

Shutesbury Emergency Management Team Meeting Minutes

Monday March 31, 2025

Members Present: Emergency Management Director (EMD) Leonard “Lenny” Czerwonka, Select Board (SB) Co-Chair Melissa Makepeace-O’Neil, Select Board (SB) Co-Chair Rita Farrell, Select Board Member Eric Stocker, Board of Health Member Norene Pease (remote participant), Lake Wyola (Red Moriarty Dam) Keeper Howard Kinder, Team Secretary Leslie Bracebridge, recording.

Guest Speaker: Phil Gilmore, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Franklin County Bureau of Forest Fire Control and Forestry. Topic: Massachusetts Firewise Program

Guests: Tom Seifert and Mark Rivers.

Meeting opened at 5:38 PM by EMD Leonard Czerwonka.

1. **Call to Order and Introductions:** EMD Czerwonka opened the meeting at 5:38 PM. Self-Introductions were made by all present. Agenda item #4 was addressed first due to guest speaker Phil Gilmore’s presence.
2. The **minutes of the February 24, 2025 meeting were reviewed, edited and approved:** Makepeace-O’Neil – Aye, Stocker – aye, Kinder – Aye, Czerwonka – aye, Farrell, Pease and Bracebridge abstained having not attended that meeting.
3. **Review of Old Business:** – No specific discussion, but generally referred to throughout the meeting.
4. **Phil Gilmore - Massachusetts Firewise Program:**
 - a. The Massachusetts Firewise Program is part of a federal Firewise Program originating in response to the major wildfires experienced in western United States. The program first showed up in Massachusetts about 20 years ago, in the more densely built out Cape and Island region with higher risks for major fires.
 - b. Last fall, when Massachusetts drought and fire conditions were extreme the Lake Wyola Association (LWA) contacted Phil concerning fire-safety in the densely built-out Lake Wyola neighborhoods.
 - c. Even though the fire danger levels have dropped, there is no guarantee of future fire risk conditions.
 - d. The main fire defense measures in Western Massachusetts are fire towers, continuously manned in dry weather to watch the broad regions for fires.
 - e. The purpose of the Firewise Program is to educate local property owners and community officials of ways to eliminate existing fire risks in neighborhoods and to develop response action plans ahead of fire events.
 - f. Phil offered to provide an overview of the Firewise Program for the (non-municipal) LWA. Members of the LWA, spoke of the Program at a (municipal) Lake Wyola Advisory Committee (LWAC) meeting causing the idea of including the entire town, so Phil was invited to attend this Emergency Management Team meeting to introduce the Firewise Program to determine the level of interest at the municipal level:
 - i. Participation in the program is voluntary on the part of each individual property owner.
 - ii. Trained Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Firewise Program staff visit participant properties to evaluate what short and long-term fire prevention measures can be taken. For example, eliminating brush near homes reduces the risk of fire to a particular home and/or the spread of fire from one home to another in neighborhoods, where homes are close to each other.
 - iii. Fire response actions, such as evacuation planning are also evaluated during a Firewise review.
 - iv. Gaining property-owner participation in fire prevention reduces the overall risk of fires occurring. Advance neighborhood fire response strategy planning helps Fire Departments’ responses to fires.

All Select Board members spoke positively about what they had heard and were behind making the Firewise Program available to all residents of Shutesbury:

1. Some of Shutesbury's roads, away from Lake Wyola also have houses relatively close together, where a shared interest in fire prevention would be recommended.
2. Phil gave an example of slopes creating a wild fire risk. Homes at the top of a slope are vulnerable to a fire below, especially under windy conditions and if the slope has dry brush on it, a fire can rapidly spread uphill. A Firewise evaluation would include looking at the combustible materials on the slope leading upward toward the house.
3. Phil said that Massachusetts Program Coordinator Alex Belote could do a Power Point Firewise Program presentation on Zoom at a future date. The immediate goals of the DCR forest fire unit are to get the fire towers fully staffed for the up-coming season. Phil will have Alex send possible presentation dates to the Select Board.

Select Board members discussed publicity, distribution of brochures, and a town-wide announcement of the Belote presentation opportunity. The presentation should also have an in-person, Town Hall option for those without access to Zoom. Further discussion included incorporating applicable parts of the program into the Community Emergency Management Plan. (CEMP)

5. **FFY 2024 EMPG (Emergency Management Preparedness Grant) – EMD Czerwonka:** Reimbursement documents have been submitted, and EMD Czerwonka will notify the Team when the reimbursement is received.
6. **Update on Lake Wyola (Red Moriarty) Dam Emergency Action Plan updates (EAP) – EMD Czerwonka:**
 - a. Contact information for Leverett and Shutesbury has been received.
 - b. EMD Czerwonka has updated the local names and numbers, with the exception of contact information for the new Town Administrator Hayley Bolton who begins work on Monday April 7. EMD Czerwonka will follow-up with Hayley for her best emergency contact number at the Tuesday, April 8 "Meet and Greet".
 - c. To a question raised about the impact of a failure of either the "MacAvoy Dam" or "Fiske Dam" in Wendell, Dam Keeper Kinder recollected from previous reviews, that neither would raise the Lake level enough to be of concern. EMD Czerwonka reported that he would be attending a meeting the next night and would bring back any further consideration of the Wendell dams' potential impact on Lake Wyola.
 - d. All Team members were asked to review the Plan, and get any corrections to EMD Czerwonka.
 - e. The Plan will be distributed electronically to Team members.
 - f. Once redacted of personal information, the plan will be made available to the public.
7. **Updated Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) – EMD Czerwonka:**
 - a. The most recent version of the CEMP was sent out with the agenda for member review.
 - b. The Elementary School is considered Shutesbury's emergency shelter.
 - c. EMD Czerwonka will get a generic Emergency Shelter Plan from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to add into the CEMP.
 - d. Emergency Shelters require Police and medical (nurse) presence.
 - e. EMD Czerwonka requested the Team to review the CEMP and send change recommendations to him.
8. **House Numbers: - EMD Czerwonka:**
 - a. Police Chief and Deputy Emergency Management Kristen Burgess was to be getting a list of house numbers from the Lake Wyola Association.
 - b. The Fire Fighters Association reports the cost to be \$12/sign, \$9/post.
 - i. The high-quality posts currently in use are likely more to purchase now.
 - ii. The cost for the hardware to attach the sign to the post has likely also increased.
 - c. Shutesbury has a street sign bylaw.
 - d. Code states house numbers should be attached to the house if the house is visible from the street.
 - e. Street signs are easier for emergency vehicle drivers to see when driving.
 - f. Due to the smaller frontage along some Lake Wyola roads, signposts could look more like "fenceposts." Code placement of house numbers on houses rather than at the end of the driveway may make more sense for those areas.

- g. A suggestion was made for EMD Czerwonka to contact the LWA President to request to be put on a meeting agenda to discuss E-911 street numbering options for homes in the Lake area.
- h. Some residents still use the numbers they used prior to the 1990's E-911 official street numbering.
- i. Volunteers could help put the posts up. Volunteers should be advised to adhere to the uniform post placement standards previously developed.
- j. A \$30 charge to install a street sign should cover the costs of materials; any excess revenue will go into the Firefighters Association Donation account.

9. Reports of Boards and Committees - Board of Health Representative Norene Pease:

- a. The Board of Health issues the permits for dealing with beavers.
- b. The box culvert (AKA Plympton Bridge) just west of Shore Dr. where Fiske Brook goes under Lakeview RD, is chronically re-blocked by beavers. Could the Highway Department be asked to keep an eye on it, and periodically remove the debris? A "beaver deceiver" is not recommended for this location due to private boat usage.
- c. Would a coyote decoy be helpful?
- d. EMD Czerwonka volunteered to discuss the problem with Highway Superintendent Grenier.
- e. Also, an old log raft upstream broke loose and a board from the raft is also blocking the culvert.
- f. The topic is on the April 8 Select Board Meeting agenda

10. **Topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting:** None.

11. **Next Meeting Date:** Monday, April 28, 2025, 5:30 PM, at Town Hall. A trial run with Zoom will be in use.

12. **Vote to adjourn at 6:45 PM:**

Respectfully submitted, as approved on April 28, 2025,

Leslie Bracebridge, Secretary

List of Documents used at the Meeting:

- 1. Emergency Management Team Meeting agenda for March 31, 2025.
- 2. Draft minutes of the February 24, 2025 meeting.