



A Successful Roadside Cleanup

Every year Washington is plagued by the worst of Berkshire County's invasive species: so-called Litterbugs (*Detritus discardus* var. *obnoxere*). This time of year, evidence of their comings and goings is strewn all over our roadsides.

But thanks to a little community spirit for a few hours on the Saturday after Earth Day, we managed to reclaim some of our town pride.

Thanks to the crew that gathered to pick up along Washington Mountain Rd — Ann-Marie Desautelle, David Ellis, Carol Lew, Linda Levernoch, Laura Otulak. Thanks also to Meredyth Babcock of Westfield Wild & Scenic for lending safety vests and especially the picker-upper grabbers! Plus a shout-out to Paul Horton for collecting several of our very full bags and taking them down to the Transfer Station.

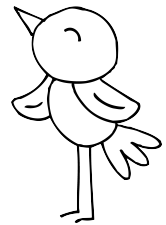
It seems like Bud Light and Fireball are tied for Litterbugs' booze of choice, although there was plenty of competition. There were fast-food containers, losing lottery tickets, broken headlights, and even a few dirty diapers (eww!). This year, a toilet plunger might take the prize as the most baffling discard.

Several residents also pitched in all around town. Thanks to Don Gagnon on the Hinsdale edge of N Washington State Rd (Rte 8), to Scott & Tina Hayward and David Weissbrod toward the Becket side of Washington Mountain Rd, and to Mike & Mary Zackin along Middlefield Rd. Thanks to Susan Colgan who picked up all along West Branch Rd going into the State Forest. And thanks to whoever made a dent on Frost Rd, as well as all the others in town who just didn't happen to come to my attention.

We will never squash all the Litterbugs, unfortunately; but with a little dedication we can hope to keep the roadside trash in check. No one is going to care more about our Town than we do. So if you see something, pick up something.

— Kent Lew

May 2022



ALL CARS WELCOME!
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IMPORTS *MOTORCYCLES

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CAR SHOW**

\$15 Per Car

May **22** 2022

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VICKEYMAZZER@GMAIL.COM
TEL: 413-822-1390

All donations will be used to benefit the children of Berkshire County - For purchasing bicycles for the bike rodeo giveaway, back packs and school supplies to be given out, and other events benefiting the children. There will be a live radio broadcast by The Peak 97.1.

Open Burn Season Has Ended for 2022

May 1, 2022 was the last day of open burn season for the year. Please contact the Fire Chief at devbo5@yahoo.com if you have any questions.

Absentee Ballots for Annual Town Election Available

Absentee ballots for the May 21st Annual Town Election are now available. If you will be absent from town on election day you are eligible to vote by absentee ballot. To request an absentee ballot, complete the **application**, mail it or put it in the drop box at Town Hall. Applications must be received by the Town Clerk on or before Tuesday, May 17th.

SPECIMEN BALLOT

TOWN OF WASHINGTON ANNUAL TOWN ELECTION

**SATURDAY, MAY 21, 2022
12:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.**

ELECTED OFFICES PUT AN "X" IN THE BOX

FINANCE COMMITTEE (3-year term)

Vote for one

☐

DEBRA MEGAS

Candidate for re-election
732 Upper Valley Rd

☐

FINANCE COMMITTEE (3-year term)

Vote for one

☐

LINDA LEVERNOCH

387 Upper Valley Rd

☐

MUNICIPAL LIGHT BOARD

(3-year term)

Vote for one

☐

JOHN MCELWAIN

Candidate for re-election
32 Nocher Rd

☐

PLANNING BOARD (5-year term)

5-year term

Vote for one

☐

ELECTED OFFICES PUT AN "X" IN THE BOX

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

(3-year term)

Vote for one

☐

JOHN FISH

190 Frost Rd

☐

TREE WARDEN (3-year term)

Vote for one

☐

QUESTION

Shall the Town of Washington be allowed to assess an additional \$150,000 in real estate and personal property taxes for the purposes of funding the Town's operating budget and Regional School District assessment for the fiscal year beginning July 1st, 2022?

☐

Yes

☐

No

TOWN OF WASHINGTON MAY 2022 CALENDAR

Sunday		Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday		Saturday		
TOWN HALL	1	TOWN HALL	2	3		TOWN HALL		4	TOWN HALL	5	TOWN HALL	6	TOWN HALL	7
		Administrative Assistants 10AM-2PM <u>Select Board Meeting 7:00 - 9:00PM</u> Assessors Office 6:00 - 8:00PM Tax Collector 6:00 - 8:00PM Town Clerk 7:00 - 9:00PM Police Department 7:00 - 9:00PM Chair Yoga with Rima 11AM		Yoga with Rima 9AM State of the Town Meeting 7PM to 9PM		<u>Historical Commission 10AM</u> Administrative Assistant 10AM-2PM Building Inspector 1PM-2PM Transfer Station 5PM-8PM Girl Scout Troop 40367 6PM-8 PM				OSTEOPOROSIS CLASS 9AM	TAI-CHI/QI-GONG CLASS 10AM		Transfer Station 8AM-4PM	
TOWN HALL	8	TOWN HALL	9	10		TOWN HALL		11	TOWN HALL	12	TOWN HALL	13	TOWN HALL	14
		Administrative Assistants 10AM-2PM <u>Select Board Meeting 7:00 - 9:00PM</u> Assessors Office 6:00 - 8:00PM Tax Collector 6:00 - 8:00PM Town Clerk 7:00 - 9:00PM Police Department 7:00 - 9:00PM Chair Yoga with Rima 11AM		Yoga with Rima 9AM <u>Planning Board Meeting 7PM</u>		Administrative Assistant 10AM-2PM Building Inspector 1PM-2PM Transfer Station 5PM-8PM ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 7PM				OSTEOPOROSIS CLASS 9AM	TAI-CHI/QI-GONG CLASS 10AM Council On Aging Polluck Dinner 5:30PM-7PM		Transfer Station 8AM-4PM	
TOWN HALL	15	TOWN HALL	16	17		TOWN HALL		18	TOWN HALL	19	TOWN HALL	20	TOWN HALL	21
		Administrative Assistants 10AM-2PM <u>Select Board Meeting 7:00 - 9:00PM</u> Assessors Office 6:00 - 8:00PM Tax Collector 6:00 - 8:00PM Town Clerk 7:00 - 9:00PM Police Department 7:00 - 9:00PM Chair Yoga with Rima 11AM		Yoga with Rima 9AM		Administrative Assistant 10AM-2PM Building Inspector 1PM-2PM Transfer Station 5PM-8PM Girl Scout Troop 40367 6PM-8 PM				OSTEOPOROSIS CLASS 9AM	TAI-CHI/QI-GONG CLASS 10AM		Transfer Station 8AM-4PM ANNUAL TOWN ELECTION 12PM TO 4PM	
TOWN HALL	22	TOWN HALL	23	24		TOWN HALL		25	TOWN HALL	26	TOWN HALL	27	TOWN HALL	28
		Administrative Assistants 10AM-2PM <u>Select Board Meeting 7:00 - 9:00PM</u> <u>Finance Committee 7:00 - 9:00PM</u> Assessors Office 6:00 - 8:00PM Tax Collector 6:00 - 8:00PM Town Clerk 7:00 - 9:00PM Police Department 7:00 - 9:00PM Chair Yoga with Rima 11AM		Yoga with Rima 9AM Berkshire Harm Reduction Services Mobile Van parked at rear of Town Hall		Administrative Assistant 10AM-2PM Building Inspector 1PM-2PM Transfer Station 5PM-8PM Girl Scout Troop 40367 6PM-8 PM				OSTEOPOROSIS CLASS 9AM	TAI-CHI/QI-GONG CLASS 10AM		Transfer Station 8AM-4PM	
TOWN HALL	29	TOWN HALL	30											
MEMORIAL DAY TOWN OFFICES CLOSED														

Entity	Contact	Number	Entity	Contact	Number
Assessors	Karen Avalle	717-7216	Finance Committee	Sean Connors	212-1182
Board of Health	Jim Huebner	655-8663	Parks Commission	Dominic Sinopoli	623-2086
Building Inspector	Paul Greene	446-0664	Planning Board	Don Gagnon	822-8385
Chapd Commission	Roso Borgris	394 0003	Police Chief	Nicole Miller	446 4294
Clerk	Allison Mikaniewicz	623-2185	Select Board	Keril Lew	623-0202
Conservation	Michelle Lampro	464-2388	Tax Collector	Gina Campbell	623-0146
Council on Aging	Rose Borgris	394-0003	Transfer Station	Michelle Lampro	464-2388
			Veterans Agent	John Herrera	499-9433

Dear Washington Friends & Neighbors:

May 2022

April showers are turning into May flowers as Washington begins to bloom once again!

Thanks to all those who participated in the Roadside Cleanup day. Thanks also to the Berkshire County Sheriff's Office for providing help cleaning up the Town Park this year through its Community Service Program. The Parks Commission requested this outside help due to the disappointing turnout of resident volunteers last year.

We're happy to welcome aboard local resident Tom Sadin from Upper Valley Rd as our new custodian at Town Hall and other town facilities as needed. Thank you for pitching in.

The contract for repaving lower Frost Rd and Lovers Lane Rd was awarded to LB Corporation from over in Lee. They anticipate tackling this project in the last weeks of May, to be substantially completed by Memorial Day. We will aim to post updates about any traffic disruptions in News on the town website. Residents of the area may want to *Subscribe to Alerts* to get email notifications.

The Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee has awarded us a modest Community Grant to nudge the stalled Frost Rd culvert project forward a few more steps. But we're still seeking \$367K for actual construction. The Governor's earmark never made it out of legislative committee. FEMA seems to have no intention of helping. So we've also applied for a culvert grant from the Dept. of Ecological Restoration. We're still awaiting announcements on those program awards.

May is Town Meeting & Town Election month. Thanks to those residents who came out to engage in one of the State of the Town talks to understand some of the challenges facing our town. The Washington Insights group has provided a recap with this issue of *Tracks*. The full slides from the presentations can be found on the Town website in the Government > Select Board section.

Our **Annual Town Meeting** will be held on **Wednesday, May 11, at 7:00 p.m.** at Town Hall. In addition to the FY23 Budget articles, there will be articles to adopt various state statutes to

- indemnify municipal officials from personal liability when performing their duties;
- allow a board member to participate in a continued hearing if absent from the first session;
- establish revolving funds for tax-title legal fees and beach stickers; and
- enable the Select Board to seek a part-time Town Administrator.

Ten days later, the **Annual Town Election** will be held **Saturday, May 21, noon–4:00 p.m.** Elsewhere in *Tracks* is an outline of what's on the ballot. Be sure to come participate in all avenues of your democracy.

Kent Lew
Select Board chair

Tricia Drugmand
Select Board clerk

David Ellis
Select Board

Washington Insights

The State of the Town

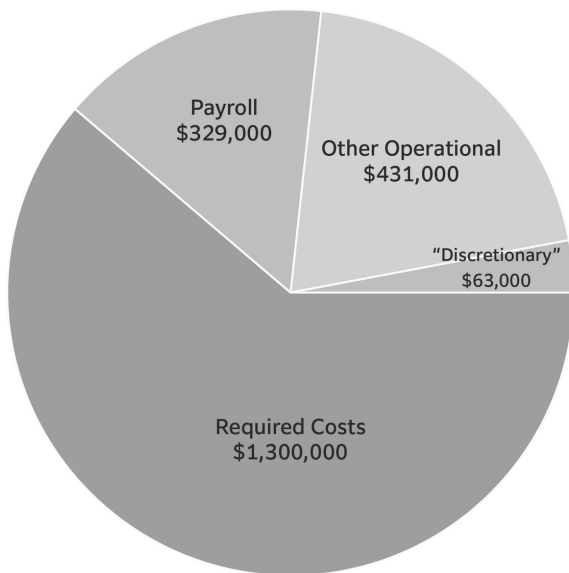
Between a Rock and a Hard Place

by Josh Greene

At a town-hall gathering to discuss the state of the town, Select Board Chair Kent Lew welcomed nearly three dozen citizens, both in person and via Zoom on Saturday morning, April 9. The goal of the meeting was to share information on the challenges of drafting a new town budget, as state-required spending will rise significantly while state aid is not keeping pace.

Kent, who worked on the town's Finance Committee for seven years before his election to the Select Board in May 2021, presented graphs outlining the town's expenses and income (now posted on the town website).

The Finance Committee believes they have written a realistic budget for running the town. It includes the cost of all the things we have to do, the cost to continue to do the things we have always done, and the cost of things we think we need to be doing. It's basically the same budget we have always had, except that the costs of things we can't avoid have gone up a lot.



FY 23 Budget

Required Costs (61%)

School District, Voc Ed., Insurance, Health Ins/Medicare/Retirement, Fire & 911, Health Agent, Veterans Aid, Debt

Payroll Costs (16%)

Salaries & Wages ~22 employees, full & part-time

Other Operational Costs (20%)

Highway, Transfer Station, Town Hall: equipment, supplies, services, utilities, etc.

"Discretionary" Costs (3%)

Community events, Becket beach, Town Park, Historical properties, reserve fund, audit, etc.

Non-discretionary spending, required of the town, accounts for \$1.3 million, or 61 percent of the total budget. Three-quarters of those mandated expenses are in the town's contribution to education, both for public schools and, particularly, for vocational schools. Those contributions will rise 17.7 percent this year. As it turns out, Washington had no vocational education students last year; this year, we will be sending four students to three different vocational schools. Our town is required by the state to pay for their schooling and transportation. That's more than \$100,000 right there.

Then there are inflationary pressures, including the need to provide cost of living increases on wages for our town employees. As it is, the town is only planning to provide a 5 percent cost of living increase, lower than the 7 percent rate of inflation.

To Balance the Budget

Towns are required by law to create budgets that match revenues to expenses. Most of the town's income comes from property taxes (the tax levy), which is what's required after other sources are accounted for, namely state aid and local income.

The state won't finalize its budget, including the aid it gives to municipalities, until July, well after the town budget is already set. In the past, the amount of state aid has remained static. This year looks no different. It will likely account for only 10 percent of needed revenue.

Local income accounts for about 12 percent of our revenue. That includes the motor-vehicle excise tax. Pittsfield Watershed makes a payment to the town in lieu of taxes. Currently, there is a small contribution from the room tax on short-term rentals in town. To encourage more townspeople to consider short-term rentals, Susan Colgan contributed an essay in the April Tracks with information on how to get started.

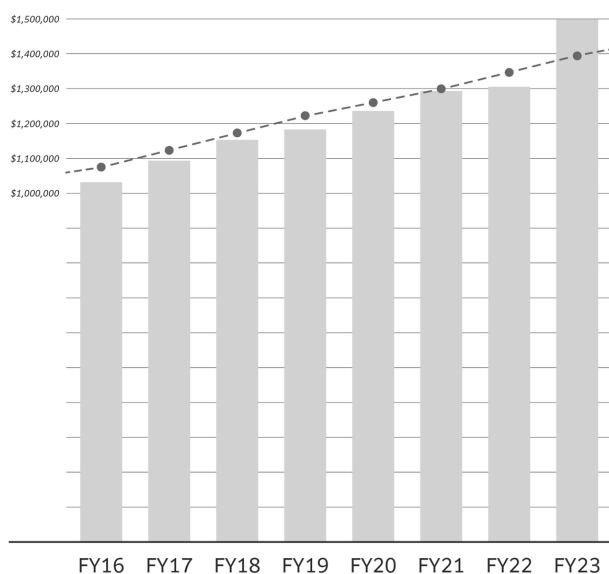
The remaining 78 percent has to come from the tax levy.

The overall budget is estimated to rise 14 percent this year. With state aid likely remaining flat and local income rising only slightly, most of the budget increase will have to be covered by the tax levy, which could go up as much as 18 percent.

Over the Limit

Due to a state law, however, we are not in a position to cover such an increase in the tax levy without a town vote. With an assist from Sean Connors, who has served on the Finance Committee for 25 years, Kent explained the complexities of Proposition 2.5, a state law that dates to 1980. The law places a limit on the town's annual tax levy, and that levy limit increases 2.5 percent each year. If there is new construction in town, the levy limit also will rise accordingly. It is possible for the town to raise the levy limit further: That's called an override, and it can only happen through the approval of the voters at an election.

Our Tax Levy vs the Levy Limit ---



Washington's tax levy has been riding at the edge of the levy limit for much of recent memory. This year, the Finance Committee projects that the budget will surpass it: about \$100,000 over the levy limit. We will either have to raise the limit or lower the budget before summer. If we don't, the state won't accept the town budget, they won't set our tax rate, and, as Kent says, "our operations will grind to a halt."

As Kent described it, "Prop 2.5 gives citizens a little rein on out-of-control taxes. But when the town is in a situation when you need to raise taxes, those reins can turn into hand cuffs."

At the Annual Town Election, the Select Board will be asking the citizens if the town will raise the levy limit by \$150,000. Kent pointed out, “Raising the limit doesn’t mean we have to spend to that limit, but if we don’t raise the limit, we can’t. Think of it as a credit limit on your credit card; if your limit is \$8,000, you don’t necessarily need to use it. But, if you have a sudden expense like a car repair, and your limit isn’t high enough, then you’re in trouble.”

In Search of Cuts

Washington runs a tight ship, so there aren’t a lot of options when it comes to cutting expenses. One suggestion that has been made is to change the town’s transfer station to a fee-based system. This would transfer the nearly \$50,000 annual expense out of the tax levy, so it is not subject to the levy limit imposed by Prop 2.5. Most towns in Berkshire County have shifted to a fee-based system for their transfer stations, rather than paying for the cost of providing the service out of tax dollars.

Kent has begun to research this. Even though no one is very keen on the idea, he says the Select Board and the Finance Committee have a responsibility to explore it as an option, under the circumstances. So far, that investigation suggests that a fee-based system, like Becket’s annual permit and per-bag fees, would cost the average town resident more than double what they are paying now, as part of their taxes. Even with that shift, the budget would still be about \$50,000 over the levy limit.

The Finance Committee and the Select Board have considered minor, discretionary costs that could be cut, if push comes to shove, including expenses for community events, access to the Becket beach, maintenance of the town park and historical properties. The reserve fund, providing a small contingency in the budget, could also be cut.

They have discussed cuts to operational costs, which account for 20 percent of the budget, including such things as road repairs, fuel for highway equipment, the transfer station and keeping the lights on at the Town Hall. But after years of trimming, there is no fat left in these budgets. So, any cuts will have consequences.

An Assist for Seniors

Kurt Whitney of Lover’s Lane raised the issue of what he called “the elephant in the room: We have an aging community. We came out here to retire and we’re on a fixed income.” Fortunately, as he pointed out, “There’s a circuit breaker senior tax credit.” The Insights team will report on programs for seniors in an upcoming article.

Our Town’s Future

Recently, the Select Board obtained a grant for a study by the Collins Center for Public Management, providing a review and analysis of the town’s organization and operations. The team at the Collins Center praised the volunteerism and the strong commitment of officials in town: “Washington does a lot with a little.” However, they pointed to the unsustainable nature of this situation, which requires members of the Select Board to devote full-time hours to town management, without any background or expertise in public administration.

Dick Spencer, who has served on the Finance Committee for close to 35 years, commented that “running this town was not that complicated 35 years ago. It’s gotten very complicated. Grants have become a major part of town finances. The obligations assumed by members of the Select Board have increased at least tenfold.” He noted that the town has been lucky to have somebody doing a full-time job for \$2,500 year. Jim Huebner did it, now Kent is doing it; who will do it next is an open question.

The Collins Center Report recommended that the town consider hiring a professional Town Administrator. The Report suggests that a professional administrator could seek out additional revenue, write grant proposals, and coordinate the implementation of those grants, as well as coordinating other town operations, noting that the town is currently lacking a point person to handle those needed tasks.

The Select Board and Finance Committee have begun to research the possibility of hiring a part-time Town Administrator, including whether sharing a position between two towns would be feasible. Currently, there is an opportunity for a grant which could cover a portion of a shared Town Administrator’s salary in the initial year.

Whatever financial benefits hiring such a professional might bring, they would come after an increase to the town’s expenses. The Collins Center Report recommends this investment as a step toward solutions to some of our complicated fiscal challenges.

May Votes

The Annual Town Meeting will take place on May 11, when we, as townspeople, vote on appropriations. At that time, the Select Board will be looking for approval to appoint a Town Administrator and for funding to do it.

On May 21, we will have our Annual Town Election, and there will be a ballot question about a levy override. If the town does not vote to override the levy limit, the Finance Committee will have to retool the budget and present it again later in the summer.

At the end of the April 9 meeting, several attendees urged their fellow citizens not only to step up and volunteer to help raise money for the town—that every little bit helps—but also to help raise awareness of the budgetary challenges the town faces in the year ahead, sharing information about the state of the town.

A Call to Action

- Educate yourself about the issues up for a vote:

Read the Collins Center Report and State of the Town 2022. You can find both documents on the website under Government>Select Board.

- Attend Annual Town Meeting on May 11
- Vote on May 21



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Please put TRACKS in the subject line.