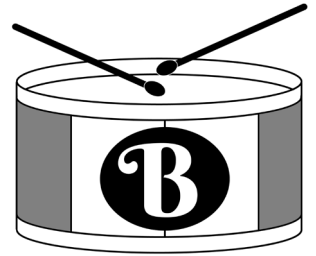


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2026



Solar/Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Update

By Kathy Dickinson

Since last summer, the Town of Becket has received Notices of Intent and permit applications for several proposed solar farms with BESSs. To date, four proposals have been submitted, with at least three currently under review. The projects are proposed on privately owned parcels that are leased or under contract with solar development companies. If all projects are approved and constructed, more than 100 acres of previously forested land could be converted to solar-array use, including removal of overhead tree canopy.



Solar Field, photo by Art Alpert

Becket's first large-scale solar array is located at Tanglewood Circle and is connected to the existing overhead electrical grid. Incentives available through the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) Program have led developers to include BESS equipment in current proposals. These containerized systems are designed to store electricity generated on site for later use during periods of higher demand. As this technology continues to evolve, residents have asked about potential local risks and benefits. At this time, aside from negotiated PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) agreements, the broader impacts for residents, including effects on individual energy costs, are not yet known.

Under Town bylaws, projects like these typically move to the Planning Board after completing Conservation Commission review and Zoning Board review. The Conservation Commission is continuing review of one application currently under its jurisdiction and posts related documents under the "Proposed Solar Installation Projects" heading on the Town website, but all projects are currently waiting for additional information from the applicants before advancing to the Zoning or Planning Board. Other boards and committees may provide comments during this process, and the Planning Board may approve projects with conditions or restrictions. Meeting notices are posted at least 48 hours in advance and include Zoom links for remote participation.

The Energy Committee will host an informational session on Saturday, February 7, from 10:00 am to noon, accessible via Zoom. The Committee currently provides FAQs and resources on energy efficiency, renewable energy, home solar systems, and power outage safety, and plans to add additional information related to solar and BESS projects. Residents are encouraged to attend the February 7th session for current information and updates.

For more details:

- Visit townofbecket.org to view calendars for Town Meetings and Community Events
- Scroll down the left side of the Town homepage and select "Subscribe to News" to receive agendas and/or minutes by email
- To view submissions and drawings provided to the Conservation Commission on their section of the Town website click on "Proposed Solar Installation Projects"



Solar Field, photo by Art Alpert

Becket Cultural Council Announces 2026 Grant Awards

By Cathy Terwedow


The Becket Cultural Council recently awarded \$10,456.75 in grants to local organizations and individuals for a wide range of arts, humanities, and science programming. All events will be held in Becket. Funds were provided by the Town of Becket and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Grant decisions were finalized on January 21st. The Council reviewed and discussed 46 applications totaling \$34,406; more than three times the amount the Council had in its budget. Sixteen grants were approved in amounts ranging from \$200 to \$2,000.

The Council makes granting decisions based, in part, on community surveys. Last year, 87 people responded. When asked which types of programming were most important, the top five responses were music, community-based programs, kids' and after-school programs, and educational programs for adults. The most popular source for learning about events was the Becket Beat.

The following is a list of the successful applicants and projects for 2026.

- Becket Arts Center for general programming
- Berkshire Arts Center (IS183, Inc.), for the ARTcentric after-school program at the Becket Washington School
- Becket Athenaeum for community programs and museum passes
- Becket Beat for student and local journalism
- Becket Washington School for BTG PLAYS, their 2025 Science in Motion Traveling Program, Jacob's Pillow Curriculum in Motion, and Interactive Science Exploration
- Becket Washington School PTO for STEAM Activities & Events, and their 2026 picnic
- Berkshire Music School, Inc. for Music for Young Minds: The Woodwind Quintet
- Community Recreation Association, Inc. for After School Programming
- Laura Lenski for First Steps Dance Discovery



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Letter from the Editors

The *Becket Beat* team is back from our break and ready to report on all things Becket in 2026. Before moving ahead, we pause to acknowledge the passing of two individuals who made lasting contributions to our community: Tom Lynch, a writer for the *Becket Beat*, and Bill Robinson, a longtime Becket resident and the subject of two *Becket Beat* articles.

Thomas Chapman Lynch, 79, died on September 27, 2025. A Massachusetts native, Tom lived a full and accomplished life. After graduating from Saint John's Seminary in Brighton in 1967, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, rising to the rank of Captain in the Airborne Rangers. Following his military service, Tom became Director of Safety for the Army in New England and later co-founded Lynch, Ryan & Associates, a workers' compensation consulting firm.

In retirement, Tom wrote for the *Becket Beat* and authored the Substack column Letters from the Berkshires, where he reflected on history, politics, and their relevance to contemporary life. The *Becket Beat* team will deeply miss Tom's wit, talent, and humility.

William F. Robinson, Sr., died on December 9, 2025, at the age of 100. A well-attended funeral was held at the Becket Federated Church on December 20, followed by a celebration of his life in the Parish Hall. Burial will take place in the North Becket Cemetery this spring.

Bill moved to Becket, MA in 1975 and was a beloved member of the community until his death. He served on the Becket Police Department for 10 years and was a deacon of the Becket Federated Church, where he served alongside his wife Catherine for nearly 30 years. He remained active in the congregation until his death.

Summer 2026 Employment Opportunities Town of Becket Parks and Recreation Committee

- Summer Park Counselor (2 positions)
- Town Beach Lifeguard (2 positions)
- Town Beach Gate Attendant (2 to 3 positions)

Send letters of interest to: Town of Becket, Parks & Rec. Committee, 557 Main Street, Becket, MA 01223

For complete job descriptions and requirements visit townofbecket.org and click on "Job/Volunteer Opportunities, Procurement" on the left sidebar.

 **Photo Gallery**

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Declining Enrollment Raises Serious Questions for BWS

By Cathy Terwedow

Thirty people crowded into the Becket Washington School (BWS) gym on January 14th to hear the prognosis for Becket Washington School's (BWS) future. With family sizes shrinking, BWS's student body has dropped to just 83 students, down from a high of 125 in 2018. Next year, BWS is projected to have only 68 students across all grades, pre-K to fifth.

School choice, in which families have the right to shop around for schools, also impacts enrollment and tends to hurt small, rural schools the most.

"We need rural advocacy!" said Dr. Michael Henault, Superintendent of Schools for the Central Berkshire Regional School District (CBRSD), who led the discussion. "It costs 20% more to educate kids in Becket than in Pittsfield. Write to Governor Healey to fully fund Rural Aid so that Chapter 70, the state's program to distribute state school aid equitably, can be calculated with proper regard to rural districts."

Currently, Becket has the biggest population of opt-out students in the district (24), losing students to private, parochial, and vocational choices, as well as to home schooling. Even geography plays a role, with parents considering it easier to travel to schools in Lee than to send their students to BWS and Nessacus Regional Middle School in Dalton.

Yet optimism reigned at the community forum. Parents, teachers, PTO members, town officials, district administrators, and local residents all spoke favorably about the school, noting particularly the benefits of its small size and sense of community.

Both Dr. Henault and Assistant Superintendent Aaron Robb know what it's like to lose a small rural school. "It's devastating to the community," said Aaron, whose own hometown no longer has its own school. "We chose to raise our family here because of the local schools in the Central Berkshire district."

Cody Mullaly, parent, agreed. "I live in Dalton and I have two students in BWS. This is a great school and BWS has some of the best teachers I've ever known. If my wife hadn't gone here, I wouldn't have known this school was here. Anything I can do to increase visibility and bring more students to BWS, I'm happy to do."

After giving a budget overview and discussing capital needs, Dr. Henault engaged the audience in possible solutions. One possibility is to make BWS a magnet school, with a specialty determined by the school community (such as nature-based learning, science, or the arts).

"We need to create a vision for BWS that attracts students and families," said Superintendent Henault. "Most people aren't aware of Becket and the fine reputation of its elementary school. Visibility and awareness, especially among kindergarten parents, will be key. Dalton residents need to know that BWS is only 15 minutes away."

"It's important for parents to know that there is a wait list for out-of-district students to get into Nessacus due to its strong reputation and successful student outcomes. Enrollment at Wahconah High School is also tightening. Yet no waiting list exists for students who attend BWS. They are guaranteed a spot. That should be a strong selling point."

For elementary-grade students, Craneville and Kittredge Elementary Schools, in Dalton and Hinsdale, respectively, draw from larger populations and might not be available alternatives for school choice. "Our outreach could say, 'We have five spaces for third grade. Sign up fast! Use BWS as your portal to get into Nessacus & Wahconah.'"

"We opened kindergarten registration early this year to project how many kids might really attend. Each year we rely on census data for our estimates, but the numbers can be wildly off," said Superintendent Henault. "If district students attended BWS and/or

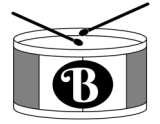


Becket residents and government officials listen intently to a presentation about the future of the Becket Washington Elementary School, photos by Art Alpert

Community Calendar February 2026

Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

see page 6
for more >>



BECKET ARTS CENTER

Tuesdays: Learn to Meditate: Tame the Wild Horses of Your Mind with Rosie Bleyer / 6-7 p.m. / \$15 per class (\$10 for members)
Thursdays: Improv for All with Ken & Paula / 6:30-8:30 p.m. / \$45 per class (discount for members)
Thursdays: Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$15 per class (discount for members)
Saturdays: Becket Freestyle Dance / 10:30am-12pm / \$15 per class (\$10 for members)
Sunday, February 1: Art Call Workshop for Artists / 10am-12pm / \$15 (free for members)
Monday, February 9, 23: Maker Mondays / 6:30-8pm / Free
Friday, February 20: Flannel Fundraiser with Rounders Revival / 7-9pm / \$15 (\$10 for members)

Up-to-date info at: becketartscenter.org/events

BECKET ATHENAEUM

Tuesdays: Baby & Toddler Playgroup / 10-11am / Free
Wednesdays: One-on-One Professional Tech Help / 2:30-4:30pm (by appointment) / Free
Saturdays: Storytime with Stay & Play / 10:30am-12:30pm / Free / Stay after Storytime for snacks and a chance for kids to play and caregivers to connect
Tuesday, February 3: Book Club: *Powerless* by Lauren Roberts / 1:30-3pm / Free
Monday, February 9: Cookbook Club: *Kachka: A Return to Russian Cooking* / 6-7:30pm / Free
Thursday, February 19: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free
Tuesday, February 24: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free
Tuesday, March 3: Book Club: *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin / 1:30-3pm / Free

Up-to-date info at: becketathenaeum.org/events

More Children's
Christmas Party
Photos by Art
Alpert online!



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Community Calendar February 2026

see page 5
 << for more



Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

TOWN GOVERNMENT

- Wednesday, February 4:** Board of Health / 5pm
- Wednesday, February 4, 18:** Select Board / 6pm
- Tuesday, February 10:** Finance Committee / 3pm
- Tuesday, February 10:** Historical Commission / 3pm
- Wednesday, February 11:** Planning Board Public Hearing / 6pm
- Tuesday, February 17:** Energy Committee / 5pm
- Wednesday, February 18:** Bylaw Review Comm / 3pm
- Tuesday, February 24:** Municipal Buildings Advisory Committee / 9am
- Tuesday, February 24:** Conservation Commission / 6pm
- Wednesday, February 25:** Planning Board / 6pm

Up-to-date info: www.townofbecket.org/calendar

Live and local music events:

- www.route8pub.com
- www.thedreamawaylodge.com/events
- www.facebook.com/PapaBobsentertainmenthall

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Mondays:** Osteo Yoga for Seniors / Washington Town Hall / 11am / Free
- Tuesdays:** Yoga for Seniors w/ Rima Sala / Washington Town Hall / 9am / Free
- Tuesdays & Thursdays:** Becket Senior Group / Becket Town Hall / 11am-2pm / Lunch and Bingo / Becket Town Hall / Lunch \$3
- Wednesdays:** Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 9am / \$3
- Saturdays, February 7, 21:** Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am
- Saturday, February 7:** Becket Energy Committee Info Session / 9:30am-12pm / Becket Town Hall
- Saturday, February 14:** Valentine's Day Cookie Extravaganza Fundraiser / 10am-2pm / Guild Hall, 21 YMCA Rd / To benefit Yoked Parish of Becket Community Emergency Outreach Program
- Tuesday, February 17:** Becket Washington Enrichment Day / 1-3pm / Becket Washington Elementary School / Free
- Tuesday, February 17:** Smartphones at a Glance - Digital Equity Tech Class / 2-3pm / Becket Town Hall / Free
- Thursday, February 19:** Smartphones at a Glance - Digital Equity Tech Class / 2-3pm / Washington Town Hall / Free

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The Vagabond Roadhouse and Hilltown Traditions

By Mark Hanford

The Vagabond Roadhouse was a cornerstone of the Hilltowns. Set back about fifty feet on the north side of Washington Mountain Road, the long, one-story building felt timeless. Inside, to the far left, was a pool room with a single table. To the right stretched a twenty-five-foot bar, backed by an open kitchen affectionately known as Alice's Dirty Open Kitchen. To the right of the bar stood a cigarette machine, and beside it pasted to the wall hung a six-foot rattlesnake skin, captured in nearby October Mountain Forest. Above the bar was a mounted fish with fur on it. After I got to know the owner, I asked about the furry fish. Without a hint of a smile, he replied, "That's how cold it gets up here."

To the left of the cigarette machine three steps led to the dance hall. Posted for all to see was a sign reading: No stags on dance night – unattached men were not welcome. Apparently, they caused trouble.

The owners, Jack and Sandy Newberry, were wonderful, kind people who always seemed ready to help others – especially a young kid from Pittsfield trying to build a place to live and raise a family. At the Vagabond, I met people from all walks of life, each one seemingly able to answer any question about Hilltown living. I was also introduced to two distinctly local forms of entertainment, both involving firearms: the annual turkey shoot and deer hunting season.

The turkey shoot took place in early fall in the field to the right of the bar. Being from Pittsfield and unfamiliar with such events, I asked Jack to explain. I imagined a group of men firing at some unfortunate turkey. I couldn't have been more wrong. Jack told me to stop by on Sunday at one o'clock and see for myself.

When I arrived the following Sunday, the parking lot was packed with pickup trucks and the bar was full. I grabbed a cold one and watched as, at one o'clock sharp, the crowd moved up the three steps into the dance hall. They formed a line in front of a small table where Jack's brother-in-law, Bill, sold spots in the shoot. At two dollars a shot, I bought one.

From there, the line moved out the back door. In the yard stood ten wooden posts, each with a white paper target and bullseye tacked to it. A rope line marked the firing line about fifty feet back. I didn't own a gun, but having recently finished my Navy service as a gunner's mate, I was comfortable handling weapons. I borrowed the bar shotgun, received a shell from Jack, and took my place.

When all shooters were ready, Jack gave the signal. The air filled with the sound of gunfire and lead shot. Afterward, we walked forward to collect our targets. Jack and Bill examined them carefully to find the pellet hole closest to the bullseye. The winner took home a frozen turkey. This process repeated ten times, and then the shoot was over – all while the drinks flowed freely. It was a tradition that, in hindsight, might be better left in the past.

Deer season ran from the last week of November through the first week of December. I never hunted and had no desire to, but I wouldn't miss the storytelling afterward. The bar would be packed with hunters swapping tales of clever whitetails that got away – or didn't. They discussed strategy in detail. Some hunters served as drivers, others as sitters. The sitters spread out in a line through the woods, weapons ready, while the drivers entered far away and moved steadily forward, pushing deer toward the waiting line. It was a family affair. Grandfathers taught grandsons; fathers taught sons. They passed down traditions, customs, and firearm safety, along with lessons about respect and cooperation. Hunters came from every walk of life—rich and poor, young and old. It was also a time to catch up on each other's lives, in an era before cell phones, when men didn't spend much time on the telephone. Often, the hunters referred to the "Indian mounds" as landmarks for organizing their lines. I never knew exactly what or where they were. When asked, Jack would simply say they had been there forever.

Years later, while serving as Fire Chief for Becket and Washington, I learned the truth. During a smoke and carbon monoxide detector inspection near an old hunting area, I noticed an unusually tall stone wall beside a home. Curious, I climbed over it. On the other side, stretching east to west, was a line of eight stone mounds. Some were dome-shaped piles of rocks carefully stacked on flat outcroppings; others were hollow, cave-like structures built into the ground. The place felt cathedral-like and deeply mystical. Research revealed that these mounds were most likely built by Native Americans over centuries. The Mohegan tribe inhabited the region, wintering near the Connecticut shoreline and summering in the Hilltowns to hunt whitetail deer and trap game. They returned to the same camps year after year, telling stories around campfires and teaching younger members their traditions. When someone told a story, they added a stone to the pile. The hollow mounds stored sacred objects and talismans meant to protect them.

It is striking how closely the traditions of the Mohegans mirrored – and perhaps informed – the local hunting culture of the 1970s. As the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

school-choice students came back, our numbers would be very healthy.”

“We have a great little school, with dedicated staff, and a strong sense of community and belonging. We want people to come to BWS and feel like they belong. Central Berkshire is one of the best districts in the county.”

“Shrinking enrollment is causing us to think outside the box to keep this gem of a school open,” said Dr. Barbara Craft-Reiss, CBRSD School Committee Member. The superintendent continued, “We are deeply committed to keeping BWS open. Can we get to 90 students in the next two years and save our school?”

Without a doubt, that was the clear goal and desire of everyone in attendance.

BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Valentine’s Day Cookie Extravaganza Fundraiser to Benefit Yoked Parish Community Emergency Outreach Program (CEOP) - Saturday, February 14, 10am-2pm

The Yoked Parish of Becket is holding a Valentine Cookie Fund Raiser (at Guild Hall, 21 YMCA Rd) to benefit the Yoked Parish of Becket Community Emergency Outreach Program. All donations will be used to help those in need in our community with fuel assistance, electrical and plumbing emergencies and other necessities.

February at the Becket Arts Center: Create, Inspire, Connect

This February, the Becket Arts Center invites you to explore creativity, connection, and community with a rich lineup of events for all ages. Kick off the month with the Art Call Workshop on Sunday, Feb. 1 — a welcoming session for artists of all levels looking to refine their work for juried shows. Find calm and focus in Learn To Meditate every Tuesday, or stretch and strengthen at Yoga with Rima Sala every Thursday— all part of our ongoing wellness offerings. For those who love movement and play, join Improv For All every Thursday and Becket Freestyle Dance every Saturday, and reconnect with fellow makers at Maker Mondays on Feb. 9 & 23.



Cap off the week with the cozy Flannel Fundraiser with Rounders Revival on Friday, Feb. 20, a winter evening of music and community support for the arts; we’ll also be collecting nonperishables for the Becket Food Pantry. Whether you’re curious about trying something new or looking to deepen your creative practice, February at BAC is full of meaningful ways to participate and belong. Learn more at becketartscenter.org/events.

Black History Month & Tech Support at the Library Plus Strategic Plan Announcement

In February, we will honor Black History Month at the Athenaeum with art activities and books inspired by the work of Black authors and illustrators. Art activities will be presented on Saturdays as part of our Storytime with Stay and Play but are open to all and will remain available throughout the week.



We are also proud to announce the completion of our 2026-2028 Strategic Plan. Thanks to the indispensable feedback via forums and surveys from our community, and the hard work of our trustees and staff, we are excited to bring new vision to the many facets of the Athenaeum that are already serving the community well. Check out the full plan at bwlibrary.org/plan and stay tuned as we turn this plan into action.

Lastly, the library is happy to be the host site for one-on-one tech support sessions on Wednesday afternoons from 2:30-4:30 thanks to a grant from the Massachusetts Broadband Institute. Schedule a free appointment with tech specialist Russ Jarowski at bwlibrary.org/techhelp.

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