



January 2024

happy new year

2024 Dog Licenses are Available

We have received the 2024 dog tags. The 2023 licenses and tags do not expire until March 31, 2024, but you are welcome to get the 2024 license/tag anytime you would like before the current one expires. You can see the Town Clerk on Monday evenings with the following:

- [Current rabies certificate](#)
- [Proof of spay or neuter, if applicable](#)
- [Fee: \\$4.00 if spayed/neutered or \\$10 if not](#)

You can also mail the above (checks payable to Town of Washington) to the Town Clerk, 8 Summit Hill Rd, Washington, MA 01223 and a license and tag will be mailed back to you.

Please note that if you received a 2023 late fee invoice, you will have to pay that first before receiving your 2024 license/tag.

Save the Dates

Washington Day: February 2024. Celebrating our town and our name-sake's birthday, we will have a get together. More specifics and details to follow.

Family Fun Day: June 29, 2024. The day will be filled with entertainment, music, activities, food and more. Details to follow.

Open Burning for 2024

Open burning will run from **January 15 - May 1, 2024**. Washington residents and property owners must obtain a permit for open burning from the Fire Chief for each day they want to burn. There are two options for obtaining a permit:

1. Call the Fire Chief's residence (413) 623-2185 and speak directly to the Chief or leave a message (listen to the entire message to be sure burning is being permitted for the day). When leaving a message include name, address where you will be burning, and a contact phone number.
2. Log onto www.bcburnpermits.com and follow the directions that are listed.

Weather conditions, current and predicted, are part of the determining factors for permitting. The MassDEP also makes a determination based on air quality. Call the MassDEP Air Quality Hotline at (800) 882-1497 or visit [MassAir Online](http://MassAirOnline) to find out if the daily air quality is acceptable for burning.

Open burning must be done:

- Between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM
- At least 75 feet from all buildings
- As close as possible to the source of the materials being burned
- When air quality is acceptable for burning
- Attended by an adult until completely extinguished
- Extinguishment materials / tools must be onsite and Useavailable
- No hazardous materials
- Use common sense and be safe
- Call 911 immediately if fire gets out of control

Paul Mikaniewicz
Fire Chief
Becket / Washington

Dear Washington Friends & Neighbors:

January 2024

With the solstice behind us and a new year ahead, the days are once again growing gradually longer. We hope that everyone enjoyed a happy and healthy holiday season.

Just before Christmas, the Town received payment of \$293,843 from Family Unity International to finally settle all outstanding taxes on the former Bucksteep property. With all the debts now repaid, we have withdrawn our foreclosure motion in Land Court and released the lien on the property. The funds were paid through a loan, rather than a sale. The future of Bucksteep remains to be seen at this point, as the owners have given no further indication about their plans.

The long-running project to repair and restore the stained glass windows in St. Andrew's Chapel was finally wrapped up in December. Earlier in the fall, the Chapel masonry was also repointed to further safeguard the stone building. Thanks to Rose Borgnis and Mark Roos for shepherding these projects to completion.

Sharp-eyed folks may have noticed that the flag at the chapel has been taken down. It had once again become tattered. And it had just been replaced not that long ago. Unfortunately, there is a history of frequent damage to the flag at this location. The telescoping flagpole seems to be a big part of the problem. So the Select Board has decided to not put up a new flag until a better solution can be determined.

We received notice from the Governor's office that Washington will receive \$112,132 as its portion of revenues gained from the "Fair Share" Amendment and earmarked for transportation improvements. This will be added to our regular annual allocation of \$167,618 in Ch. 90 funds. The next big priority will be Lower Valley & Johnson Hill Roads. Since this project will likely cost around \$2+ million, we will be seeking additional state and federal funding and it may take several years. The first step is engineering and design, which we will undertake this coming year.

The Board continues to assess our options for EMS ambulance services. We have met with Becket Ambulance to discuss their proposal. We have invited County Ambulance to meet with us this month to review their current capacity and terms for any potential renewal. However, a date has not yet been set. Once options have been clarified and evaluated, we will want to have a Community Meeting to get perspective and input from residents. We hope to schedule this for February, so stay tuned.

We wish a happy 2024 to one and all.

Kent Lew
Select Board chair

David Ellis
Select Board clerk

Mike Case
Select Board

The Running of Our Town

by Carol Lew

I think it's fair to say that most Washington residents think our town is a great place to live. Washington covers about 39 square miles, but nearly two thirds of it is uninhabited state forest or otherwise protected land. The area that's left is sparsely populated with fewer than 250 households. Most of us love that about Washington.

There's a bit of a double-edged sword in this, though. That's because the actual running of a town, any town, takes effort. Bigger towns have more people to draw from for governmental committees and boards. In Washington, there are fewer than 430 adults, and there are over 50 government positions to be filled by residents. The number of roles don't scale down just because there are fewer people to take on those positions. A few, such as Select Board, come with a small stipend. Most of them are unpaid. All of them are important to the running of the town we live in, and those who step up to fill the positions make a great contribution to maintaining the environment we love so much.

Just a few months ago, Town Clerk Allison Mikaniewicz organized a special election to fill a vacated Select Board seat. No one ran for the position, so Washington residents who went to Town Hall to vote on election day were handed blank ballots. It was good fortune for all of us that a number of people voted for one person, Mike Case, and that he accepted the position. It is close to sheer luck that we still have a three member Select Board. The scenario was alarming enough that the incident was mentioned in a Berkshire Eagle editorial and several articles.

There are 14 Committees and Boards as well as several other appointed and elected positions. Some of the Boards are crucial to the functioning of the town, for example the Finance Committee, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, and the Select Board. Others add quality to town life: The Council on Aging oversees a series of activities that are important to the seniors among us. The Parks Commission makes sure the town park continues to be a great place for events and individual outdoor activities. New needs arise from time to time necessitating additional group efforts such as the Green Community Committee.

I am on the Zoning Board of Appeals in the role of Secretary. I serve with Ed Bond, who is the Chair of the committee, and Frank Polizzi. When someone files a zoning appeal, I get out my manual to make sure I, as Secretary, follow every step properly and legally. We conduct the appeal process in the same way as towns all over the state do. Our committee meets quarterly, though more often when there's an appeal, and sometimes less often when there's nothing on the docket. It's been a great way spend time with my fellow member neighbors, and it has been interesting to gain a greater understanding of Massachusetts zoning laws and our town's bylaws. I'm glad to be able to help the town run in this small way.

Throughout the history of our town, residents have filled the necessary positions in town government. If you look through town records, you will find the names of those who served on the Select Board and as Town Clerk since the town was formed. I have researched our house and property's history, and know the names of every owner. Seven people who lived right here have served on the Select Board. The first was Moses Byxbe in 1791. The latest is my husband, Kent Lew, who is currently Select Board Chair. Ed Neumuth, who owned our house before us, was also a Select Board member. I've become very familiar with the headstones in the cemetery across the street, and quite a few of the permanent residents there participated in Washington government.

There are folks among us today who have held committee positions for a good many years. Dick Spencer was on the Finance Committee for 34 years, and has participated in numerous other town matters over his time in Washington. "When I moved to Washington, the only person I knew was Roy Wiley," Dick says. "He was the Chair of the Finance Committee. I told him I wanted to get involved in town government. I filled a position on that committee that was empty at the time. I had the chance to influence how the town spent money." Dick attributes his longevity of service to a sense of civic duty. He now serves on the Municipal Light Board and is still involved in ad hoc committees having to do with the seven-district school system. "The town's boards are not so well-defined, so you have a lot of latitude about the work. Every job is what you make it, and it can be very engaging."

Sean Conners served for 30 years on the Finance Committee. He is now the Chair of the Cultural Council, and he has great things to say about the other members. Sean's perspective on town volunteerism is this: "Consider committing 5 or 6 years to be on a board. Start on one that's a little easier on time requirements. After that, you can get more involved if you want to. If you don't, you and the town are better off for the time you served, and you will be a more educated voter at town meetings."

Michele Lampro has served on the Conservation Commission for over 10 years, first as a member, and now as the Chair. Being involved in supporting the town is important to her. "Some folks don't come to community service naturally, especially if they grew up in a family that did not get involved. Sometimes, one has to stew on the idea in order to cultivate a desire to get involved. Washington (population wise) is smaller than the neighborhood I grew up in - so I feel like we are all neighbors - and our 'neighborhood' needs us to take part, however small that part is."

Last year, voters approved the hiring of a half time Town Administrator, and Sean Curran filled the position in the summer. This went a long way to ensuring stability in the running of our small town. Prior to filling this paid position, the day-to-day operational oversight of town business fell upon one or more members of the Select Board. The burden became greater and greater over the years since government regulations have become more complicated. Thankfully, now that we have a Town Administrator, Select Board membership no longer requires hands-on town administration, the skillset to operate the business of the town, or the extensive time commitment it did over the last several decades.

Throughout the year, the Washington Insights team (the three of us who write these articles) plans to report on some of Washington's governmental committees in greater detail. The folks who participate in our town's government are truly inspirational, and the inner workings of our town are more interesting than you might think.

There's always a need for new folks to dip their toe in the water of town government. It requires a willingness to learn, and to serve in the best interest of the town. There are terms to each role. Some are elected positions and some are appointed by the Select Board. You can learn a lot about the committees and boards on Washington's website: www.washington-ma.gov. Click on the Government menu and you'll see a list of Boards. Click on any Board and you'll see a description of what they do. If you think you might want to explore what it's like to serve on a Board, there's a way to contact at least one member from those pages.

Our town's namesake fought for the founding of this country which was based on the Constitution of the United States that starts with the words "We the People". It was a revolutionary idea at the time to think that people could self-govern, but it's what has made our country so great. It works when we value the right and responsibility to have a say, and when we participate.

Events for the Yoked Parish of Becket for 2024

There is additional information for the Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas dinners:
"Please RSVP 413-464-6169 if possible. Leave total # of people in party. Call for rides or meals for shut-ins Becket/Washington."

January

Friday, Jan 5: Free Pasta Dinner / Becket Federated Church / 5-7pm

Saturday, Jan 6: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am

Saturday, Jan 20: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am

Saturday, Jan 27: Breakfast / Becket Federated Church / 8-10:30am / \$8

February

Friday, Feb 2: Free Pasta Dinner / Becket Federated Church / 5-7pm

Saturday, Feb 3: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am

Saturday, Feb 17: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am

Saturday, Feb 24: Breakfast / Becket Federated Church / 8-10:30am / \$8

Upcoming Events at the Becket Athenaeum

3367 Main St, Becket

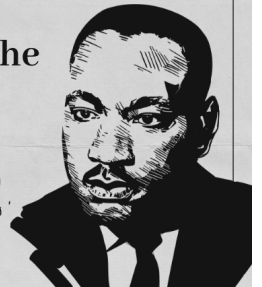
BecketAthenaeum.org

- **Library Storytime**
Saturdays, January 6, 20, 27
10:30-11:30am
- **Movie Night for Adults** Saturday, January 6
6-9:30pm, movie starts at 6:30pm
- **Cookbook Club:** Ottolenghi Flavor by Yotam Ottolenghi & Ixta Belfrage
Monday, January 8
6pm
- **Book Club:** Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline
Tuesday, January 9
1:30pm
- **Creative Movement & Storytime with Laurel Lenski**
Saturday, January 13
10:30-11:30am
- **Game Night**
Wednesday, January 17
5-7pm

"Faith is
taking the
first step even
when you
don't see the
whole
staircase."

Martin Luther King Jr.
—Martin Luther King Jr.

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