Town of Savoy
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SAVOY SELECT BOARD MEETING
SAVOY TOWN HALL
Tuesday, April 22, 2025 5:00pm

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 5pm by Justin Kaczowski, seconded by Marie Saucier.

The minutes of the April 8, 2025 meeting were unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Gabrielle Glasier from Northern Berkshire Community Coalition presented the selectboard with information on the town hosting an emergency preparedness event. This workshop will be at no cost to the town and free to the public. NBCC will provide all necessary supplies and advertising for the event. The event will be at the Town Park with date to be announced.

DEPARTMENT CHECK IN:

Highway Department...Jon Choquette

- The highway department has started filling in potholes this week.
- The highway department received grant money to cover the cost of the "beaver deceiver" used to remove the beaver dam on Rte 116.
- The full time and part time positions have been filled.
- Work will be done on Old Main Road #4 Monday and Tuesday of next week.

Transfer Station...Barbara Belisle

- A 2025 bulky waste flyer was distributed containing dates and pricing information for recycling bulky waste items. The flyers will be put up at the transfer station, town hall, town website, and Facebook page to alert town residents.
- A shed has been ordered for the "Swap Shop" and should be arriving the first week in June. The shed was purchased through grant money awarded to the Transfer Station.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee...Kathy Luczynski

- The finance committee has asked the selectboard to postpone the Annual Town Meeting until all the financial information has been verified for accuracy for the fiscal year 2026 budget.
- The selectboard agreed that it is imperative to have accurate financial information to present to the town's people and agreed to postpone the annual town meeting.

- The selectboard tabled setting the date for the annual town meeting until updated information is available after the next finance committee meeting.

Parks & Recreation...Stephanie Harris

- Town clean up will be the week of April 27 – May 3.
- The next Golden Cane recipient was contacted in regard to the designation. He will be receiving the Golden Cane at the Annual Town Meeting.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Board of Health- 497 Main Road

- A variance for 497 Main Road septic system was unanimously approved by the selectboard.

Plumbing Inspector

- Tim Martin was appointed as alternate plumbing inspector for the town.
- Plumbing inspection fee schedule will be reviewed with the selectboard in the future.

Annual Town Meeting

- The selectboard agreed to postpone the annual town meeting. The date for the ATM had not been officially set by the selectboard as of yet, so no motion is needed to postpone. The new date will be announced after the next finance committee meeting.

Town Website Quotes

- Several quotes came in for the making the town website official. Justin Kaczowski suggested going with TownWeb as the vendor as they were lower cost, easy to maintain, offer emergency communications, and have good customer service options for help.
- The recommendation will be put to the finance committee for discussion.
- Adopting an official town website will be presented at the annual town meeting for a vote.
- Because TownWeb offers emergency communications within the website, there is possible grant money through the town insurance company to cover the cost. Stephanie Harris, vice chair of the safety committee, will inquire with MIIA.

Colonial Power Group-RFP Planning/Indicative Pricing

- Justin Kaczowski will follow up with representatives at Colonial Power Group for the upcoming community choice power planning and pricing.

Annual Town Reports

- The Town Clerk reports for 2023 and 2024 are needed before going to print.

DCR-Notice of Land Acquisition

- The Department of Conservation and Recreation asked the selectboard if the DCR can purchase two acres of land that is part of a contiguous parcel of land on West Hill Road in Hawley. The two acres located in Savoy is not buildable land.
- DCR will purchase the land and requested the 120 day waiting period be waived. Justin Kaczowski signed the waiver.

- At the time the town lines were remapped, the owner of the two acre piece of land was unknown to the Savoy Assessors for the fact there is no deed on file for the parcel. DCR representative said the back taxes will be paid to 6/30/2025.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Contact email information will be updated with Smith-Vocational School to include the select board administrative assistant and the finance committee.
- Complaints by a neighbor of 523 and 525 Center Road regarding "illegal tree cutting" were relayed to the selectboard; the complaints were forwarded to the conservation commission for follow up.

SELECTBOARD ITEMS:

- The Annual Town Election warrant was reviewed; the selectboard asked that the election times be edited to 12-8pm as per Town Bi-laws; edits were made by the Town Clerk, and the warrant was signed by the select board.
- Marie Saucier has submitted all the necessary quarterly grant reporting.
- Marie Saucer presented a press release she has written[1].
- The furnace at the town hall is scheduled for maintenance on May 6th.

ADJOURN MEETING: The meeting was adjourned at 6pm by Marie Saucier, seconded by Brenda Smith and Justin Kaczowski.

APPROVAL DATE: 5/13/25

Justin Kaczowski, Chair

Marie Saucier

Brenda Smith

Savoy's culvert funding conundrum
Or
How can $1,000,000 not be enough?

Marie Saucier, Town of Savoy Select Board Member
April 21, 2025

Living in Savoy is both a privilege and a challenge. Nestled in Northern Berkshire County, Massachusetts, this small town spans 23,040 acres atop the Hoosac Mountain Range at an average elevation of 1,837 feet. Over half of the land—12,198 acres—is state-owned (2024 data), with significant conservation restrictions on private property. Savoy is home to several state forests and wildlife management areas, including Savoy Mountain State Forest, Savoy Wildlife Management Area, portions of the Mohawk Trail State Forest, Kenneth Dubuque Memorial State Forest, and Windsor State Forests. It also serves as the headwaters to brooks and rivers feeding into the nationally recognized Wild & Scenic Westfield River, Deerfield and Hoosic watersheds.

Despite its natural beauty, Savoy faces substantial financial struggles. With a population of roughly 650, the town operates on a modest 2024 budget of $2.1 million—of which $1.12 million funds the school system, leaving just $976,000 for municipal services. Our aging population grapples with the challenge of staying in their homes, while younger generations continue to migrate elsewhere—a story familiar to many rural communities.

The town's efforts to comply with ever-changing regulations from state agencies and the legislature are a constant struggle. Operating with limited resources, Savoy relies on its volunteer Select Board members, who work tirelessly to keep the town running despite the absence of professional administrative staff.

This backdrop sets the stage for a surprising twist: the award of a $1,000,000 MASS WORKS 2023 Grant to replace two stream crossing culverts on Chapel Road. While this might seem like a win for our community, it has led to a greater financial conundrum.

The grant was awarded under the Small-Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP) to replace crossings over the Chickley River and Tilton Brook. These waterways, designated as Critical Cold-Water Fisheries, have severe barriers for migratory fish—a passability score of zero and 0.01, respectively. The town applied for years before securing the grant, and engineering documents for the crossings date back as far as 2005.

As of April 21, the town has withdrawn the Tilton Brook crossing from the grant and requested an extension to the June 30, 2025, deadline for completion. Permitting delays have slowed progress, with the engineering team working alongside the Savoy Conservation Commission, Mass DEP, and the Army Corps. Meanwhile, the projected cost for the Chickley River project has soared to $1.395 million—far exceeding the grant's budget.

This leaves Savoy in a precarious position: how does a small town with an annual municipal budget of $976,000 find an additional $400,000? Despite outreach efforts to our legislative delegation and additional alternative grant programs—such as funding from the Department of Environmental Restoration—the challenges persist Additional grants, such as the (DER) would require 100% compliance with stringent stream crossing standards, tight deadlines that do not line up with our newly projected timelines, and more quarterly reporting and reimbursement requests. With limited staffing, the burden of tracking, reporting, and reimbursement submissions falls heavily on volunteers, some of whom already contribute 20-40 hours a month.

Further complicating matters is the lack of bidders in these remote hill towns, making it unwise to open the project for bids without confirmed funding. Savoy's leadership hesitates to risk frustrating potential contractors by withdrawing the project after bids are submitted, which could harm future endeavors.

Exploring the Chickley River provides additional context. Its headwaters originate deep within Savoy State Forest, flowing for miles through state, private, and town-owned lands. In fact, 69% of the river's length within Savoy lies on state land, while the town is responsible for just a fraction—a road crossing spanning 0.01 miles. The river then flows through Hawley and ultimately into the Deerfield River.

In fairness, the state does provide Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) funds annually. For 2024, this amounted to $132,179—or approximately $11 per acre. Alternatively, Savoy could consider using Chapter 90 funds to address the crossing, but even combining Chapter 90 funds with the Fair Share apportionment, the total allocation of $325,615 falls short of covering the project's projected costs. Meanwhile, residents grow increasingly concerned about the state of the town's roads.

This situation begs the question how do we abide by updated stream crossing standards and keep our citizens in their homes? With 54 stream crossings in Savoy, each potentially costing $1million to replace, how can our town thrive—or even survive? And this is without addressing bridge issues.

At this point, there are no easy answers. Savoy risks losing the $1 million grant altogether if no solutions are found. If anyone out there has suggestions—or funds to contribute—please direct them to the Town of Savoy with a note for the Chapel Road Project. As a community, we are trying our best, but we desperately need increased state funding to support rural areas like Savoy and many other small towns here in the Berkshires.

Photo Credits: naacc.org



Upstream view at Chapel Road Chickley River Crossing



View from the downstream side of the crossing.