

**Board of Selectmen  
January 3, 2023  
Veteran's Memorial Hall, Town Hall  
308 Main Street, Sturbridge**

**Present:**

Mary Blanchard, Chair  
Chase Kaitbenski, Vice Chair  
Mary Dowling, Clerk  
Selectman Jamie Goodwin

**Absent:**

Selectman Ian Dunnigan

**Staff:**

Robin A. Grinn, Ph.D., Town Administrator  
Michelle Garman, Executive Assistant

**Chair Blanchard called meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.**

**The Selectmen led the Pledge of Allegiance.**

**Chair Blanchard read the agenda.**

Chair Blanchard asked for a moment of silence for all those suffering from personal issues, Covid-19, and people suffering in Ukraine.

**Public Service Announcements:**

- Selectmen each wished everyone a happy, healthy, God-blessed New Year filled with happiness.
- Town of Sturbridge 2023 Nomination Papers will be available on Monday January 9 for the Town Election, which is Monday, April 3.
- The 2023 Dog licenses are now available. Un-spayed/un-neutered dogs are \$15; Spayed/neutered dogs are \$10. Late fees will be charged after March 31.

**Executive Session:** Per M.G.L. c.30A, Sec. 21 (2) to convene in executive session in order to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with union and/or nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with union and/or nonunion personnel; (3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. Chair Blanchard so declared. And to reconvene in open session.

**Motion: To go into executive session and to reconvene in open session.**

**By: Clerk Dowling**

Selectman Goodwin suggested the discussion be moved to the end of the meeting in consideration of the staff and residents in attendance.

**Motion: To rescind the motion to go into executive session and to reconvene in open session.**

**By: Clerk Dowling**

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**Motion: To amend the motion and hold the executive session at the end of the open-session meeting.**

**By: Selectman Dowling**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chair Kaitbenski**

**Vote: Chair Blanchard, yes; Vice Chair Kaitbenski, yes; Clerk Dowling, yes; Selectman Goodwin, yes.**

**Town Administrator Report:**

**LED Street Light Update:**

TA Grimm revisited the issue of street lighting, and the option of privatizing vs. remaining with National Grid.

While there is clearly a cost-saving with privatizing, there are also many downsides, including that the town would be responsible for maintenance and handling any problems. Other municipalities have privatized, and while some are happy with the decision, others report problems. Another concern is staffing to manage it, as Sturbridge does not have an energy-resource staff member, as larger municipalities do. Privatizing would necessitate hiring new staff.

TA Grimm believes that logistically, it's safer to stay with National Grid, as going private may be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Clerk Dowling agreed, saying the savings would not justify the extra risk and cost of personnel, although she would consider other options if other selectmen wished. Selectman Goodwin concurred, saying he likes being able to rely on National Grid for maintenance and emergencies. TA Grimm noted that DPW director Heather Blakeley supports keeping National Grid.

**Motion: To remain with National Grid for the purposes of updating our street lights to LED and other modernization.**

**By: Selectman Goodwin**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Dowling**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

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**Impact Shifts Memorandum of Agreement: Fire Department**

TA Grimm explained this is simply a change in shifts and the reduction of "Kelly Days" because the addition of the two new firefighters resulted in a new schedule that decreases overtime. There is no extra cost, but because it is part of the union contract, this Memorandum of Agreement requires approval by the Board of Selectmen.

**Motion: To approve the Memorandum of Agreement as the impact shifts for the reasons stated by the Town Administrator.**

By: Selectman Goodwin  
2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chairman Kaitbenski  
Vote: 4-0-0

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TA Grimm learned an hour earlier that Sturbridge received \$199,924 in the Green Community Application Grant — \$71,540 for Burgess Elementary School LED lighting; \$1,503 for idle-right devices for police vehicles; \$59,051 for the Joshua Hyde Library air-source heat pump; and \$67,830 for improvements to the HVAC and temperature controls at the Public Safety Complex. TA Grimm thanked Facilities Director Robyn Chrabaszcz and Town Planner Jean Bubon for getting the grant.

**Department Report- Economic Development:**

Economic Development Director Terry Masterson reported:

— The meals- and hotel-spending figures from 2022, which are indicative of local economic activity, are back to where they were pre-Covid. The Covid declines were more significant for hotels than restaurants, likely because the restaurants were able to do pick-up and take-out, which mitigated the losses. Incredibly, \$65 to \$70 million was spent in restaurants last year.

— Sturbridge's two RV parks, including the new Pine Lake RV Resort — comprise 300 to 400 RV pads, which translates to 300 or 400 hotel rooms. Conservatively calculated, those RV parks bring 108,000 people, all of whom bring disposable income, to Sturbridge.

— Retail relocations and departures: Retail along Route 20 and 131 appear to be well-occupied. The exception is the vacancy in the old Cinemagic space. The rest of space Hobbs Book Plaza is either occupied or about to be occupied.

- Teddy G's purchased the former Friendly's locations and is planning renovations.
- D'Errico's meat purveyor has taken the space next to Local Roots but is not yet open. Clerk Dowling asked what the holdup was, and suggested the town consider limiting how far in advance businesses should be able to put up signs, as extensive delays is confusing to residents. Mr. Masterson will look into it; TA Grimm's understanding is that D'Errico's is facing supply issues.
- Heal and Local Roots dispensaries are still operating. A quick calculation based on the 3% dispensary tax shows almost \$8.5 million in cannabis sales.
- Wicked Licks and Tutti Quanti opened last summer and both had a good first year.
- Brush it Off last week expanded their business which now includes pottery, wine and beer. Owner Denise Sirois Morgan has offered some ideas on how to promote that section of Route 20.
- JC Penney space, which has been productively repurposed; The Santander building has become the Sturbridge Learning Academy.
- Vacant spaces include the former Jimmy D's, Rom's, Wildflour Kolaches, and the Stone & Sparrow. Mr. Masterson is planning to begin an exit-interview program where outgoing business owners are asked 15 to 20 questions about their reasons for their move, including if there is anything the town could or should have done differently.

- There are three home-based businesses — Work of Art Cookies, Just a Nibble, and Twiddle-T's Pottery — that are being included on the tourism website, as many home-based businesses, like Whoopie Doo & Cupcakes Too, become brick-and-mortar businesses.
- Per a suggestion by TA Grimm, the Economic Development office will now be "One Stop," meaning that any time businesses have a question, concern or problem, they should call the Economic Development office, who will then work with applicable town departments to resolve the problem or answer questions, whether they be about an issue with the town, a rule, license renewal, etc. TA Grimm's vision of the service is someone who is considering opening a business in Sturbridge going directly to the Economic Development office, who will answer questions about licensing, zoning, business types, home-business, health-department involvement, parking, and available space. This "One-Stop Sturbridge" will be especially helpful for small businesses. The town is also working on making the licensing processing and renewals more streamlined, and offering job fairs to provide staffing.
- In 2022 the Business of the Year contest was resumed. After 210 votes were counted, winners were the Publick House, Bird Store & More, Old Sturbridge Village, and Whoopie Doo & Cupcakes Too.
- In 2022 Sturbridge was awarded \$98,000 in Tourism grants.
- Major new projects include New England Cold Storage Plant; Complete Cold Storage Plant; and the Noble Energy Travel Center and EV Center.
- The new tourism website is up and running. It includes a daily calendar that lists all events in the next 12 months, which will help with planning.
- This spring and summer, thanks to a \$48,000 marketing grant, there will be a variety of advertising in various media within 50 miles, including digital ads, banner ads, email, and newsletters.
- The STA gave OSV \$10,000 to help pay for a digital highway campaign on the Mass Pike in Albany.
- Chair Dowling recalled that the former Economic Director held meetings several times a year with different topics, but interest waned. Chair Dowling wonders if such meetings would be beneficial. TA Grimm said it is worth considering, as long as it is done in conjunction with the Chamber of Commerce so there is no overlapping. Mr. Masterson said interest in virtual or live informational meetings and attempts for joint ventures is lacking. Mr. Masterson said he did get a fair amount of response to a 28-question end-of-the-survey mailed to 80 tourist-related businesses. He will send a reminder and expects to get more.
- Mr. Masterson stressed the importance of finishing the 501 Main Street parking lot, which will open up the trails to the Main Street retail corridor.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski praised the exit-interview program and the year-ahead calendar; Clerk Dowling is happy with the One-Stop Sturbridge service, which has been talked about for many years. TA Grimm commended Mr. Masterson for redefining the role of the town's first full-time Economic Development director.

#### **Action Items:**

- A. Consideration and possible action on the confirmation and appointment of Johnny Rice to the Special Events Committee for a term to expire January 3, 2026.

Mr. Rice, who was instrumental in the success of this year's Home of the Brave Road Race, is filling a vacancy on the Special Events Committee. Clerk Dowling was so thrilled with his organization, ideas, and commitment — and his doubling the number of participants, despite the pouring rain on the day of the event — that she asked him to fill a long-standing vacancy on the SEC.

Mr. Rice said he is looking forward to supporting the town's existing events, and plans to establish a "Christmas in July" road race that would benefit the Festival of Giving Trees, which raises money for cancer research.

**Motion: To confirm the appointment of Johnny Rice to the Special Events Committee for a term to expire January 3, 2026.**

**By: Clerk Dowling**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chair Kaithenski**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

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- A. Consideration and possible action on the re-appointment of Janet E. Garon to the Board of Registrars March 30, 2026.

Chair Blanchard read a letter from Ms. Garon, who vowed to uphold her duties and to serve fairly, with the best interest of voters in mind, and to remain non-political.

**Motion: To re-appointment of Janet E. Garon to the Board of Registrars March 30, 2026.**

**By: Vice Chair Kaithenski**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Goodwin**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

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- B. Consideration and possible action on the Board of Registrars vote to opt out of offering in-person early voting for local elections within the Town of Sturbridge.

Town Clerk Lynne Girouard explained that in a town election, turnout is typically not as high as other elections, it does not make sense to add the expense of early-voting hours, especially because the town offers absentee voting, which is virtually the same — the only difference is that early voting includes voting on the weekend before the election.

Clerk Dowling said she is comfortable deferring to the Town Clerk, especially because absentee voting is offered. Selectman Goodwin said he agrees, and that it is important to keep advertising going, as the Town Clerk has done in the past, so people know the absentee ballots are available.

**Motion: To opt out of offering in-person early voting for local elections.**

**By: Vice Chair Kaithenski**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Dowling**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

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C. Consideration and possible action on a Common Victualler License for Altruist Brewing Company, LLC located at 559 Main Street, Suite 105 in Sturbridge

Chair Blanchard noted that the applicant did not check off the part of the application that says bring-your-own would not be permitted.

**Motion: To approve the Common Victualler License for Altruist Brewing Company, LLC, Located at 559 Main Street, Suite 105 in Sturbridge subject to a representation of "no" on the Bring Your Own Bottle (BYOB) at the bottom of the application.**

**By: Selectman Goodwin**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Chair Blanchard**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

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D. Consideration and possible action on confirmation the appointment of Barbara Search to the Municipal Housing Trust Committee.

Chair Blanchard explained Ms. Search is the Community Preservation Committee representative on the Municipal Housing Trust Committee.

**Motion: To confirm and appoint Barbara Search to the Municipal Housing Trust Committee as the CPC representative for a term to expire January 3, 2025.**

**By: Selectman Goodwin**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chair Kaitbenski**

**Vote: 4-0-0**

**Old Business:** Selectman Dowling said the board needs to come up with a date for a retreat to reaffirm goals or to create new goals for the Town Administrator; or, if preferable, it can be done publicly, which TA Grimm said is okay with her. Board members prefer the intimacy of a retreat.

The BOS selected a morning meeting on Feb. 11, 2023. The location will be determined.

**New Business:**

Selectman Dowling said that during the ARPA meeting it was discovered that the design of the new Senior Center has changed, and costs could be quite a bit higher than what was appropriated at the last Town Meeting. She suggested the Building Committee come in to brainstorm with the Board of Selectmen, as she is concerned that if the plans deviate too far, it would no longer be consistent with what was approved at Town Meeting. TA Grimm said the town will have a formal cost estimate in a few weeks — the biggest changes seems to be the size of the parking lot — so that would be a better time to bring in the Building Committee. The change would not be in the town funding but with historic-renovation funding from the CPC.

**Correspondence:**

No correspondence.

**Approval of Minutes:**

No minutes to be approved.

**Citizen's Forum**

Johnny Rice, of 230 Podunk Road, and Karen Errichetti, of 234 Podunk Road, brought a petition to the Board. Chair Blanchard explained that the petition must first be submitted to the Town Clerk, who will certify the signatures.

Mr. Rice explained the petition is in regard to the neighboring Hayloft Steppers dance-hall property, which is between his home and Ms. Errichetti's homes. Although Mr. Rice did not expect that living next to Hayloft would be a problem, there have been problems. There are two businesses — one non-profit, one is a dance business — that hold events, often until 2 a.m., which poses problems. In addition to the noise, which prohibits the ability for neighbors to sleep, there are also problems with property damage and speeding cars, which is of particular concern to Ms. Errichetti, who has a 5-year-old. Events are held almost every weekend. Ms. Errichetti submitted a log of what she has observed. Ms. Errichetti has also gone to the Health Department, while Mr. Rice has gone to other agencies, like the Police Department. Ms. Errichetti does not think the property has an entertainment license or a Common Victualler license, although it seems likely they are serving food and beverages.

Chairman Blanchard said the town has in the past put limits on hours for businesses, and the establishment's license can be checked.

Selectman Dowling asked if the neighbors have spoken with Hayloft Steppers. Mr. Rice said they have repeatedly, but have reached an impasse. He feels things have gotten worse, and relayed a story of his videotaping from his porch a truck revving its engine and "burning out" of the parking lot and "full-throttling" down Podunk Road at 10 p.m. The day after he shared the video with his neighbors, Mr. Rice got a call from the Police Department saying the Hayloft Steppers got a "no trespass order" against him.

Ms. Errichetti said that while these dance events seem like reasonable community events, the disruption to the neighbors is not reasonable. Mr. Rice got confirmation that the property is not just being used by the Hayloft Steppers, and that the Hayloft Steppers have a special permit to operate and are grandfathered, the space is also being rented out. Mr. Rice said he has called the police, but that as soon as police approach, the noise lessens.

The question to be answered is what they are grandfathered to do, whether they are complying and/or whether there has been a change in use. Clerk Dowling suggested the Hayloft owners come to a Board meeting to explain their side and answer questions.

**Executive Session:**

**Motion: Executive Session:** Per M.G.L. c.30A, Sec. 21 (2) to convene in executive session in order to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with union personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with union

personnel; (3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares. Chair Blanchard so declared. And to not reconvene in open session.

By: Selectman Dowling

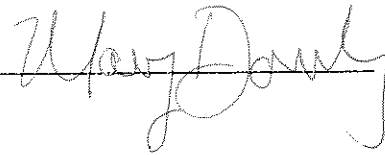
2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Goodwin

Vote: Chair Blanchard, yes; Vice Chair Kaitbenski, yes; Clerk Dowling, yes;  
Selectman Goodwin, yes.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by: Michelle Garman and Elisa Krochmalnyckyj

Clerk of the Board:



Date signed:

