



February 2023

2023 Annual Town Census

The 2023 Annual Town Census was mailed the last week in January. The deadline for returning the census form is Wednesday, February 15th. Included in the census mailing is an envelope to mail the census form to the town hall. Alternatively, you can drop the census form in the drop box at the town hall.

We have also included an application to vote by mail in the 2023 elections, which for this year will only be the Annual Town Election in May.

And if your census form indicates that you own a dog(s), an application for a 2023 dog license was included. If you already have a 2023 dog license, you can disregard this.

2023 Dog Licenses Available

Just a reminder that the current (2022) dog licenses will expire March 31, 2023. The dog licenses for 2023 are now available. Please see the Town Clerk on Monday evenings with the following information or send it in the mail (Attn: Town Clerk, 8 Summit Hill Road, Washington):

- Current rabies certificate
- Proof that your dog is spayed or neutered, if applicable
- Appropriate fee. \$4 if dog is spayed or neutered, \$10 if not
- Mail the above to the Town Clerk, 8 Summit Hill Road, Washington, MA 01223 and a license and tag will be mailed to you.
- If you received a late fee invoice for 2022, you will have to pay that first before you can renew your dog license for 2023.

Any questions please contact the Town Clerk 413-207-7526 or washington.ma.townclerk@gmail.com.

Town Nomination Papers Available

Nomination papers are available for the following town positions that are up for election this year:

- Finance Committee (3 year term)
- Finance Committee (3 year term)
- Planning Board (5 year term)
- Board of Selectmen (3 year term)
- Municipal Light Board (3 year term)

If you would like to take out nomination papers, you can find the papers on the website: <https://www.washington-ma.gov/town-clerk/pages/town-elections> or pick them up at the town hall on Monday evenings. You will need to collect 20 signatures from town residents that are registered to vote and the completed nomination papers must be returned to me by Friday, March 31, 2023. Any questions please contact the Town Clerk 413-207-7526 or washington.ma.townclerk@gmail.com.

Dear Washington Friends & Neighbors:

February 2023

With a recent increase in cases of the latest, highly contagious Covid-19 variant, masking is being strongly encouraged in public settings. We have some KN-95 masks and test kits available at Town Hall during public hours: Monday nights 7-9pm, and Mondays & Wednesdays 11am-1pm.

We continue to seek a new Highway crew member. The position requires a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Recent changes in federal law have now mandated specific classroom and training requirements to obtain a CDL, making it more expensive for employers to consider hiring someone who doesn't have a license already and help them to get one. But, in consultation with the Finance Committee, the Select Board has decided to consider applicants without a CDL and sponsor the right candidate to obtain their licenses in return for a two-year commitment. The starting pay rate would be also reduced accordingly. Anyone who is interested in the position should check the job posting on our website: www.washington-ma.gov/job-opportunities, or reach out directly to Tom at the Highway garage.

We will be going out to bid in the coming months for several grant-funded construction projects planned for this summer: repaving the northern portion of Upper Valley Rd, which had originally been planned for last year; upper Frost Rd culvert replacement, several years overdue; and replacement of two bridges on Lenox-Whitney Rd in October Mountain State Forest. We will also be following through on line-painting and crack-sealing projects that didn't happen last fall as originally intended. These will likewise be covered primarily by State funds.

The FY24 budget season has begun. The Select Board is reviewing priorities and the Finance Committee will be crunching numbers over the next few months. Inflation will, of course, weigh heavily. The School District has published a preliminary budget that projects a potential increase in overall town assessments of almost 9%. The School Committee will meet again about that budget on Feb. 9, and there is a public hearing scheduled for Feb. 16.

The owners of Bucksteep filed a late answer to our foreclosure motion in Land Court. They claim again to have a potential buyer, which would allow them to pay back the substantial tax lien. The Town is seeking a hearing to learn more and to ask the Court to set a firm deadline.

For a moment there, we had a signed acceptance for a Shared Town Administrator for Washington and Middlefield. We just needed to meet to finalize any details of an Employment Agreement with him. But then the Towns got left at the altar when he abruptly withdrew. There are no other candidates currently available to consider. So we are essentially back at square one. We will regroup with Middlefield and continue searching for someone to help run our Towns.

Kent Lew
Select Board chair

David Ellis
Select Board

John Fish
Select Board clerk

State Forest Management – Seeing the Forest for the Trees

By Carol Lew

October Mountain State Forest takes up a good portion of Washington; 11,600 acres, which is 42% of our town's footprint. So, when the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) takes steps to manage the forest, we're going to notice it more than other visitors of the park.

In late October, DCR representatives Kristopher Massini and Thomas Brule attended a Washington Select Board meeting to answer any questions and hear comments Washington residents might have about an upcoming project they're calling "Ant Lot." This was announced in Tracks in advance, but few residents attended the meeting; I didn't either! The subject of forest management and tree cutting is complex, and had I attended, I'm sure I would have learned a lot—including the fact that forest cutting is a hot topic that stirs up strong opinions.

Over a five-year period, DCR proposes a project that involves cuttings in a 447 acre area of the forest along parts of West Branch Road and Lenox Whitney Road. The goals are to increase the resilience of the forest, and to manage the forest ecosystem health and biodiversity. You can see the full proposal here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-forestry-proposal-ant-lot-2022/download>. The basics of the project are these:

- In 120 acres of this lot, cut some areas of the forest leaving seed trees of desired species, Yellow and Paper Birch in particular. The cutting will occur in dense stands of Ash. This is intended to promote the regeneration of trees that don't do well in shade, and to curtail the conditions that are good for Beech understory; Beech are kind of like bullies in the forest, making it difficult for other trees and vegetation to thrive.
- Clear-cut patches of the Beech understory. This will create a needed break in the cycle of Beech bark disease, and also allow a greater diversity of northern hardwood to grow. The ice storm of 2008 created opportunities for the Beech understory to block regeneration of other trees. Clear-cut patches will be variable in size and will not exceed 5 acres. Multiple patches will occur on approximately 50% of the 80 acre section slated for this treatment, and thinning between patches may occur as well.
- In 99 acres of the lot, where there's a variety of tree species, they will harvest trees based on species. Within each stand, between 20% and 80% of trees will be harvested. Generally, more trees will be removed where there are predominantly shade-intolerant trees and fewer will be removed in areas where trees will thrive without thinning. A primary goal will be to promote the retention and regeneration of softwood species in the overstory.
- Along the roads, Ash trees (which are being decimated by emerald ash borer) within 200 feet of the road will be removed. Other species of trees within that 200 ft. buffer will be retained unless they pose a hazard.
- The revenue generated by the viable lumber will fund the treatment of invasive species in the area. The invasive species slated for chemical treatment are Japanese Bar Berry, Bittersweet, Honeysuckle, and Garlic Mustard.

- Historic areas will be flagged and protected before machinery is brought in.
- An overriding goal is to sustain future generations of Ash trees: Silvicultural treatments in areas of existing ash regeneration can foster the growth and development of these young trees in hope that a control for EAB (ash borer) becomes available.

The town of Washington benefits from these cuttings in a few ways: We get an 8% stumpage fee for whatever revenue DCR receives from the loggers who do the project. And DCR gives our highway department the gravel needed to improve the roads in the project area. Since the roads are our responsibility, this keeps us from having to pay for their improvements from taxes. Also, preemptive removal of hazardous trees along the roads will save our highway department from dealing with fallen trees across those roads later.

While these objectives sound positive, there's no getting around the fact that when areas of the forest are cut, they look unsightly and disturbed. To look at, it doesn't "seem" good for the forest at all. Residents who frequent the forest have thoughts about the cuttings.

Birder and naturalist Ed Neumuth spends a lot of the time in October Mountain State Forest. He knows that the blackberry bushes will be some of the first vegetation to take over cut areas, and it's excellent habitat for Mourning Warblers. He hopes that the activity won't be too close to the swamp area. He has been keeping track of Sandhill Cranes in the vicinity and hoped they would begin to nest there; too much activity would likely make them decide it's not the place for them. He hopes there is care in selecting and protecting seed trees left in the cut areas. In previous project areas, poor specimens were left standing alone, unprotected by trees around them, and many were blown over. And he hopes that DCR intends to create brush pile habitats for the New England Cottontail rabbits, whose population is vulnerable.

Ellen Bond enjoys walking and biking in the state forest with her husband, Ed. She is concerned about the animals that currently live in the earmarked area because it's the right habitat for them. The cutting down of carbon-collecting trees seems to her inconsistent with the idea of helping our climate.

Dick Spencer had another perspective on forest management. As the owner of 153 acres in Chapter 61 (the Massachusetts program for reduction of tax assessments on forested land), he is committed to improving the timber on that land. Over the years, he has earmarked various sections of his land for the kinds of cutting projects that take place in the State Forest. He thinks these projects are important to do if the forest is to maintain diversity, health, and resilience into the future. Regarding his own land, Dick says, "I will never see the results of the forest management I am doing now. My sons will be in their eighties when they see the benefit. But the forest will be better for it."

Dick's perspective made me stop and think about my aversion to how the land looks after a cutting. I am not accustomed to making plans that won't come to pass during my lifetime, but forests will be here for a long, long time. I hope that, whatever downsides there are to contemporary forest management, it will ultimately be best for the forest of the future.

Becket Athenaeum

- Thursday, February 2, 7-8:30pm
Pamela Means & the Power of the Protest Song: Our Shared History & Present Day
- Saturdays, February 4, 11, 18, 25, 10:30-11:30am
Library Storytime (2nd Saturday of the month, the craft project is replaced by creative movement.)
- Saturday, February 4, 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm
- Movie Night for Adults
- Tuesdays, February 7, 14, 21, 28, 10:30-11:30am
Pre-School STEAM Program. Preregistration required: BecketAthenaeum.org/events
- Tuesday, February 7, 1:30pm
- Book Club: The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson
- Monday, February 13, 6pm
- Cookbook Club: Jerusalem by Yotam Ottolenghi & Sami Tamimi
- Wednesday, February 15, closing at 6pm
- Saturday, February 18, 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm
- Teen Movie Night
- Wednesday, February 22, 6pm
- Chess for Beginners with Glenn Davison, on Zoom
- Date TBA, 6-8pm
- Game Night
- Weekdays, 2:55-5:30pm
Kids Club After-School Care at BWS. Contact Jon Yetto at the Dalton CRA
413-684-0260 jyetto@daltoncra.org for information and to sign up.

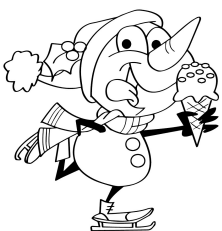
If you are having serious challenges purchasing food, heat or anything that may affect your health, we may be able to help! Call Pastor Bill, Becket Federated Church 413-770-1897.

The Washington Historical Commission invites you to consider joining this committee. We meet once a month, the first Wednesday of the month, at 10 am at the town hall. Come see what we're all about, and discuss your thoughts and special interests with us. If you've ever wondered about the Whitney Estate, the old town schoolhouses, the first settlers, or any other things related to the town's history, come meet with us or send us an email. Of course if you have vintage photos or other items of the town's past, please consider bringing them to a meeting. We'd love to see you and talk to you about your interests.
David Weissbrod, Chairperson of the Washington Historical Commission

COA
Classes
Chair Yoga Mondays 11:00 AM
Yoga Tuesdays at 9:00 AM
Osteoporosis Thursdays at 9:00 AM
Ti-Chi/QiGong Fridays at 10:00 AM

Pot Luck Dinner
Friday Feb 17 5:30 Steve will be cooking chicken cordon bleu. Bring a dish to share if you can.

Questions, comments, or need assistance?
Call [413-394-0003](tel:413-394-0003)
or email washingtoncoa@gmail.com



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Email your TRACKS info by the 25th of the month to get in to next
month's issue to Lisa at: mrsabeski@mac.com
Please put TRACKS in the subject line.