on the new system on Wednesday, November 12, 2014, and the switch over will occur on Thursday, November 13, 2014. Residents calling Town offices may experience busy signals as the switch over to the new system is underway, but if they call back in five minutes they should be able to connect with the office they are trying to reach.

#### ***Slums & Blight Target Area:***

Community Development staff is working with *Berkshire Regional Planning Commission* to identify a new target area for the Town's future CDBG applications. A new target area must be approved by the *Department of Housing and Community Development* prior to an application. Communities must submit an analysis of building and infrastructure condition within the proposed target area to DHCD for approval 30 calendar days prior to the application deadline. The Selectmen need to formally approve the proposed target area, which will be brought to the Board of Selectmen for consideration at the November 19, 2014 meeting.

#### ***Meeting with USDA Rural Development***

A meeting took place with Len Schuzdak, Rural Development Coordinator for the USDA office in Hadley to discuss public and private Town projects and how USDA funding programs might assist them toward implementation. The projects discussed included the *Greylock Glen*, the renovation of the *Memorial School* building, the redevelopment of the *Old Stone Mill*, and other rehabilitation for residential properties in Adams. Specifically discussed was how USDA funding might augment CDBG housing rehab funds that the Town receives. There are several programs that appear promising.

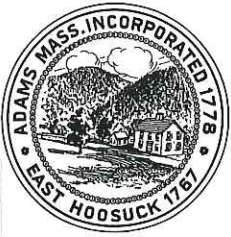
#### ***Paving on Park Street***

The new date for paving Park Street is Tuesday, November 11, 2014 due to weather. Paving will begin early and will be scheduled to work around the Veterans Day services.

### **PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

*There were no items presented at this meeting*





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### **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

*There were no items presented at this meeting*

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

*There were no items presented at this meeting*

### **OTHER DEPARTMENTS**

*There were no items presented at this meeting*

### **TOWN COUNSEL REPORT**

Since the last time Town Counsel appeared before the Board, he reviewed executive session minutes, advised Town staff concerning executive session meetings, gave advice to Town staff concerning a road off of East Hoosac Street, reviewed and commented to Town staff regarding the *Cable Television Agreement*, and gave advice concerning the *Greylock Glen Master Lease*.

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*There were no announcements at this meeting*

### **APPROVALS**

*There were no approvals at this meeting*

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

*There were no items presented at this meeting*

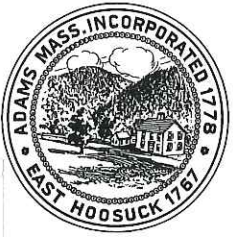
### **AGENDA ITEMS**

#### ***Economic Development Meeting***

There will be an Economic Development meeting at a workshop coming up.

#### ***Budget Process***

**Interim Town Administrator Cesan** met with the Accountant and Assessor regarding the budget, and hopes to have discussions and workshop meetings on expenditures and revenue generation. There are a number of ideas to put forth and out of the box thinking is encouraged.



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### GOOD OF THE ORDER

#### ***Hoosac Valley vs. Frontier***

**Member Snoonian** advised there is a game happening Friday night between *Hoosac Valley* and *Frontier*, and everyone is encouraged to go and wear warm clothes.

#### ***Veterans' Day***

**Vice Chairman Blanchard** announced that at 11:00 a.m. at Tuesday, November 11, 2014 the *American Legion Post 160* will be holding a *Veterans Day Ceremony* at Town Hall.

#### ***Telemarketing***

**Member Nowak** advised that robotic telemarketing calls are being received by citizens and thought they are not illegal, they are deceptive. The *FCC* is aware of them, and to handle these concerns citizens can call (888) 225-5322, or go to [www.FCC.GOV/complaints](http://www.FCC.GOV/complaints) for more information. Citizens may put themselves on the *Do Not Call List* by calling (888) 382-1222.

#### ***Voting***

**Member Nowak** reported the voting turnout was encouraging. Young families brought in children to see how voting takes place. It is important because children are learning at an early age how important it is to vote.

#### ***Taxes***

**Member Nowak** received calls from citizens who would like to know what is going on with the taxes, and citizens can go through the process outlined earlier by Chairman Harrington. He suggests that as a Select Board items should be really reviewed and determined if necessary so they can make fiscally sound decisions. He said the appeal of those who have called has been heartbreaking.

#### ***Voting Location***

**Chairman Harrington** was approached by a citizen asking about alternate places to vote as the DPW Garage is cold and a dangerous place to cross the street from. He advised that the Town is looking at an alternative place which would be more suitable potentially for next election and Town Meeting. He also encouraged those who did not like the election results to come back out at the next election and keep voting and not to give up.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

*There was no executive session at this meeting*

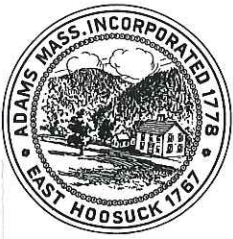
***Motion to Adjourn made by Vice Chairman Blanchard***

***Second by Member Snoonian***

***Unanimous vote***

***Motion passed***







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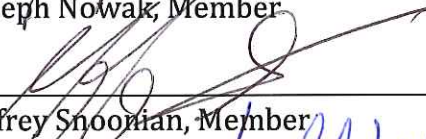
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***Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.***

Respectfully Submitted by Deborah J. Dunlap,  
Recording Secretary

  
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Joseph Nowak, Member

  
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John Duval, Member

  
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Jeffrey Snoodian, Member

  
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Richard Blanchard, Vice Chairman

  
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Arthur Harrington, Chairman