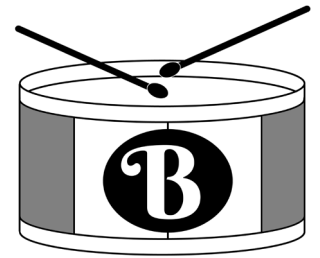


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected Vol. 5, No. 5, June 2026



Surprising Evening at the Two-Town Forum

By Kathy Baugh



Audience at the Forum, photo by Art Alpert

The Becket Washington Elementary School (BWS) auditorium was bursting with town pride and joy at the Two-Town Forum held on May 4th from 6 to 8 pm. With over 140 participants, what portended to be a humdrum event turned out to be a celebration of democracy, civic engagement and believe it or not, the town census!

As people meandered in, they were greeted by an array of inviting savory and sweet treats, compliments of The Route 8 Pub, The Neon Newt, The Becket Country Store, the Sherwood Shoppe, Papa Bob's (soon to be Jacob's Ladder Tavern) and local chef extraordinaire, Yvonne Matteson. In the background was live music by Dave Bacon and Simon Guthrie.

improvisational skit presented by the Becket Arts Players on the importance of filling out your town census and participating in direct democracy. What again, one would expect to be a bit on the dry side, resulted in boisterous laughter, singing and cheers. It turns out that the census is truly important – the numbers reported through the census inform what grants towns can apply for and the level of funding allocated by the State and Federal government. The skit stressed that one cannot in good conscience simultaneously complain about the state of our roads and ignore the census.

Next up was principal of BWS, Mary Kay McCloskey. As reported in last month's edition of the Beat, McCloskey is retiring after 26 years in the school system, including nine years as principal. She welcomed everyone to the school, announced that April West will be the new Principal, and extolled the virtues of BWS, which because it is student centric, has earned "A School of Excellence" rating from the State.

The official program kicked off with an



Mary Kay McCloskey, photo by Art Alpert



Paul Mark, Leigh Davis taking a question, photo by Art Alpert

Kathy Vsetecka and Linda Shaw, both associate pastors at the Yoked Parish, spoke about the Becket-Washington Food Pantry and the Community Emergency Outreach Program (CEOP). Founded in 2000, the two organizations have assisted countless residents with home food supplies, toiletries, hot meals at the church, and assistance with emergency needs such as electric/fuel bills, medical bills and a variety of other emergency situations.

Capping off the evening, the group heard from State Senator Paul Mark and State House Representative Leigh Davis. Senator Mark, of Becket, represents 57 towns in Western Massachusetts. Representative Davis, of Great Barrington, represents all of the 18 South County towns, including

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Letter from the Editors

It may seem that there aren't many opportunities for "feel good" stories these days. That's why at the *Becket Beat* we make an effort to find and report not just on day-to-day or Town news, but on some of the positive, uplifting and poignant moments our residents are experiencing throughout the course of their days here in Becket. As our Business Manager Adele Levine sometimes prods us, "aren't there any fun stories?"

So, who would have thought, for example, that a skit about the Town census would cause so much laughter and enjoyment? The organizers of the Two-Town Forum hoped about 60 or so Becket and Washington residents would attend the meeting. But over 140 showed up and informal feedback was overwhelmingly positive!

And how about the final sale in early May that we're reporting on this month of the 858-acre Palmer Brook Property to Mass Audubon? The Strassler family had owned and maintained the parcel for over 60 years and now rather than being broken up into smaller pieces or developed, Mass Audubon is committed to it becoming the Palmer Brook Wildlife Sanctuary. Now it's a legacy that has the potential to become a very special place for all of us.

Two-Town Forum, continued from page 1



Audience Improvisation, photo by Art Alpert

to make a difference. They talked about the importance of local politics – filling out the census, attending town meetings and participating in town elections. All of it is democracy in action, they emphasized, and should be celebrated, not ignored.

Surrounding the room were tables with representatives from the Towns of Becket and Washington from: BWS, the Becket Athenaeum (Becket and Washington's Community Library), the Becket Art Center of the Hilltowns, the Becket-Washington Food Pantry and CEOP and the Becket Washington Friends & Neighbors group (BWFAN) – each there to share their services and programs that attendees might not have been aware of. Since its inception in the Spring of 2025, BWFAN, a pro-democracy group, has been actively seeking ways to support their neighbors including leading many food drives, and organizing this Two-Town Forum. To learn more about BWFAN, go to www.bwfan.org. The group meets monthly and welcomes anyone interested to attend.

Becket and Washington.

Both Mark and Davis expressed their connection to the communities they represent and their passion for helping to elevate them. Recently, they both actively and successfully responded to the crises brought on by the exceedingly cold winter and the fuel shortages that resulted. Senator Mark has also earmarked \$250,000 towards sustainability of the BWS. Mark and Davis urged audience members to reach out to them if they saw a need in the community that had fallen short in the local budget. They both talked about their journeys into politics, relating that they are just ordinary people who cared about their own community and wanted



Music with Dave Bacon and Simon Guthrie, photo by Art Alpert




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May 9th 2026 Annual Town Election Results

Board of Health (3yr term) – Mary Canty was a write-in with 157 votes/Robert T. Ronzio had 31/8 blank votes

Finance Committee (3yr term) – Ellen Manley won another term with 169 votes/4 write-ins/23 blank votes

Select Board (3yr term) – Jeff Piemont won another term with 171 votes/1 write-in/24 blank votes

Moderator (3yr term) – Ethan Klepetar won another term with 177 votes/1 write-in/18 blank votes

Cemetery Commissioner (3yr term) – Dean Williams won another term with 171 votes/3 write-ins/22 blank votes

Planning Board (5yr term) – Natasha Loeffler won with 138 votes/25 write-ins/33 blank votes

Planning Board (3yr term) – Art Feltman was a write-in with 139 votes/57 blank votes

Town Clerk (3yr term) – Robin C. Mathiesen won another term with 175 votes/no write-ins/21 blank votes

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Annual Town Meeting (ATM) Generates Strong Turnout and Limited Debate

By Kathy Dickinson

Despite the rain, well over a hundred residents participated in the ATM on May 9th held at the Becket Washington School (BWS). In little more than two hours, registered voters considered, discussed, and voted on all 24 Articles included in the Warrant. Twenty-three articles passed either unanimously or by a simple majority; only one failed to pass.

Before getting into Warrant details, there were acknowledgments and thanks to several Town employees who have served the Town and are retiring this year: Barbara Craft-Reiss spoke on behalf of the BWS administration, recognizing Principal Mary Kay McCloskey. Selectman Chris Swindlehurst thanked Ken Bilodeau, Tax Collector and Christine Bleau, Treasurer. He additionally acknowledged and thanked all the volunteers who keep the Town running, with special note to the Becket Fire Department.

Among the approved articles, the most significant expenditure items were:

- Article 2 FY2027 Operating Budget, which at \$8,156,645 represents a 5.1% increase over FY 2026 and includes General Government, Public Safety, Education, Forestry, Highway Department, Transfer Station, Health and Human Services, Community Services and Benefits.
- Article 10 Ambulance Budget (for salaries and expenses), which at \$764,910 represents a 7.3% increase over FY 2026.
- Article 12 Purchase of Ambulance for \$608,000.

Also passed and worth noting:

- Articles 16 -18 related to Community Preservation Committee recommendations for \$22,000 to fund a dog park feasibility study; \$30,000 to support the replacement of the Becket Athenaeum roof; and a \$23,114 re-allocation of previously approved funds to build a small structure at the North Becket Village Park to house the copper dome from the original Becket Consolidated School.
- Article 13 Purchase of a Police Cruiser for \$103,570.

Failed to pass after lengthy discussion:

- Article 20 Local Option Meals Excise Tax of .75% of gross receipts of the vendor from the sale of restaurant meals. Even though 75% of towns in Berkshire County have adopted this tax, opposition was voiced from attendees involved in local food and beverage establishments as well as residents concerned with rising costs.

For residents unable to attend the meeting but interested in more details, ATM documents can be found on townofbecket.org (go to the Town Meetings Calendar and click on May 9th).

\$5 Million Sale Closes on Palmer Brook Property to Mass Audubon

By Marcia Parnell

On May 4th, Mass Audubon became the new owner of the Palmer Brook/Berkshire Fishing Club property with its \$5 million purchase from the Strassler family of the 858-acre site, including a 125-acre lake.

Sale closure follows an option to purchase agreement signed in August 2025, which allowed Mass Audubon time to raise the \$5 million sale price. Working with a coalition of conservation-oriented organizations, Mass Audubon received a commitment from the Commonwealth of MA's Landscape Partnership Grant Program for \$1.25 million and another \$1.25 million from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation. Additional funding has been contributed by the local Becket Land Trust, regional Berkshire National Resources Council and individual gifts and grants, with the remaining balance supplied by Mass Audubon's 30x30 Catalyst Fund.

Mass Audubon officials advise that the property – now formally named the Palmer Brook Wildlife Sanctuary – has long been a priority due to its size and location in a “conservation corridor,” anchored by the 16,500-acre October Mountain State Forest. Nearly all of the land is forested, which provides habitat for forest-dependent birds along with moose, bear, deer and other wildlife. The large tract of forest also acts as a natural climate solution by storing carbon and preventing it from entering the atmosphere.

The sale has closed but fundraising efforts are not over, explains Janet Curtis, Mass Audubon Associate Director of Philanthropy – Conservation. The new owners are continuing to raise funds with an expectation that bringing the site to its envisioned potential as a Sanctuary property will likely cost about \$2.5 million more and take at least two years.

Becky Cushing Gop, Mass Audubon Regional Director, who is also responsible for the Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in Lenox, advises a project of this magnitude requires a cross-functional team of Mass Audubon staff working together over the next six to

Community Calendar June 2026

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

see page 6
for more >>



BECKET ARTS CENTER

Thursdays: Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$15 per class (discount for members)

Saturday, June 6: A Dialogue Between Artists: Gregory Crewdson & Johnny Irion / 2-4pm / \$15

Saturday, June 6: Reception & Live Launch: Becket Stories Project / 4-6pm / Free

Saturdays, June 6, 13: Becket Moving Freestyle with Delsie Dunn / 10:30am-12pm / \$15 (discount for members)

Saturday, June 13: Berkshire LGBTQ+ Pride Art Exhibit Opening Reception / 2-4pm / Free

Saturday, June 13: Music Brings Communities Together: Wanda Houston Band / 5-7pm / Free - donations welcome (new location: North Becket Park)

Sunday, June 14: Eco-Printing with Plants / 10:30am-12:30pm / \$80 (discount for members)

Wednesday, June 17: Plein Air in Becket / 10am-1pm / \$10 (free for members)

Wednesday, June 17: W.I.P. Wednesday - sharing of works in progress / 7-8:30pm / Free

Saturday, June 20: Flower Power Garden Party / 2-5pm / \$25 (discount for members)

Wednesday, June 24 & July 1: Writing Better Fiction, Memoir, & Non-Fiction Class w/ Bob Reiss / 6-8pm / \$100

Saturday, June 27: Music Brings Communities Together: Criollo Clasico / 5-7pm / Free - donations welcome (new location: North Becket Park)

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

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Wednesdays: One-on-One Tech Support / 2:30-4:30pm / By appt: bwlibrary.org/techhelp / Free

Saturdays: Storytime with Stay & Play / 10:30am-12pm / Free / Stay after Storytime for snacks and a chance for kids to play and caregivers to connect!

2nd & 4th Saturdays: One-on-One Tech Support / 1-3pm / By appt: bwlibrary.org/techhelp / Free

Tuesday, June 2: Book Club: *There Are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafak / 1:30pm / Free

Tuesday, June 2: Be Proud, Be You: All Ages Art Making with the Becket Arts Center / drop in between 3 & 5pm / Free

Monday, June 8: Cookbook Club: *Good Things* by Samin Nosrat / 6-7:30pm / Free

Thursday, June 11: When the Road Narrows with local author Richard Sgaglio / 6-7pm / Free

Thursday, June 18: Digital Equity Class: Navigating Berkshire Health System's Online Resources / 1pm / Free

Thursday, June 18: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free

Tuesday, June 23: School's Out, Summer's On Party with children's musician Stacey Peasley / 11:30am / North Becket Village Park (Maple St) / Free

Tuesday, June 23 to Saturday, August 22: Summer Reading: Plant a Seed, Read / Free

Tuesday, June 23: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Saturday, June 27: Washington Family Fun Day / 10am-4pm / Washington Town Park

Saturday, July 4 & Sunday, July 5: Book & Bake Sale Fundraiser & Library Closed / 10am-4pm / By donation (cash or check)

Tuesday, July 7: Book Club: *James* by Percival Everett / 1:30pm / Free

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Swimming and Hiking Enthusiast? Consider Upper Goose Pond

By Susan Neul

Water, water everywhere but one of the most idyllic places to swim in Becket requires walking over I-90 to get there! Thanks to the same glacier that gave us our rock-filled soil, Becket is pocketed with ponds, but not all the Becket ponds are glacier derived. Some are creations of our large beaver population and some were formed by man-made dams. But despite the proliferation of ponds, very few have desirable public access for swimming enthusiasts seeking a more peaceful and unrestricted setting.

The outdoor aquatic enthusiast's choice in Becket is between swimming across Center Pond, towing a bright red buoy to keep power boats away, or taking a hike to Upper Goose Pond. The 1.7 mile one-way hike offers a huge, deliciously cool pond as its primary reward, but the walk itself is spectacular and a prize in itself. This is one of only a few places on its entire 2,198 miles where the Appalachian Trail (AT) passes over an interstate highway on a dedicated hiker overpass. Motorists



Photo by Art Alpert



Photo by Art Alpert

below pass under a large sign announcing "Appalachian Trail" and will enthusiastically beep their horns to waving hikers above them. If passing over a motorway doesn't fall into your list of peak outdoor experiences, be not alarmed. Very shortly traffic sounds disappear and the trail climbs steeply about a quarter mile through hemlock groves and then winds its way on flat ground through dense stands of mountain laurel and ferns until it heads downhill to a fork in the trail just above the lake. Both of the two options lead to spots with easy access for swimming. The left fork passes through a natural clearing under pines on the banks of the pond with logs to sit on for easy removal of boots and socks. The fork to the right leads to the large dock next to the AT cabin, which provides overnight shelter for through hikers. Sometimes there are other swimmers, but mostly not. Occasionally there is a canoe or small fishing boat on the pond that has made its way through the narrow passage between Upper and Lower Goose Ponds, but mostly there is just solitude and lovely cool water.

To hike the AT to Upper Goose Pond park at the Jacobs Ladder parking area on Route 20 near the Lee/Becket line. From the parking lot, walk along the shoulder on the south side of Route 20 following the signs for the AT. You'll go down some stairs where the wooded trail then heads toward I90. Follow the white rectangular trail markers (blazes), which are painted on trees along the entire route of the AT, to reach Upper Goose Pond.

Palmer Brook, continued from page 4

12 months to assess the site and develop priorities. For example, what is required to maintain or improve the existing lodge and dam? Where might an additional parking area make sense? What about hiking trails and access to the lake? Importantly, says Cushing Gop, at the same time the team will also engage a host of potential stakeholders from the local community and Berkshire County to determine potential demand, interests, needs and concerns across that broad audience so that the Sanctuary takes all viewpoints into consideration.

Another expectation, according to Cushing Gop, is that the Mass Audubon team will look for a few quick options to make some portions of the Sanctuary available to the public sooner rather than later, perhaps an area to sit with a broad view of the lake, and even a community day to share progress and show off the property. Said Cushing Gop, "This is an amazing property and we're overjoyed to be its next steward."

Now-former owner Alan Strassler acknowledged some emotion about the sale, but ultimately, "it's been a pleasure to share this space with so many people over the past 26 years the [Fishing] Club was open. And in the end, it's not really saying goodbye knowing it will be preserved for future generations with Audubon managing the space in a controlled way. I am looking forward to visiting the property in the future to keep my memories fresh. It will always be a very special place to our family."

For readers who would like to stay updated and engaged as the Sanctuary transformation takes shape, go to massaudubon.org/palmerbrook, where there is also an option to sign up for their newsletter and to donate.

Becket Quarry Closed Indefinitely

The Trustees of Reservations has indefinitely closed the Becket Quarry, including the parking area located at 456 Quarry Road in Becket. Although signage on the property and the Trustees website absolutely prohibits swimming, diving and climbing on the property, frequent violations led to injuries and even loss of life last summer. The Trustees advise that they will continue to steward the site as a conservation area but ask that the public not travel to Becket Quarry during this indefinite closure period.

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BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Becket Arts Center Offers a Full June Calendar

The Becket Arts Center has a busy June planned, with opportunities for residents to enjoy art, movement, music, writing, and community connection. Monthly highlights include “Be Proud, Be You!” Drop-in Art-Making on June 2, weekly Yoga with Rima Sala and Becket Moving Freestyle, and The Becket Stories Project reception on June 6, celebrating a new interactive archive and public story trail created with local voices.

The month also features the Berkshire LGBTQ+ Pride exhibition Amplifying Queer Creativity, with an opening reception on June 13, plus Music Brings Communities Together returns with Wanda Houston Band that evening at North Becket Park. Later offerings include Eco-Printing with Plants, Plein Air in Becket, W.I.P. Wednesday, the Flower Power Garden Party at Canterbury Farm, a two-part writing workshop with Bob Reiss, and a June 27 concert by Criollo Clasico.

Details and registration are available on the Becket Arts Center events calendar.

BECKET ARTS CENTER

Celebrate Pride, Local Author Reading, & Summer Reading at the Athenaeum

The Athenaeum and Becket Arts Center will come together on June 2nd at 3pm to kick-off Pride month with drop-in art-making and stories for all ages. We hope you'll join us! On June 11 at 6pm, we welcome Richard Sgaglio of Otis for a reading and discussion of his recent book, *When the Road Narrows*. On June 23 at 11:30am (the last day of school for those keeping track!), join us for School's Out, Summer's On - a picnic + popsicle party with a live performance by children's musician Stacey Peasley. The party will take place at the North Becket Pavilion across from the school and is open to all. We'll launch our Summer Reading program and share information about all of the family-friendly activities, events, and motivators we have in store to get everyone reading and staying connected over the summer. BYO picnic, popsicles provided by the library! Registration appreciated. With an eye on July, be sure to add our first Book & Bake Sale Fundraiser to your calendar: July 4 & 5, 10am-4pm!



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