



May 2023

2023 Washington Community Walks

As the weather turns warmer, the Town Planning Steering Committee invites you to join us on a series of community walks. Enjoy the beautiful outdoors, learn about our rich history, meet some of your neighbors, and help us as we work to foster a greater sense of community in Washington.

1) Town Bird Walk with Ed Neumuth: **Saturday, May 20th**

- Meet at the the Town Park at 7:00 am
- Bring binoculars (if you don't have any, we'll have a few extra pairs)
- Some spots we might visit: Muddy Pond, Upper Valley Marsh, Cross Place Rd, October Mountain State Forest, and Washington Mountain Marsh
- Some of the birds we're likely to see: various Warblers (Yellow. Yellow-rumped, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Nashville, Magnolia), Bluebird, Red-eyed Vireo, Broad-winged Hawk, maybe a Northern Harrier, Bittern, Virginia Rail, and who knows what else.
- RSVP preferred, but not required. Text or call (413) 884-4961

2) Muddy Pond Walk with David Pierce, President, Chester Railway Station: **Saturday, June 17th at 9:00 am** Save the date! More details will be included in the June TRACKS

3) Washington Mountain Marsh Trail Walk led by Alec Gillman, DCR West Region. Interpretive Coordinator: **Saturday, July 29th at 9:00 am**

Save the date! More details will be included in the July TRACKS

In addition, Washington's Historical Commission will be scheduling a series of hikes to explore town history, led by Commission member Tom Hoffman. Their first hike will take place on **Saturday, September 9th** around several of the quarries near Ashley Lake. Hikes will begin at 9 a.m. Contributions will be welcome to help support the Historical Commission's projects. As Commission Chairman Dave Weissbrod notes: " Hiking is definitely another way to explore, observe some of our town's past. And it's not a bad way to enjoy the beautiful present."

PLAYGROUND PROJECT DAY - Saturday, May 27th, 2023 from 11 am - 3 pm

Thanks to our amazing attendance, support and donations during the Music in The Park last summer - the park has the opportunity to work on a project to beautify the playground. We have ordered a truck load of specialized playground wood fiber to be delivered to the park. We are seeking volunteers to assist in laying landscape fabric and spreading the fiber around the playground equipment in the park. A volunteer event is scheduled for Saturday, May 27th, 2023 from 11 am - 3 pm. We would like to offer food and refreshments but are requesting volunteers RSVP that they can assist with the project. Please reach out to dominic.sinopoli@gmail.com if you plan to attend or sign up on the sheets that will be posted at the Town Hall and Transfer Station. The Park Commission is hoping for another fantastic Music in the Park this summer but needs your help to maintain our beautiful park.

Open Burn Season Has Ended for 2023

May 1, 2023 was the last day of open burn season for the year. Please contact the Fire Chief at washington.mafirechief@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Expired Dog License Grace Period Ends on May 31, 2023

Reminder: March 31, 2023 was the deadline to renew your dog license(s) and then the two-month grace period began. If you have not yet registered your dog(s) for 2023, please do so before May 31, 2023 to avoid the \$25 late fee.

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 May 19 5:30 Steve will be firing up the grill and providing us with hamburgs and hotdogs. Bring a dish to share if you can.

Questions, comments, or need assistance? Call 413-394-0003 or email washingtoncoa@gmail.com

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT TO THE SELECT BOARD

The Washington Select Board is in search of an Administrative Assistant to the Select Board. This position interacts with all Select board members, as well as members of the public, while reporting directly to the Select board. The position is a part-time, hourly position, with an expectation of 7 hours per typical week of work at a rate of \$21.00 per hour. In-person attendance at all Monday evening Select Board meetings is required, as well as additional special meetings as scheduled or needed. Responsibilities include recording and transcribing meeting minutes, maintaining a record of outstanding action items from meetings and posting meeting agendas. Qualified candidates must have a working knowledge of Microsoft Word, Gmail, strong communication and written skills.

After last month's well attended public hearing on Accessory Dwelling Units and Short-Term Rentals, the bylaws were accordingly revised with advice from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. These revisions can now be read on the Washington town website (<https://washington-ma.gov/proposed-adu-str-bylaws>).

The bylaws as conceived by the Planning Board, and the Town Steering Committee, provide clearly defined opportunities to take advantage of home ownership, now and in the future, while maintaining the single-family character and the beauty of the town we prize. Short-term rentals help promote and support the Town as an active tourist destination and outline the owner-occupied, or non-owner occupied, possibilities. The ADU bylaw gives residents more housing options for themselves, their family, renters, or health providers, as well as allowing potential income from their homes. An ADU can be attached or detached from the home.

The bylaws have been built simply and concisely to fit our Town's uniqueness. For details please read the bylaws and attend the May 20 Annual Town Meeting, and importantly: VOTE!

Annual Town Meeting

Date: Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Washington Town Hall, 8 Summit Hill Rd

Deadline to register to vote at the Annual Town Meeting is **Monday, May 1, 2023**

Annual Town Election

Date: Saturday, May 20, 2023

Time: 12:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Polling location: Washington Town Hall, 8 Summit Hill Rd

Deadline to register to vote at the Annual Town Election is **Wednesday, May 10, 2023**

Specimen Ballot

SPECIMEN BALLOT

TOWN OF WASHINGTON
ANNUAL TOWN ELECTION

SATURDAY, MAY 20, 2023
12:00 PM to 4:00 PM

ELECTED OFFICES PUT AN "X" IN THE BOX

FINANCE COMMITTEE (3-year term)

Vote for one

- ☐ **SHERRI THOMAS**
200 Summit Hill Rd
- ☐ _____

FINANCE COMMITTEE (3-year term)

Vote for one

- ☐ _____

MUNICIPAL LIGHT BOARD

(3-year term)

Vote for one

- ☐ **RICHARD SPENCER**
Candidate for re-election
233 Johnson Hill Rd
- ☐ _____

ELECTED OFFICES PUT AN "X" IN THE BOX

PLANNING BOARD (5-year term)

Vote for one

- ☐ **PETER MATSON**
597 Lovers Lane
- ☐ _____

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

(3-year term)

Vote for one

- ☐ **DAVID A. ELLIS**
Candidate for re-election
507 Middlefield Rd
- ☐ _____

Vote by Mail for the Annual Town Election

- If you returned the Vote by Mail application that was included with your annual census, a ballot and instructions have already been sent to you.
- If you still need to apply to Vote by Mail you can find the application here: https://www.washington-ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf7491/f/uploads/vote_by_mail_application_2023.pdf. Mail the completed form to the Washington Town Clerk, 8 Summit Hill Rd, Washington, MA 01223. You can also drop the completed application in the drop box at the front of the town hall. The application must be received by the Town Clerk on or before Monday, May 15, 2023.

Dear Washington Friends & Neighbors:

May 2023

Thanks to everyone who turned out on Earth Day this year to pick up roadside litter all around town. Linda Levernoch even found a deer antler on Washington Mountain Rd (which is not to say that the deer was littering, of course, but that was cool!).

The Parks Commission has scheduled this year's Annual Town Park Cleanup for Saturday, May 27. It's another opportunity to join neighbors and help spruce up our Town.

There are several big highway grant projects scheduled for this year. Upper Valley Rd is slated for final repaving from Route 8 to Summit Hill Rd this June. The Frost Rd culvert replacement will finally happen later in summer, July or August perhaps. The road will need to be completely closed for several weeks; exactly when and for how long still need to be finalized with a contractor, but more details will be provided as they become known to help residents plan for the inconvenience.

The case with Woodrow Witter has been settled. Although not the maximum allowed by law as originally imposed, the Board is satisfied to have held Mr. Witter to account for daily fines amounting to \$133/day for the period of his noncompliance after the final July 2021 deadline.

The potential buyers of the Bucksteep property have reached out to the Planning Board to learn what they will need to present to obtain the necessary Special Permit for their intended use. We look forward to learning more about their proposed plans and hope the property can come back into productive ownership and the back taxes paid up.

The Select Board is looking for someone to take over responsibility for keeping our meeting minutes. This entails attending all Monday night meetings, then preparing the minutes, making any necessary edits, and final posting once approved. This paid position is estimated to require about 5-7 hours per week. See [washington-ma.gov/job-opportunities](https://www.washington-ma.gov/job-opportunities) for more information.

The reposted Shared Town Administrator position has now attracted eight applicants so far, with a wider range of backgrounds and experience, as hoped. A Joint Screening Committee from both towns will begin reviewing the applications over the next few weeks, with the goal of having recommendations for the two Select Boards to interview before the end of the month.

Annual Town Meeting will be held on **Wednesday, May 10, at 7:00pm** at Town Hall. As of Tracks deadline, the budget and bylaw articles are still being finalized. The full warrant and budget details will be posted online on May 2. The **Annual Town Election** will follow 10 days later on **Saturday, May 20, noon to 4:00pm**. Please come out and participate in your local government.

Kent Lew
Select Board chair

David Ellis
Select Board

John Fish
Select Board clerk

Dave Drugmand on the Town Budget

Interviewed by Josh Greene

The Finance Committee has been busy finalizing the Town of Washington's budget for 2024, in preparation for the Annual Town Meeting at Town Hall on Wednesday, May 10. Dave Drugmand, who has served on the committee for four years, took over as chair last summer. Others on the committee include vice-chair Deb Megaw, Dick Spencer, the longest serving member, Linda Levernoch and Sherri Thomas. Recently, Dave shared the planning for the new fiscal year, beginning on July 1.

How does the new budget compare to last year's?

The budget is still in flux, until the warrant is drawn up by the end of April. There's a 6.55 percent increase over Fiscal 2023; inflation has been running at 9 percent so we're doing okay.

Even with inflation going up, the levy limit can only increase 2.5 percent a year, or the taxpayers have to okay an increase. If we increased appropriations by 9 percent, we would have been in trouble with the levy limit. Last year, we passed an override of the levy limit, so we got some extra room. For Fiscal 2023, between the budget and the increase in the levy limit, we were \$120,000 under the levy limit. For Fiscal 2024, with our current numbers, we're looking to be \$70k below the levy limit.

How will changes in the budget impact property taxes?

The tax rate for 2023 was \$15.21 per thousand. Now we're looking at \$16.30, a \$1.09 difference. For the average single-family home assessment, which is almost \$304,000, the difference in yearly taxes would be \$331. That's with the numbers we have right now; these numbers are still in flux. Because the state hasn't passed its budget yet, we don't know how much money we will get from the state; we try to keep the revenue estimates on the conservative side. We'll find out more in May or June, but we have to get the budget put together now.

Which of the changes are discretionary and which are mandates from the state?

We have to pay for vocational education, that's a mandate. It changes by the number of students who elect to go to vocational ed. For fiscal 2023, we had four students in vocational ed. The year before we had zero. Now we're anticipating six, as two more have applied.

There's tuition, which is about \$20k a year per student. We're budgeting \$119K for six students. Then there's the transportation. Several years ago, the town bought a bus to take kids to vocational ed. We have an arrangement with Becket, so when they have students who need transport, they pay some of the cost. Becket has a bus that goes to Smith. We've been taking kids to McCann and Taconic. Right now, it's pretty fluid, so in the budget, we put in a worst-case scenario: \$67,500, which is a 121% increase. We think we can get that down a little bit, maybe to \$58 or \$60,000, but that's a moving target.

The other moving target is the state reimbursement. Governor Maura Healey, in her budget, has proposed that 90% of transport be reimbursed. It has been 5%. By law, we're supposed to get 100%. The House Ways and Means committee put their budget forward and they stayed at 5%. Even if we get reimbursed, it probably won't help next year's taxes.

For the regular school budget, the numbers are less than last year, based on enrollment. Our capital costs are down 16% from the year before, and our assessment for the operating budget for the district went down 2%.

How are town salaries keeping up with inflation?

For our Cost-of-Living increase this year for employees, we settled on a number of 7.5%. The highway department is the next biggest chunk of the budget. We lost one member of the highway crew and we've been

trying to hire a third member. Our wage is not very competitive, so we've been having a hard time filling that vacancy. We've been talking about raising the highway department wages for everyone; we haven't settled on it, but it will be much more than the 7.5%. We'll make that decision at our next meeting. Of course, fuel and materials have gone up. Overall, we're looking at an 8.8% increase in the Highway budget, pretty much along the lines of what inflation has been.

What are some of the factors working in our favor?

On the revenue side, one bright spot is the contribution of Wired West distributions to help pay the debt service on the fiber optic infrastructure. As was mentioned during the fiber optic infrastructure funding discussion, there was the possibility of money coming back to the town if the Wired West co-op did well financially and Washington had a good subscription rate. This has come to pass and on the budget spreadsheet we are currently slotting \$30,000 in revenue from Wired West to help cover debt payments. It is not written in stone, as the Municipal Light Plant Board (MLP) has not yet officially voted.

Also, there was a discussion over the last few years about the use of Becket Beach. Becket charges Washington \$2,500 a year for townspeople to use the beach, plus \$5 a piece to buy a parking sticker. Last year, we increased the sticker fee to \$25; \$5 went to Becket and we put the rest in a revolving fund, so this year, \$1,300 of the \$2,500 is covered. Our goal is to get that to be self-funded.

What other factors go into the Fiscal 2024 budget?

Aside from the basic budget that's appropriated from taxpayer money, there's unexpended money from previous years ("free cash"). We tend to use that for one-time expenditures. These don't directly affect the tax rate.

For this year, we have ash-tree removal of \$15,000. We will continue to renovate St. Andrew's Chapel windows. We've earmarked \$10,000 of free cash to explore what it will take to get better access to the chapel. [The town owns a few feet around the chapel but has no easement to access the building from the Bucksteep driveway.] We are also using \$20,000 to look into Cemetery Development; there are several options on the table. Then there's free cash for general maintenance and repairs, Old Town Hall repairs, and our regular Town Hall paint and carpentry; We budgeted a little over \$11,000 for that.

Last year, we appropriated \$20,000 for a new town administrator, to be shared with Middlefield. For an administrator's salary and benefits, we're looking at a figure of up to \$100,000. Half of that is grant funded for the first year. Washington is the lead town in this arrangement, so, we will have to appropriate \$50,000 this year and Middlefield will be paying us directly for their share. Our portion is a little over \$25,000, and \$20,000 of that will be covered by the carryover from last year's appropriation.

Are there any ways that townspeople can help balance the budget outside of paying their property taxes or renting to guests who pay a room tax?

Write to our legislators about the State's payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT). A large portion of Washington is state forest and about ten years ago, the state decided to cut 30% of their PILOT. We dipped from \$100,000 to below \$70,000, gradually coming up a little bit. Now we're back to \$114,000. Even so, Pittsfield will pay us \$137,000 this year for the Watershed property, a much smaller piece of land.

Also, residents could write to legislators about how Vocational Education and regional school district transportation should be more fully funded.

How can townspeople get more details on the budget? The warrant should be published online on Tuesday, May 2, at www.washington-ma.gov/town-meetings

Becket Athenaeum BecketAthenaeum.org

- Tuesday, May 2, 1:30pm
Book Club: Lab Girl by Hope Jahren
- Saturdays, May 6, 13, 27, 10:30-11:30am
Library Storytime
- Saturday, May 6, 9-11am
Local Spring Wildflower Walk with Ed Neumuth. Registration required: bit.ly/BA-wildflower
- Saturday, May 6, 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm
Movie Night for Adults - You choose: The Whale or Massive Talent
- Monday, May 8, 6pm
Cookbook Club: The Blue Zones Kitchen by Dan Buettner
- Saturday, May 20, 10:30-11:30am
Creative Movement & Storytime
- Thursdays, June 1 & 8, 7-8:30pm
Start Your Memoir with Lara Tupper. Registration required: bit.ly/BA-memoir



The poster features a colorful tree logo on the left. The title 'May' is in large green letters, followed by 'Becket Arts Center Events' in purple. Below this, a list of activities is provided with their respective dates and times. At the bottom left, there is a QR code and a small image of purple flowers. The text 'Learn More' is written in green, followed by the website 'becketartscenter.org/events' in blue.

Art Show May 1 - June 15, Open Thurs - Mon, 12-4pm - Susan Robinson. Opening reception: Saturday, May 20, 5:30-7pm

Art Mondays, May 1, 8, 15, 22 1-3pm - Sean McCusker, BAC Artist In Residence, leads free art demos live and on Facebook.

Yoga Thursdays, May 4, 11, 18, 25, 9:30am- Rima Sala leads yoga for all abilities. Donations \$5-\$10.

Music Saturday, May 6, 7pm - Open Mic Night - Live at BAC! Sign up to play when you arrive. Listeners welcome as well - 50/50 Raffle \$10 tickets.

Theater Saturday, May 20, 7pm - Storytelling night with Paula Kaplan Reise & Rick Reise. \$10 suggested donation at the door.

Talk Sunday, May 21, 4pm - Speaker Series presents: Chris Ferrero, Let's Go Native! An Introduction for Home Gardeners

Learn More
becketartscenter.org/events

First Congregational Church of Becket

**Mother's Day
Flower Sale**

Saturday, May 13th
9 am to 3 pm

10" Hanging Baskets
10" Patio Pots
Bedding Plants

To Benefit the Historical Restoration Efforts of
The First Congregational Church of Becket
413-623-8300

Beach Passes will be available starting May 1st. The cost of the family beach pass is \$25.00. It is not necessary to purchase more than one. A pass can be used by any vehicle belonging to a resident of the household. Beach Pass Request forms can be found at <https://www.washington-ma.gov/parks-commission> or at the Town Hall in the Town Clerks or Administrative Assistant's office. If you would like to purchase a family pass to use the Becket Beach, accessed using Mecum Way (blue sign) off Route 8, please return the form along with a self-addressed stamped envelope and \$25.00 check payable to the Town of Washington. Return by using the drop box outside the Town Hall, by mail or stop in during Town Hall hours.



Washington Tracks
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tapes and video cassette tapes to DVDs.
Call or email for pricing.

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.