

Local yokel

(n.) a country folk living in a quaint neighborhood community

West
Stockbridge
February
2025

S E R V I N G O U R C O M M U N I T Y S I N C E 2 0 0 4



Happy
Valentine's
Day!

*Williams River from Great Barrington Road.
Photo by John Parker*

Cardinals and Coyotes Break the Winter Silence

By Carol McKenna

Although a lot of winter still lies ahead, every February I perk up when I hear two signs that indicate spring is not too far off: northern cardinals singing to each other early in the morning and the increased calls of coyotes at night.

Cardinals are around all winter long, brightening the landscape with their striking red plumage against an often-snowy backdrop. But by the end of February, they start to test my patience when they wake me up at first daylight with their songs. Before I let myself get too annoyed, though, I tell myself to be glad to be hearing their rich, flutelike songs because they are a harbinger of spring.

Male cardinals sing back and forth to each other at this time of year to establish and defend their territories and to attract mates. Female cardinals are among the more vocal female North American songbirds, and when one pairs up with a male, they sing duets to reinforce their bond.

Cardinals start building their nests as early as February. They typically raise one to two broods per season but have been known to raise three. They rarely use the same nest twice.

The cardinal was once a more southern bird. It gradually spread north in the 20th century, with the first nesting in Massachusetts recorded in 1958. Experts believe the main drivers of this expansion were a warming climate and the growth of suburbs in the eastern United States that increased the amount of edge habitat that cardinals prefer. The widespread use of bird feeders may have played a part, too.

Cardinals get their brilliant red feathers from carotenoids in their food. Carotenoids are the plant pigments responsible for the yellow, orange, and red colors in many fruits and vegetables. Cardinals love the native fruits that are packed with these pigments, such as winterberry, dogwood berries, and mulberries. Female cardinals have genes that regulate pigment conversion differently, resulting in a more muted color.

The redder a male cardinal, the more successful he will be in the wild. Redder males gain higher quality territories, pair up with earlier breeding females, and have more offspring in a breeding season.

Cardinals also eat grain and seed and a wide variety of insects. They even eat maple sap from holes in trees made by yellow-bellied sapsuckers!

The cardinal is a much loved bird that carries symbolic meaning. Many people, including me and some of my family members,

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*Photos courtesy of Scott Santino/Mass Audubon
top to bottom:*

Female Northern Cardinal; Northern Cardinal; Eastern Coyote



Select Board Meeting Minutes

[Editor's note: At the town administrator's request, the Select Board minutes here are reprinted verbatim with no editing of text. Official board minutes are available at the West Stockbridge Public Library and on the town website, <https://www.weststockbridge-ma.gov/>. Select Board meetings are on Zoom and may be viewed by clicking on the link in the meeting agenda posted on the town website calendar. Residents can receive email notification of town events and meeting agendas by subscribing at <http://weststockbridgema.virtualltownhall.net/subscriber>].

Select Board Meeting Minutes Zoom Only Meeting December 16, 2024

The quorum was present remotely: Select Board members Andrew Krouss, Kathleen Kersey, and Chair Andrew Potter.

Others present remotely: Mary Stodden, Assessing Clerk and Harold Schneid, Assessor

Andy Potter opened the meeting at 10:18 AM and introduced Harold.

The meeting began late due to a loss of internet throughout the Town.

Tax Classification :

Harold shared and discussed the following presentation:

Introduction

Prior to the mailing of 3rd quarter tax billings, the Select Board holds a public hearing to determine the percentage of the Town's property tax levy to be borne by each major property class. This responsibility and procedure are described in Chapter 40, Section 56 of the Massachusetts General Laws.

The steps in completing the Classification Hearing are outlined below. Also provided is information about the levy, property assessments, and recommendations made by the Board of Assessors.

Steps in Setting Tax Rates

Pre-classification Hearing Steps

Step 1: Determination of the property tax levy (Budget Process)

Step 2: Determine assessed valuations (Assessors)

Step 3: Tabulate assessed valuations by class (Assessors)

Classification Hearing Steps

Step 4: Classification hearing presentation (Assessors & Select Board)

Step 5: Voting a tax shift factor (Select Board)

Post Classification Hearing Steps

Step 6: Sign the LA-5 Classification Form (Select Board)

Step 7: Send annual recap to DOR for tax rate approval (Assessors)

Step 8: Obtain DOR approval of tax rates (DOR)

Terminology

The following are definitions of the terms frequently used in the discussion of tax rates.

Levy: The tax levy (or levy) is the amount of property taxes to be raised. The levy amount is determined by the budget. The total amount of the approved budget less revenues from other sources like motor vehicle excise, municipal fees, and state aid is the amount to be raised from property taxation. The town will be raising \$5,831,713 in property tax revenues. The tax levy has increased \$44,674 (0.8%) over last year's levy of \$5,787,039.

Levy Ceiling: The levy ceiling is 2.5 percent of the full value of the Town. Based on the West Stockbridge's aggregate valuation of \$631,821,526, the town cannot levy taxes in excess of \$15,795,538.

New Growth Revenue: Property taxes derived from newly taxable properties like new construction, additions, subdivisions, and personal property. The assessors have tabulated new growth revenues of \$45,221.

...continued on page 7

Correction



In our January issue, we listed an incorrect contact phone number for more information about Pet Partners; we apologize for the error. The correct number is (518) 781-0362.

A Dog Park Is Coming Soon to West Stockbridge

— We Need a Logo! —



The Friends of the West Stockbridge Dog Park (FOWSDP), a nonprofit organization, is considering several ideas and events for raising funds to support the park's development and future maintenance. We are inviting our community to help create a fun logo to represent our new group.

We welcome all your ideas, but the design should be simple and at least include these elements:

- Friends of the West Stockbridge Dog Park or FOWSDP
- Dog(s) of course
- Something representing a park, such as tree(s), a bench, a pathway, etc.

The logo can be drawn by hand or a computer image. Just let your creative powers go wild, and maybe you will see folks in town wearing a shirt or hat with your design. We will reveal the new logo at the dog park's groundbreaking ceremony.

Please send your submissions by March 1 to Friends of the West Stockbridge Dog Park, PO Box 117, West Stockbridge, MA 01266 or by email to info@friendsofwsdogpark.org.

We are a small but mighty group of volunteers looking for new community members to join us in our mission to give our town's dogs and humans a beautiful new park to enjoy. If you're interested in joining us, please fill out the form at <https://bit.ly/wsdpinterestform>.

You can also check out <https://www.facebook.com/groups/weststockbridgedogpark> for more information.

...**Cardinals and Coyotes** cont'd from page 2

associate them with messages from heaven or from a departed loved one, another reason to feel happy when the cardinals' "birdie, birdie, birdie" song wakes you up early on a late winter morning.

It's all about courtship and mating, as it is with the increased calls of coyotes this time of year. Coyotes, like northern cardinals, are generally monogamous and form strong pair bonds for several years.

Coyotes are one of the most vocal mammals. You can hear them year round in the Berkshires, but during breeding season, between late January and early March, you may notice more calls and a broader range of vocalization.

Female coyotes whimper and whine when they are close to being in heat, and coyote pairs howl and yip to let other coyotes know they have an established territory and to keep away. Other nearby pairs may then respond, announcing their own territories. At such times, it can sound like many more coyotes are in the area than actually are there. Also, coyote howls often echo against hillsides. This acoustic trickery is another reason why people may overestimate the number of coyotes nearby.

Researchers have identified about a dozen coyote vocalizations that serve a variety of functions, from alarm to warning to socialization. I was surprised to learn that coyotes do not howl to announce a kill because this behavior would attract other wild animals, and coyotes in more urban areas vocalize less because they find it easier to survive in those settings by being quiet.

Although negative encounters with coyotes are rare, the opportunity for human-coyote interaction is highest during breeding season. Make sure to keep pets directly supervised on a leash when outdoors, never feed coyotes intentionally or unintentionally, haze any coyotes that you see in your yard by yelling or using an air horn, and physically chase the coyote(s) off your land.

One winter night when my daughter was a toddler, she called me into her bedroom to tell me she was awakened by "a broken-down fire engine" in our back field. What she heard, of course, was the yip-howls of a pack of coyotes. I remember being hesitant to tell her the sounds were from wild animals that were close by. Today, as a young adult, she said she loves to hear coyotes at night and be reminded of the untamed aspects of our world.

If you hear the calls of cardinals or coyotes this month, enjoy the sound show, and remember: spring is only a few weeks away.

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Caleb Huff center right. Photo courtesy of Caleb Huff

Caleb W. Huff

U.S. Army, 2005–2011

Iraq

Afghanistan

Rank: E4 Specialist

What influenced you to join the service?

In 2005, with the war taking off, I couldn't come up with an excuse not to enlist. I felt I had to do my part to help or serve. If there wasn't a war, I wouldn't have joined.

What was a memorable experience?

In 2010, I was deployed to Afghanistan for demining operations, clearing the area of landmines left by the Russians. The best part was at the end when thousands of acres of land had been cleared. Farmers could plant and kids could play soccer. We had an actual impact on the betterment of Afghani lives. As a thank you, the villagers cooked us a huge meal, with lots of raisins, nuts, and lamb kebobs.

What was an important life lesson you took from your time in the service?

You see the best and the worst of people. Even people you were told to hate, you find that some of them are the most amazing people. Stay open-minded to what someone has inside them that doesn't fit the mold you think. The human element exists within. They might be living in mud huts, but there's no real difference between what you want and they want—the human desire for family and prosperity.

Life after the service

Caleb joined Monterey Masonry when he returned in 2011 and fell in love with the work. He went on to start his own business, Maple Hill Masonry, that today does all kinds of masonry with a specialization in landscape masonry.

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*Thank You,
West Stockbridge!*

Santa's Wish List Donations

Our annual appeal for donations to West Stockbridge organizations appeared in our December issue. The total received this year was \$11,180, about \$1,235 more than last year!

We thank all those who gave so generously to these important community groups that work very hard to make West Stockbridge such a special place to live. Here are the totals by organization:

Friends of the Library	\$1,410
Local Yokel	\$3,110
Pet Partners	\$300
WS Farmers Market	\$875
WS Fire & Rescue	\$1,415
WS Historical Society	\$1,285
WS Parks & Recreation	\$520
WS Plants and Gardens	\$1,315
WS Zucchini Festival	\$950

Total: \$11,180

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- Firewood

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Levy Limit: Also referred to as the “maximum allowable levy”, this is calculated by adding 2.5 percent of the previous year’s levy limit plus new growth revenue for the present fiscal year to last year’s levy limit. Exceeding the levy limit requires an override of Proposition 2 ½. For Fiscal Year 2025 the levy limit is \$7,288,866.

Excess Levy Capacity: Excess levy capacity is the difference between the levy and the levy limit.

The Fiscal Year 2025 Levy Limit and Amount to be Raised

The following is a calculation of West Stockbridge’s levy limit for fiscal year 2025.

Fiscal year 2024 levy limit	\$7,000,104
Levy increase allowed under Prop. 2 ½	175,003
New growth revenue	45,221
Excluded Debt to Pay Bonds	68,538
Fiscal year 2025 levy limit	7,288,866
Levy to be raised	\$5,831,713
Excess levy capacity	\$1,457,153

Valuations by Class Before Tax Shift

<u>Major Property Class</u>	<u>Valuation</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Res vs CIP%</u>
Residential	591,419,007	93.6054	93.6054
Commercial	18,229,793	2.8853	
Industrial	3,837,600	0.6074	6.3946
Personal Property	18,335,126	2.9019	
TOTAL	631,821,526	100.0000	

Shifting the Tax Burden

Municipalities with a large commercial/industrial tax base often see fit to shift the tax burden to help maintain lower residential taxes. Given West Stockbridge’s relatively small commercial, industrial, and personal property tax base, it takes a CIP tax rate increase of approximately 15% to yield a 1% residential tax rate reduction.

Tax Rates

The estimated single tax rate for fiscal year 2025 is \$6.24 per thousand valuation.

<u>Property Class</u>	<u>FY2024</u>	<u>FY2025</u>
Residential	\$9.58	9.23
Commercial	\$9.58	9.23
Industrial	\$9.58	9.23
Personal Property	\$9.58	9.23

Note that the FY2025 rate is an estimate and may change upon Department of Revenue review.

Tax Rates History

Fiscal Year 2023	\$10.31	Fiscal Year 2020	\$13.12
Fiscal Year 2022	\$12.56	Fiscal Year 2019	\$12.13
Fiscal Year 2021	\$13.91		

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Tax Impacts

Examples of Typical Tax Changes Under a Single Tax Rate

<u>Average</u> <u>Property Class</u>	<u>Average</u> <u>FY24 Value</u>	<u>Avg. Tax</u>	<u>FY25 Value</u>	<u>Avg. Tax</u>	<u>Change</u>
Single Family Homes	\$650,400	\$6,231	\$671,500	\$6,198	\$-33

Board of Assessors Recommendation

The Board of Assessors recommends that the Select Board adopt a single tax rate to be applied to all classes of property in West Stockbridge.

Summary of Assessments (LA4)

<u>Property Type</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Residential</u>	<u>Commercial</u>	<u>Industrial</u>	<u>Personal Property</u>
101-Single Family	717	481,473,200	-0-	-0-	-0-
102-Condominiums	0	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
103,109-Misc Res	39	43,934,200	-0-	-0-	-0-
104-Two Family	15	8,070,600	-0-	-0-	-0-
105-Three Family	1	411,900	-0-	-0-	-0-
111-125-Apartments	2	1,415,600	-0-	-0-	-0-
130's-Vacant Land	205	25,039,900	-0-	-0-	-0-
012-043-Mixed Use	7	31,073,607	2,259,215	-0-	-0-
300-393-Commercial	42	-0-	14,855,500	-0-	-0-
400-452-Industrial	11	-0-	-0-	3,837,600	-0-
500-508-Pers. Prop.	230	-0-	-0-	-0-	18,335,126
600's-Forestry	14	-0-	222,812	-0-	-0-
700's-Agricultural	17	-0-	340,606	-0-	-0-
800's-Recreation	10	-0-	551,660	-0-	-0-
 TOTAL BY CLASS	 1,310	 591,419,007	 18,229,793	 3,837,600	 18,335,126
TOTAL TAXABLE PROPERTIES		631,821,565			
TOTAL TAX EXEMPT PROPERTIES		25,801,800			

Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Andy Potter;

The West Stockbridge Select Board votes in accordance with M.G.L., Ch. 40, Sec. 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2025 tax rates and set the Residential Factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Roll call vote:

Andy Potter	Yes
Kathleen	Yes
Andy Krouss	Yes

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Andy Potter motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Kathleen.

Roll call vote:

Andy Krouss Yes

Kathleen Yes

Andy Potter Yes

The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan

Town Administrator

Select Board Meeting Minutes December 18, 2024

The quorum was present remotely: Select Board members Andrew Krouss and Chair Andrew Potter. Kathleen Keresey was absent.

Andy Potter opened the meeting at 6:00 PM.

Andy Krouss motioned to approve the December 2, 2024 minutes, seconded by Andy Potter.

All were in favor, and the minutes were approved.

Andy Potter stated that the Dog Park discussion agenda item would not take place tonight due to the absence of Michael Bolognino, Dog Park Advisory Committee Chair. This will discussion be on the January 6, 2025 agenda.

Town Administrator Update:

Marie stated that the Helping Hands program has been working hard this year to support seven families. Marie, Police Chief Marc Portieri, and Cait Graham have completed the Christmas gift shopping and have all the gifts wrapped for the families to pick up this weekend. This is a great program that truly helps make the holidays brighter for many families.

Citizen Speak: None

Civic Appreciation Award:

Andy Potter thanked Fire Chief Steve Traver for his support and aid in the Town of West Stockbridge two years ago when we needed a Fire Chief. The Town truly appreciates all he has done for us and we all wish him the best in his retirement. Andy Potter then presented Steve with a certificate of appreciation.

Public Hearing for Slaughter Operation at Baldwin Farm:

Andy Potter opened the Public Hearing at 6:04 PM. He stated that Baldwin Farm is looking for approval to have a slaughter operation at Baldwin Farm located at 25 West Center Road.

Toby Casey explained that the first step to being USDA-certified is local approval to operate the slaughter portion of their business. This certification will allow them to expand their business. Currently, they perform slaughter operations out in the open. They plan on using a large shipping container, enabling them to clean and disinfect the area as needed. Also, this container will be movable, allowing them to move it closer to the buildings to allow easier access to electricity and running water.

The Board asked if he had a waste disposal plan. Toby stated that he has been working with Nicole Day from Agriforaging Food Safety to complete the process of becoming USDA-certified. She has assisted him with a waste disposal plan that would compost the waste except the heart, liver, neck, and gizzard. These parts are packaged and sold. The remaining parts are composed into a water tote, and Yankee Septic will come and pump them out for removal.

Andy asked if there were any public comments. Joe Roy stated that he feels Toby has worked hard to create his business and that it is safe and humane. He strongly urged the Board to approve Toby's request.

Andy Potter then closed the public hearing.

Andy Krouss motioned to approve the request to allow for a slaughter operation at Baldwin Farm, seconded by Andy Potter.

All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Select Board Speak:

Andy Krouss wished everyone a safe, happy, and healthy holiday.

Andy Potter requested that the Board adjourn the Open Session and go into an Executive Session due to an anticipated Executive Session per M.G.L. c. 30A Paragraph 21 (a)(3), to discuss strategy concerning collective bargaining, as meeting in open session would have a detrimental impact on the Board's negotiating position regarding the Director of Public Works Contract.

Andy Krouss made a motion, seconded by Andy Potter, to adjourn the open session, enter the executive session, and not return to the open session.

Roll call vote:

Andy Potter Yes

Andy Krouss Yes

The open meeting was adjourned at 6:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan

Town Administrator

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West Stockbridge Historical Society's
Berkshire Nature Talk Series

ANIMAL ROMANCE

**Saturday, February 15th
at 7:00 p.m.**

Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street, West Stockbridge



Photo: Dx Lanson/MassAudubon

*Nicaela Haig of Mass Audubon's
Berkshire Wildlife Sanctuaries
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wonderful world of animal
romance in the Berkshires,
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WEST STOCKBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*This program is funded in part by grants from the Richmond, Stockbridge, and West Stockbridge Cultural Councils,
local agencies which are supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.*

**Select Board Meeting Minutes
Zoom Only
January 8, 2025**

The quorum was present remotely: Select Board members Andrew Krouss and Chair Andrew Potter, Kathleen Keresey, and Town Administrator Marie Ryan.

Others Present: Michael Bolognino and Jana Sax, Dog Park Advisory Committee Co-Chairs.

Andy Potter opened the meeting at 10:02 AM.

Dog Park Update: Michael Bolognino, Committee Chair

Michael explained to the Board that the Planning Board has approved their special permit to create the Dog Park behind the tennis courts on the Town Hall property. However, several conditions apply.

Michael stated that the conditions for the permit as we understood them from the Planning Board:

1. Special permit issued to Town of West Stockbridge
2. Construction must follow submitted plans
3. The park must comply with state/federal accessibility regulations
4. Tree cutting is limited to what is shown on plans
5. Drainage/grading plan requires PB & DPW approval
6. Water supply must use a frost-protected hydrant
7. Park hours: Dawn to dusk
8. Solar lighting at the entrance with a timer (for safety when exiting), not to be on after TBD time at night
9. Rules must be posted on weatherproof signs (similar to the Pittsfield example)
10. Signage must be present about the requirement of leashes outside the park
 - a. Minimum 2'x2' signs in two key locations
 1. Maintenance responsibilities assigned to park users (this one we have to double check)

Michael informed the Board that the terms of the grant from the Stanton Foundation require them to submit a final design by February 1st. The Foundation will then have until May to approve or deny the design. Once the Committee receives the final approval of the design, they will bid to construct the Dog Park. Michael will work with Marie on bidding when they are ready to proceed. The Board also requested that the Dog Park Committee work with Marie to create a Memorandum of Understanding with the Town before the Park's opening.

Jana mentioned that the Planning Board suggested the Committee start an endowment so that as members come and go, there will always be a fund to support the maintenance and repairs of the Dog Park without making the taxpayers support the park. Jana also stated that the Dog Park Committee has officially formed a 501C3 non-profit status to give continued financial support for the dog park.

The Board asked if the Committee has people to take care of any repairs or maintenance, and Michael stated that they have many volunteers who will watch over the park as needed and address any issues they see that may need to be addressed. He also informed the Board that they would pay for and hire a company to come and remove the waste.

The site plan design includes solar lights, a shed for storage, and ADA-compliant paths. Large signs with the park rules will also be placed in multiple locations within and outside the park.

The Board asked who would enforce the rules in the park. Michael said he has spoken with the Animal Control Officer and the Police Department. The Committee members and volunteers will monitor the park for any issues that arise and then contact the Police and/or the Animal Control Officer for any enforcement needed.

Michael stated that the Committee needs the Board to approve the final design in order for him to submit it to the foundation for approval.

Kathleen made a motion, seconded by Andy Krouss, to approve the final Dog Park design.

Roll Call Vote:

Andy Potter Yes

Kathleen Yes

Andy Krouss Yes

All were in favor, and the motion was approved.

Andy Krouss made a motion, seconded by Kathleen, to adjourn.

Roll Call Vote:

Andy Potter Yes

Kathleen Yes

Andy Krouss Yes

The meeting adjourned at 10:40 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan

Town Administrator

February History Quiz Question:

Something about West Stockbridge in the early 19th century seemed to inspire or create strong religious and humanitarian-oriented people who went on to national prominence. That period from the late 1700s to 1850 is known as the "Second Great Awakening" with religious/humanist communes, communities, and movements starting up and flourishing.

In the mid-1800s, two of our most prominent people were Daniel Spencer and Charles Boynton. Spencer became a major leader in the early Mormon church. Boynton was a fervent abolitionist and one of the founders of Howard University, among other accomplishments. Both were born here and spent their early years in West Stockbridge.

Even earlier, before 1800, one family from West Stockbridge went on to accomplish great humanitarian works of national prominence or impact. Who were they, and what did they do?

(Find the answer somewhere in this issue!)

When friends, neighbors, or relatives move, downsize, or just clean house, *please* ask them to think of the West Stockbridge Historical Society before they discard any old books, pictures, postcards, letters, or memorabilia of the Town of West Stockbridge. Email info@weststockbridgehistory.org or call (413) 232-4465.



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GRAVEL PRODUCTS

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and Municipalities Take on Unpaved Road Concerns

By Alison Dixon, Senior Planner, BRPC



Stuck car on Red Rock Road. Photo courtesy of West Stockbridge DPW

Many Berkshire County towns are facing increased challenges with road maintenance, especially for unpaved roads, mostly due to the impacts of climate change. Our winters are changing with widely fluctuating temperatures often resulting in snow followed by freezing rain or rain. For unpaved roads, this means that residents and highway departments are often dealing with not just one, but multiple and extended mud seasons. In addition, the increased intensity of precipitation is resulting in more unpaved road erosion and washouts. Sediment from unpaved roads can wash into our streams and impact our valuable cold water fish resources. The result is increased maintenance costs for municipalities and concerns for the safety of residents.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) have joined forces to support municipalities as they prioritize and identify solutions on their unpaved roads. The Western Massachusetts Regional Unpaved Regional Roads project is funded by the state's Municipal Vulnerability

Preparedness Program (MVP). In 2024, Franklin Regional Council of Governments developed an Unpaved Roads Stormwater Toolkit to support their region's highway department's prioritization of unpaved road concerns and to determine best management practices to reduce erosion vulnerability and sediment transport into streams. The three regional planning agencies will build upon and amend the Unpaved Roads Stormwater Toolkit to ensure climate resilience is fully considered. FRCOG's current Unpaved Roads Stormwater Toolkit can be viewed at this link: <https://frcog.org/publications/unpaved-roads-stormwater-management-toolkit>.

The goal of the Unpaved Roads Stormwater Toolkit is to provide highway departments with a methodology for prioritizing their unpaved roads, including providing a "Vulnerability Assessment" that indicates the most vulnerable unpaved road segments based on criteria such as road slope, embankment steepness, and proximity to streams and lakes. Together with local knowledge, the top priority unpaved road segments in a municipality are identified. A field assessment conducted by municipal staff on the top priority road segments helps identify the recommended best management practices (BMPs) to resolve issues observed. The Toolkit also provides BMP designs developed by engineers to assist highway departments in implementing the recommended BMPs. BRPC is developing a Vulnerability Assessment map for each municipality in Berkshire County, under this project.

The revised Toolkit will also incorporate elements and lessons learned from the Rural Dirt Road Assessment and Recommendations report completed by BSC Group for Sheffield, Sandisfield and New Marlborough under an MVP project conducted in 2020-2021. During this project, BSC Group developed an unpaved road assessment and prioritization methodology that considered climate change and conducted assessments in all three towns on priority unpaved roads.

An additional component to the Western Massachusetts Regional Unpaved Regional Roads project is community engagement. BRPC is in the process of gathering information from Highway Superintendents to identify concerns, issues, costs, and priority unpaved roads.

BRPC also wants to hear from residents who live on unpaved roads or drive them regularly. Community information is key to developing grant proposals that can help address identified issues. To this end, BRPC has created a Berkshire County-wide online dirt road problems interactive map (<https://tinyurl.com/Dirt-Road-Problems>). This map will be available to enter information up until April 30, 2025. As we approach spring and mud season, we encourage residents to keep this website handy. If an unpaved road issue is encountered or if there is knowledge of a long-standing issue, residents can pinpoint the problem on the map and describe the concern. This project is fully supported by the West Stockbridge DPW. Information gathered will increase BRPC's ability to effectively assist the towns and may support a larger conversation about Berkshire County's need to maintain safe, unpaved roads.



GUILD OF BERKSHIRE ARTISTS invites you to Dreamscapes: Journeys into Nature

at Berkshire Botanical Garden

5 West Stockbridge Road

Stockbridge MA 01262

February 7 - February 23, 2024

Tuesdays through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Friday, FEB 7 - 5 - 7pm Opening Reception

Saturday, FEB 15 - 2-4pm Artist's Walkabout and Tea

In this juried show featuring artwork by the Guild of Berkshire Artists, nature serves as the muse. That includes Berkshire Botanical Garden itself, which hosts the Guild's plein air group. The Guild's work covers a wide range of visual media, including painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, textiles, wood, glass and mixed media.

Each artist is challenged to interpret their concept of what nature means to them. Is it colors, textures, the amazing beauty of life in nature? Is it the complexity as well as the simple beauty of spring tulips, fall leaves and sunsets?

BerkshireArtists.org

BerkshireBotanical.org

Neither Snow Nor Sleet Could Dampen the Turnout for the West Stockbridge Chamber Players Winter Concert

By Liza Bennett

A winter storm was taking hold outside as intrepid supporters of the West Stockbridge Chamber Players stamped the snow off their boots and climbed the stairs of the Old Town Hall on a recent January Sunday afternoon. After a welcome and update on the progress of the Town Hall's restoration by Robert Salerno, president of the Historical Society, four members of the acclaimed ensemble took the stage: Sheila Fiekowsky, violin; Lisa Crockett, violin; Daniel Getz, viola; and Adam Esbensen, cello. Their first piece, a stirring performance of Franz Liszt's *Am Grabe Richard Wagners*, S. 135, was followed by Amy Beach's String Quartet, Op. 89, a composer long championed by Fiekowsky.

"She was influenced by both Liszt and Wagner," Fiekowsky said, introducing the quartet, "but you'll also make out notes of Native American and Eskimo cultures." Hearing such beautiful yet rarely performed works is one of the joys of these Chamber Players' concerts, and the ravishing Beach was followed by another such piece: Jessie Montgomery's *Strum*. "She's influenced by Bartók, Debussy, and Britten," Getz explained "and grew up surrounded by jazz." Fiekowsky added that the musicians pluck their instruments so hard while performing the piece, they're completely out of tune by the end of it.

After the intermission, Chamber Players' artistic director Catherine Hudgins performed a solo piece on the clarinet—that was not on the program—to commemorate the disastrous fires in Los Angeles. Entitled *L.A.tude* it was written just that past week by James M. Stephenson, an American composer who, along with Montgomery, mentors many young composers. Hudgins was then joined on stage by the other four musicians for the final work of the program, Bernard Herrmann's *Souvenirs de voyage*. "Herrmann was very prolific at scoring films and influenced many of the film composers who followed him," Hudgins told the audience. "He scored many of Hitchcock's films, as well as *Taxi Driver* and television's *Twilight Zone*, just to name a few. For this piece, about memories of travel, I guess he wanted to get away—like some of you might want to do right now." As the charming work concluded, an appreciative audience gave a rousing round of applause, then headed back out into the swirling snow.



Artistic director Catherine Hudgins was joined by the other four musicians for the final work of the program. Photo by David Finck



Ensemble members include Sheila Fiekowsky, violin; Lisa Crockett, violin; Adam Esbensen, cello; and Daniel Getz, viola. Photo by Bob Salerno



News from the Pews

By Ed Byrne,
St. Patrick Church

Happy New Year from St. Patrick Church! We hope you had a joyful Christmas and are staying warm during these cold winter months. As we begin 2025, we are excited about the opportunities for fellowship and growth in our church community. We invite all active members—and those who are interested in learning more about our parish—to join us for our upcoming events:

- **Annual Polenta Dinner:** Join us on **February 16** at the Parish Center for a delicious meal featuring chicken sausage, salad, beverages, and Italian cookies and other desserts. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow parishioners and enjoy good food and conversation.
- **St. Patrick's Day Potluck Dinner:** In **March**, we will celebrate with our annual St. Patrick's Day Potluck Dinner. Bring a dish to share, enjoy great company, and celebrate our faith and heritage together!

These events are a perfect way to get involved and meet others in the parish. We also invite you to join us for **Catholic Mass every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.** If you're new to the area or considering becoming a member, we'd love for you to experience the warmth and fellowship of our community. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Photo source: <https://www.visitweststockbridge.com/churches-library>

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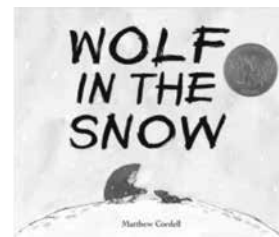
21 State Line Rd | West Stockbridge, MA 01266 | In the Town Offices
weststockbridgepl.org | 413-232-0300 ext. 308

Mon., Wed., Thurs., and Sat. 10 am–3 pm | Tues. and Fri. 2–6 pm | Sun. Closed

For those of you who enjoyed our December StoryWalk or did not get to see it, please come and experience the February version, *Wolf in the Snow*. The book won the Caldecott Medal for its illustrations.

For fiscal year 2024:

- 9,301 hard-copy items were borrowed and renewed
- \$193,533 was saved by library users because they borrowed instead of buying
- 3,992 eBooks and streaming audiobooks were borrowed
- 4,977 library visitors!



We look forward to seeing you soon! Vicky, Rachel, Sarah, Francesca

NEW ADULT FICTION

Airey, *Confessions*
Bear, *Mother of Rome*
Berry, *Trust her*
Chen, *Homeseking*
Crais, *The big empty*
Evanovich, *Now or never*
Harkaway, *Karla's choice: a John Le Carré novel*
Higashino, *Invisible helix*
Hunsinger, *How it all ends*
Hurstun, *The life of Herod the Great*
Kang, *We do not part*
Krentz, *Shattering dawn*
Larsen, *The lost house*
McCullough, *Everything is poison*
Morris, *Black butterflies*
Morris, *Stopping by jungle on a snowy evening*
Naspini, *The bishop's villa*
O'Donnell, *The naming of the birds*
Ogawa, *Mina's matchbox*
Patterson, *Holmes is missing*
Schultz, *Brooklyn kills me*
Tady, *Bluebird day*

NEW ADULT NONFICTION

Barracough, *Embers of the hands: hidden histories of the Viking Age*
Janssen, *World almanac and book of facts 2025*
Kennedy, *The secret history of the rape kit: a true crime story*
Reeder, *The cure for women*
Renkl, *Leaf, cloud, crow: a weekly backyard journal*

NEW YOUNG ADULT AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Averling, *The curse of Eelgrass Bog*
Bell, *Animal albums from A to Z*
Cordell, *To see an owl*
Lincoln, *The night librarian: a graphic novel*
Percival, *Safe crossing*
Shaloshvili, *Miss Leopolda*
Thiru, *Into the sunken city*
Varga, *For she is wrath*

NEW DVDs

The Apprentice; Dumb Mondy; Escape at Dannemora; Inside Out 2; Three Thousand Years of Longing



Scrapbook Questions/created by Paula Farrell TEST YOUR TRIVIA KNOWLEDGE!

1. Who said, "The American Dream is the notion that hard work and a prudent lifestyle should be enough to elevate any citizen to a higher quality of life"?
2. Which West Stockbridge resident didn't believe the "American Dream" was attainable anymore? He said, "The country and the world is different. The United States used to be a safe haven for immigrants, but it is not as welcoming in 2014."
3. What was the minimum wage in the year 2014?
4. What institution was named "Top Hospital" for the third straight year in 2014?



This program is supported in part by a grant from the West Stockbridge Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

1. Tim Butterworth
2. Peter Gregory
3. \$7.25
4. Fairview Hospital

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February Art Calendar

Guild of Berkshire Artists | BerkshireArtists.org | infoberkshireartists@gmail.com

2025

Continuing in Feb, "Holiday Small Works Show" featuring Carolyn Abrams, Sue Aiken, Mike Coyne, Jane Craker, Sarah Morrison, Karen Carmean, and Margie Skaggs. Art on Main Gallery, West Stockbridge, MA. **Gallery Open:** Saturdays 11am-4pm.

February 7-23, "Dreamscapes in Nature" Juried Art show at Berkshire Botanical Garden, Stockbridge, MA. **Reception:** Friday February 7, 5-7pm. **Artist walk & Tea:** Saturday February 15, 2-4pm.

February 25, Meet the Artist, 3pm. Artist TBD. Link to watch to be shared on website.

February 23, Berkshire Photo Gathering. See web: berkshirephotogathering.com/online-meetings

Upcoming Workshops:

March 4, 1-4pm, Introduction to Cold Wax Workshop with Carolyn Abrams. Berkshire South, Great Barrington. See calendar on the GBA website for sign up link.

March, Plein air Workshop with Lori Bradley. Sheep's Hill, Williamstown or TBD. See website for more information closer to date.

See www.berkshireartists.org for all the in-person and online events offered by the Guild of Berkshire Artists!



*Dreamscapes
in Nature*

February 7-23

*Juried
Art Show
at
Berkshire
Botanical
Garden*

Stockbridge, MA



Reception:
Fri, February 7
5-7pm

Artist Walk & Tea:
Sat, February 15
2-4pm



(photos above from 2024 show)

February Donor Roll Call

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Susan Fisher & Gary Schieneman
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Kathryn Gallitano
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Anonymous: 1

Thanks to everyone who has donated to WSLY. We couldn't do it without your support! Keep the *Local Yokel* coming. Please send your gift today! (See response form on page 21)



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Community News & Events

Stockbridge Grange Dinner

Take a night off from cooking and order this month's takeout-only Stockbridge Grange Dinner on Sunday, February 9, with pickup at the Grange Hall, 51 Church Street, Stockbridge. Dinner entrée: roast pork; dessert: lemon and chocolate pies. To place an order, call (413) 243-1298 or (413) 443-4352. Pickup time is 12 to 1:30 pm. Please call if the weather is iffy.

Council on Aging

The Richmond/West Stockbridge COA Craft Group will meet at 9:30 am on Tuesday, February 4, in the Richmond Library history room. We will be making Valentine gift boxes. Pre-register to reserve your space and materials by calling Heather at Richmond Town Hall, (413) 553-7793. The class is free to residents of Richmond and West Stockbridge. It's a fun time—hope to see you there!

The Knitters Group

The Knitters Group meets every Wednesday from 2 to 4 pm in the Community Room at the Town Offices. All crafts are welcome.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Library Committee meets every second Wednesday of the month from 3:30 to 4:30 pm in the Community Room at the Town Offices. All are welcome.

Please send your notices for Community News & Events to the Local Yokel, P.O. Box 238, West Stockbridge, MA 01266, email info@thelocalyokel.org, or visit thelocalyokel.org.



WINTER PARKING BAN in effect as of November 15, 2024

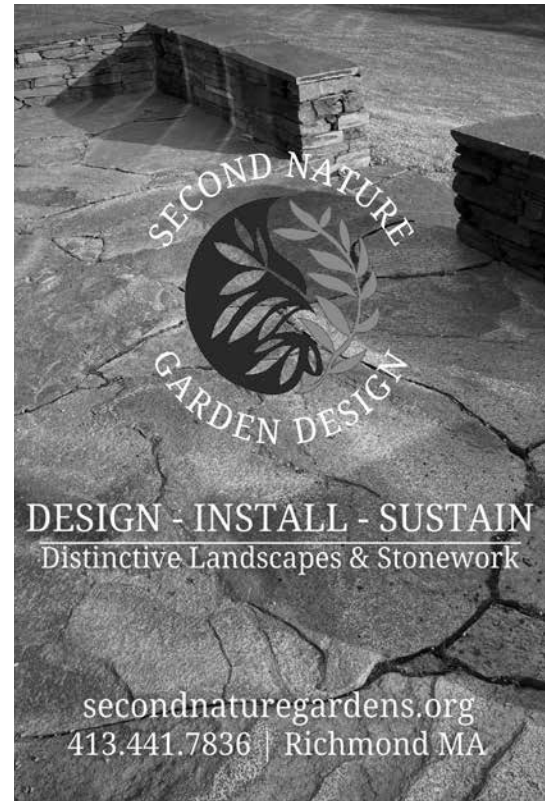


The West Stockbridge winter parking ban will be in effect from NOVEMBER 15 to APRIL 1 between 11 pm and 7 am for all town roads. Violation of the ban may result in a \$25 fine for parking in a prohibited area, as well as a \$50 fine for impeding snow removal. The vehicle may also be towed at the owner's expense for impeding snow removal.

Municipal parking is located on Hotel Street and Center Street. Snow removal in these areas will be between 7AM-8AM.

Thank you for your cooperation.

West Stockbridge Police Department
(413) 232-8500



The *Local Yokel* is published monthly. Please mail submissions to: **The Local Yokel**, P.O. Box 238, West Stockbridge, MA 01266, email info@thelocalyokel.org, or visit www.thelocalyokel.org. Copy deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the publication. Editors: **John Parker**, 394-4368, john.j.parker53@gmail.com; **Vicki Grayson**, 232-6131, vicki.grayson@rocketmail.com; **Susan Fisher**, 232-4443, suefish12@gmail.com; **Anne Lesser**, 717-0277, anne@annelessercommunications.com; Designer: **Kim Bradway**, kim@bloominarts.com.

The *Local Yokel* is supported in part by a grant from the West Stockbridge Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

History Quiz Answer:

In the colonial period of the late 1700s, religion was an important part of social life and thoroughly intertwined with town government. For example, a large portion of taxes went to the congregation, specifically to support the minister. Although there were a few different religions in West Stockbridge, the Congregational Church and minister received the bulk of the tax revenue and other benefits. At that time, the role of minister was a lucrative job.

In the beginning, everyone worshiped together at the local meetinghouse or church in West Center. In May 1793, the Baptists split from the Congregationalists. The Congregational Church then formally ordained Oliver Ayers, a Stockbridge resident, as its first permanent Congregational minister. Before that, the church had used itinerant preachers who came through, serving all believers who happened to be in the pews that day.

Oliver was born in West Farms, Connecticut, in 1765. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1788 with both a pastoral degree and a doctorate. He landed in Stockbridge and then moved to our town to become minister of the West Center Church. In addition to receiving the stipend and a supply of firewood, Oliver was given a small farm in West Center. During his time here, Oliver became well known in the area. For example, he gave the opening sermon for the newly established Masonic Lodge and served as the pastoral adviser to the last person to be hung in Berkshire County.

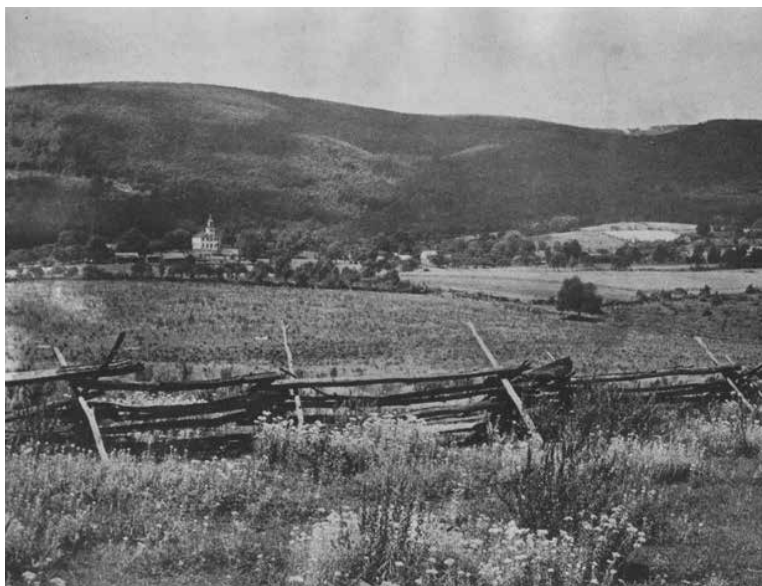
Oliver remained minister here until 1807 when he moved to Oswego, New York. At that time western New York was a frontier, just beginning to be populated. Oliver served as a missionary, establishing several churches and congregations. He represented the Connecticut Missionary Society to the newly arrived settlers in the Mohawk Valley. For the next 25 years, he actively traveled around the area, establishing congregations and building churches. Oliver became an important figure in the development of the area that was growing fast just as construction of the Erie Canal began.

Oliver's son, Frederick, born in 1803, was raised in West Stockbridge. His mother Phebe stayed here for a few years before moving to New York to be with Oliver. Frederick was raised and attended the local school. He then decided to actively follow his father's career path.

Frederick went further west to the Minnesota/Wisconsin territory. Back then the upper Mississippi region was Ojibwe country and the destination of many missionaries. Frederick had an informal mission and school in Belle Prairie, Minnesota. While he was there, he returned to West Stockbridge and other places in New England and New York, preaching and collecting clothing, household utensils, and tools for the Indian mission and school.

It was after the Civil War that Frederick became prominent. He moved to Atlanta to teach reading and other subjects to former slaves with the American Missionary Society and the Freedmen's Bureau. Smallpox, the Ku Klux Klan, poverty, and general hostility by the population made it tough work. But he still had the energy to create a Congregational Church, set up an orphanage, and do religious outreach. Most importantly, he signed the charter to help establish Atlanta University, the first "historically Black university" in the South.

Both Oliver and his son Frederick were major figures in the 1800s. Both were nationally known and respected in their communities, and they started in West Stockbridge!



*West Center Church early 1900s.
Photo courtesy of West Stockbridge Historical Society*

Every issue costs us about \$1,300 to print and distribute! Please help us keep the Local Yokel coming!

With increased printing and postage costs, we need your help more than ever. To get the latest town news, please contribute to the Local Yokel. For your donation of at least \$25.00 per year we will mail each issue to you (unless you prefer otherwise). The Local Yokel will continue to be available free at selected locations as long as possible, but we hope you will contribute anything you can. The West Stockbridge Local Yokel, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Please check with your employer, or former employer if retired, for matching gift programs.

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Assessors Office	<i>Mary Stodden</i>	232-0300	ext. 303	Tues. 1-5 pm; Thurs. 9 am-1 pm
Board of Health	<i>Earl Moffatt</i>	232-0300	ext. 314	Fri. 9 am-4 pm, or by appt.
Select Board	<i>Kathleen Keresey Andy Krouss Andy Potter</i>	232-0300	ext. 319	
Town Administrator	<i>Marie Ryan</i>			Mon.-Thurs. 7 am-3 pm Fri. 7-11 am
Building Inspector	<i>Brian Duval</i>	232-0300	ext. 313	Leave Message for Inquiries
Conservation Commission	<i>Kathy Korte</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	Leave Message for Inquiries
Council on Aging	<i>John Zick</i>	232-0300	ext. 340	Leave Message for Inquiries
Emergency Management	<i>Louis Oggiani</i>	528-2175		
Fire Department	<i>Steve Traver</i>	911 or 329-7153 (non-emergency)		Mon. 6:30-9 pm
Highway Department	<i>Curt G. Wilton</i>	232-0305		Leave Message for Inquiries
Library	<i>Rachel Alter</i>	232-0300	ext. 308	Mon., Wed., Thurs., and Sat. 10 am-3 pm; Tues. and Fri. 2-6 pm; closed Sun.
Police Department	<i>Marc Portieri</i>	911 or 232-8500 (non-emergency)		24 hours, 7 days/week
Post Office	<i>Randy Bates</i>	232-8544		Lobby: 7 am-7 pm; 7 days/week; Window: Mon.-Fri. 9 am-4:30 pm; Sat. 9 am-12 noon
Sewer & Water Commission	<i>Michael Buffoni</i>	232-0309		
Town Accountant	<i>Elaine Markham</i>	232-0300	ext. 317	Leave Message for Inquiries
Town Clerk	<i>Ronni Barrett</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	Tues. & Thurs. 1:30-3:30 pm
Town Collector	<i>Kelli Bradbury</i>	232-0300	ext. 302	Tues. 1-5 pm; Wed. 7 am-12 pm; Thurs. 1-6 pm
Town Historian	<i>Robert Salerno</i>	232-4465		
Town Treasurer	<i>Benjamin Gelb</i>	232-0300	ext. 316	Tues. 9 am-4 pm
Transfer Station	<i>Wayne Cooper</i>	232-0307		Tues. & Thurs. 10 am-6 pm and Sat. 8 am-6 pm
Tree Warden	<i>Andrew Fudge</i>	212-9206		
Veterans Agency	<i>Tom Beasley</i>	528-1580		
Zoning Board of Appeals	<i>C. Randolph Thunfors</i>	232-0300	ext. 300	

Official Town Government Website: weststockbridge-ma.gov • Community and Business Website: visitweststockbridge.com



Hometown Tree Makes Good. Frank Landsberger kindly sent us this photo he took of "our" tree decked out in all its glory at Rockefeller Center in New York City last December. For Auld Lang Syne...



S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	

February Calendar of Events

2/2	Groundhog Day		
2/3	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
2/4	Council on Aging Craft Group meeting	9:30 am	Richmond Library History Room
2/4	Planning Board meeting	7 pm	Town Offices
2/5	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
2/6	Finance Committee	1 pm	Town Offices
2/9	Stockbridge Grange Takeout Dinner		See Community News for details
2/12	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
2/12	Friends of the Library meeting	3:30 pm	Community Room
2/13	Finance Committee	1 pm	Town Offices
2/14	Valentine's Day		
2/15	*** Deadline for the next Local Yokel ***		Send to info@thelocalyokel.org
2/15	WSHS Nature Series: Animal Romance	7 pm	Old Town Hall, 9 Main Street
2/17	Presidents' Day: Town Offices closed		
2/18	Select Board meeting	6 pm	Town Offices and on Zoom
2/18	Planning Board meeting	7 pm	Town Offices
2/19	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
2/26	Knitters Group	2-4 pm	Community Room
2/26	Finance Committee Public Hearing	6 pm	Town Offices
2/28	Ramadan begins at sunset		

Note: Town Offices (including Community Room and Library) are located at 21 State Line Road, West Stockbridge.