

## *Town of Adams Massachusetts 01220-2087*

### BOARD OF SELECTMEN

TOWN HALL BUILDING  
8 PARK STREET

Monday, September 13, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

### BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES

**CALL TO ORDER:** On the above date the Board of Selectmen held a meeting at the Town Hall Board of Selectmen Room. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Duval. Present from the Board of Selectmen were Chairman Duval, Vice Chairman Hoyt, Members Blanchard, Nowak and Rosenberg. Also present were Town Administrator Green, Town Assessor Wheeler, and Administrative Assistant Dunlap. Via Zoom were Melissa Provencher of Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Joshua Rapp and Samantha Smith of Mass Audubon and CarrieAnne Petrik, MVP Coordinator for the Berkshires and Hill Towns and Jack Guerino from iBerkshires.

### PUBLIC CALL-IN:

#### Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81274828231?pwd=dkhUSDJSeGczTmhFYjhlb0x0OUtqQT09>

Meeting ID: 812 7482 8231; Passcode: 444806

**One tap mobile:** +19294362866,,81274828231#,,, \*444806# US (New York)

**Dial In:** 1 (929) 436-2866 US (New York); *Meeting ID:* 812 7482 8231, *Passcode:* 444806

### NEW BUSINESS

**Municipality Vulnerability Program – Climate Resiliency:** *Member Nowak* gave a brief overview of the program as it relates to the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership and introduced the presenters. *Josh Rapp* played a presentation regarding the MVP Grant and Climate-Smart Forestry. The presentation reviewed adaptation, mitigation and managing for resilience. Climate changed impacts were noted and include extreme precipitation events, increases in storm frequency and intensity, elevated drought risk and increasing occurrences of wildfires. Additionally, outlined was an increase in insect pests and pathogens, invasive plants, rising sea levels and a reduction of tree species. Climate change mitigation actions were outlined. It was noted that forests are a solution to climate change with carbon sequestration, which was explained in depth. Carbon storage was briefly outlined as well as the carbon cycle. Changing carbon stocks were outlined including succession, changes over time, forest stressors, and management. The practice of Climate-smart Forestry and the DCR Forest Stewardship Program were explained and details were given on the Standard Stewardship and the Bird Plans with Mass Audubon. Steps taken in the process were noted as determining goals, assessing forest vulnerability and creating a design. Actions to protect the ecosystem were outlined, and were noted as building resilience, reducing stressors and promoting change. A presentation by Laura Marx was played on the Adams Climate-smart Forest practices and modeling. She briefly reviewed the Municipal Vulnerability Program steps regarding climate change and the 20-year benefits of a short list of practices. Carbon practices for southern New England were discussed, and it was explained that Grow Older Forests practices allow younger forests to age.

Delaying or foregoing harvest for 20 years and creating gaps to promote regeneration open up to allow for light for new seedlings and leave 80% of the forest unharvested to retain more carbon and to remove lower quality trees. The practice protects seedlings and saplings from deer browse, and infestations of invasive plants. It also allows for removal of invasive vegetation and connects land owners to other sources to treat invasive plants and eliminate deer access. The Family Forest Carbon Program was briefly explained and required 3,000 to 4,000 acres to make it viable practice. It was noted that there were changes in how payments are done to pay the land owner to do the practice and fund a viable practice. It was explained that the program pays the landowner for 20 years for doing the practice, for the amount that they think they can sell it on the market. As time goes on a measurement is done and it is sold on market. It was explained that the risk lies with the program, not the land owner if the carbon is not at the amount expected. It was pointed out that municipal lands are not eligible for the program. *Sam Smith* discussed resilience and the pilot program for the practices which was developed with funding from EEA through MVP. The Forest Climate Resilience Program has funding from grants for Adams and Williamstown. The DCR Forest Stewardship Program was noted as being a related program, and is a cost-share for forest management planning which includes climate plans and the Family Forest Carbon Program for private landowners. The Adams MVP Grant enveloped the adaptation practices for consideration of a future incentive program. It was explained that practice manuals were created and developed recommendations for the pilot program. The long-term vision was reviewed and it was pointed out that the goal is to grow resilient forests and the forest economy through the Mohawk Trail Woodland Partnership and beyond. The adaptation practices under consideration are to remove invasive vegetation, protect seedlings from animal browse, plant climate-adapted trees, create climate-informed forest access and forestry operations and enhance adaptive capacity in northern hardwood and spruce/fir forests for resilience. The current work with Williamstown was outlined and builds on the Adams MVP Grant. It updates the practice manuals and provides training and materials for foresters, harvesters and landowners. The next steps were explained as pursuing funding opportunities, exploring additional MVP funding opportunities to implement practices and then roll them out. Additional information will be made available at [www.massaudubon.org/climateforestry](http://www.massaudubon.org/climateforestry) or to contact any of the presenters. *Chairman Duval* inquired what the major impact would be in our community as a lot of the land is state owned. It was explained that work is being done with DCR to develop the forestation climate plan and they are always looking for more opportunities to work with the state to spread forestry practices. It was pointed out that it appears DCR is going down the same path. *Member Nowak* informed the Board that work is in process with the Federal Government, and will give free technical advice to help landowners manage their properties. He pointed out that funding was the greatest challenge. *Josh Rupp* advised the next steps for Adams is to continue to look for additional funds to work on this program and the grant funds are to design it. He noted the possibility of state funding and looking into other MVP and federal grant funds. He explained the federal involvement match for Williamstown was from the Federal government which helped. *Carrieanne Petrik*, the Municipal Coordinator for the Hill Towns, advised that the MVP Action grants will open up again in the spring and it is a good time to discuss potential action grant projects. She noted she would work to make a competitive grant proposal. *Melissa Provencher* from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) advised there are future grants that can be sought and are other resources available to the town. It was explained that Community Development Special Programs Coordinator Cesan has been the person working on the Adams grants and it was noted that carbon sequestration is only one of nine aspects of the grants. She noted the influence of the MVP and the key criteria gaining traction and momentum through Secretary Theoharides of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA).

It was pointed out that the MVP Action Grant and a regional approach were avenues that could be taken. The Grant Street infrastructure improvement was a critical project, and they worked together with Community Development to use information for different agencies and to combine it with other critical components to create the original application/ *Member Rosenberg* inquired about the microbiome of soils and it was explained that a lot of the practices focus on that as the easiest impact including protecting soils and the water associated with it. Research is being done on ways municipalities are looking at soil sequestration. If Board Members have further questions they can contact Josh Rapp at [jrapp@massaudubon.org](mailto:jrapp@massaudubon.org), Melissa Provencher at [mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:mprovencher@berkshireplanning.org) and CarrieAnne Petrik at [CarrieAnne.petrik@mass.gov](mailto:CarrieAnne.petrik@mass.gov).

**Review of Tax Classification Information:** *Town Assessor Wheeler* explained there is an increase of over \$47 Million for 2021 and the increase to residential valuations is \$1.5 Million over last year, due mostly to single-family home sales. Personal property changes are a result of changes with how the state valued the utilities. This was done by the state a couple years ago with the phone companies and now it is being done with the gas utilities. It was noted that there are 19 new small businesses, and McDonalds updated their facilities. The tax levy is \$12,535,817 and the state calculated a single tax rate of \$21.95. Last year's tax levy was reviewed. A chart was shown to outline what the single tax rate is, and last year's tax rate, with projected 10%, 15% and 20% shifts. It was noted that the total growth is \$5 Million, of which \$3.5 Million is personal property and residential property is \$1.5 Million. Commercial and Industrial Property did not grow much, and not a lot of big businesses are coming to town. Residential property with new homes was the biggest growth, and single-family home values have gone up. In the past a 15% shift was approved. Last year the single-family home average was \$149,000 in value, and last year's tax rate was \$22.62. The difference between residential and commercial rates were explained, and that it was outlined that the rate is going down and the value is going up which does not mean the tax bill will be less. Based on a 15% shift, last year's residential tax bill averaged \$3,370. This year the average tax bill for the same home is \$3,529, which is \$159 more because of valuation change. Commercial property taxes were reviewed, and an auto repair facility was used as an example. At a 15% shift last year the tax rate was \$26.89 for an average tax bill of \$18,043 tax bill. This year now at a 15% shift the tax rate would be approximately \$25.24, and the tax bill would be \$17,012; a decrease in over \$1,000. Clarification was given regarding the shift from the residential homeowner to the commercial side. It was noted that a higher commercial tax rate was thought to deter business but has been not found to be the case. It was pointed out that by law the Assessor cannot offer an opinion but can provide data. Mathematical calculations were briefly reviewed and consideration was given for the services offered. It was clarified that the State has a formula for residential homes but not for the commercial side. It was noted that the residential tax is going up due to the state formula and the sale prices of the houses, which requires the value of the homes to be raised. Commercial value is based on sales and growth and there were not many commercial sales. Mixed-use increased, but not as much as single-family homes. A business that changes ownership or improves the property shows growth but there was not enough to show an impact. Personal property taxes were discussed and it was noted that the businesses annually report their equipment. The acquisition of a product or machine is noted and value determined, which decreases with age. The Town must verify the information every few years. It was pointed out that every 5 years a valuation is done and the big one is done at 10 years. The last 10-year valuation was done in 2017, and is also required now every 5 years so some is done every year to be completed at the 5-year mark. It was noted that \$250,000 was voted on at Town Meeting to be put toward the residential taxes. It was noted that if there was no work done to house it only goes up a certain amount but putting on a deck or other improvements brings it to another level.



Information is not complete for this year's sales yet so the information requires use of last year's sales. It was noted that this year's sales have been just as astronomical as last year so they will keep going up. It was explained that as sales go up the new home owner will pay more taxes than previous owner, which will help to control the assessment for everyone on the residential side. *Town Administrator Green* advised that though Adams is one of the most conservative spending communities it has been out of balance. He noted that the market demand is so high, the free market is what is doing this and it is right balancing the municipality by the mathematical formula which is driving the tax rate lower and starting to balance it out. *Member Blanchard* pointed out that 5 years ago the state made the Town lower the values and now they are requiring the Town raise the values. Different scenarios were discussed to raise or lower the residential values, and it was noted that the Town is only allowed to shift it so much. For the residential side, a 20% shift would be an increase of \$121 annually, and a 25% shift would be an increase of \$83. For commercial, using one property as example, at a 20% shift commercial would be -\$290 and at a 25% shift there would be an increase of \$452. *Member Nowak* noted the problem of having 50% of the housing stock as rentals, who owners maintain but don't upgrade them and they want to keep their taxes as low as they can. It was noted that there is no difference between single-family and multi-family residences, however mixed-use has 2 different tax rates. Multi-family homes don't turn over as much as single-family homes. *Town Administrator Green* noted that the Town budget dropped this year and \$1.23 was added for the school override. Town budget and staff reduction of cost of living adjustments from 3% to 2%, and retention issues were briefly discussed and it was noted it is uncertain how long the Town can operate with this slim a budget. Assessor Wheeler was thanked for providing the information to the Board Members.


**ANNOUNCEMENTS, GOOD OF THE ORDER:** *Vice Chairman Hoyt* announced that there will be a "Coffee in the Court" on Thursday morning at 7:30 a.m. and Fall Run will take place on Sunday.

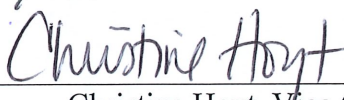
**ADJOURNMENT:** *Motion made by Member Blanchard to adjourn, second by Member Hoyt. Vote: unanimous. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

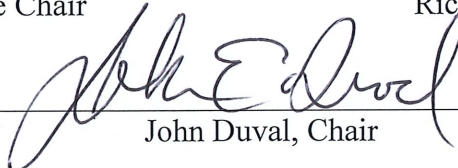
Deborah J. Dunlap, Recording Secretary

  
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Joseph Nowak, Member

  
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Howard Rosenberg, Member

  
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Christine Hoyt, Vice Chair

  
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Richard Blanchard, Member

  
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John Duval, Chair