

Berkshire County Retirement Board Meeting
February 28, 2025

The meeting of the Berkshire County Retirement Board was called to order at 9:00am, in the Berkshire County Retirement Office, located at 29 Dunham Mall, Pittsfield, MA. Present at the meeting were Michael Ovitt, Chairman, Mark Bashara, Elected Member, Timothy Sorrell, Elected Member and Ericka Oleson, Advisory Board member. Beth Matson, Appointed member participated remotely. Thomas Gibson, and Gerry McDonough, Legal Counsel also participated remotely.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1.) Members of the public have the opportunity to address the Retirement Board.
Michael Ovitt: We have no public, just for the record.

Consent Agenda Detail:

MINUTES:

a.) The Board minutes of the regular meeting held January 29, 2025 to be signed and approved.

Minutes provided as an attachment to email

INVESTMENTS:

b.) The Board received from PRIT a statement of performance for January 2025. The PRIT Fund returned 1.49% for the month of January.

BANK STATEMENTS:

c.) The Board received the bank statements for Jan 2025 and the budget for February 2025.
Cash Books for January were sent to Board by email.

MONTHLY WARRANTS:

d.) The Board approved payment vouchers:

02-01-2025	\$103,096.01
02-02-2025	\$22,321.39
02-03-2025	\$17,847.84
02-04-2025	\$109,555.30
02-05-2025	\$1,794,115.86

REQUESTS FOR RETIREMENT:

e.) The Board approved the application for superannuation retirement from Mary Jo Barrett, CBRSD, Supervisor. The retirement will be effective 01/01/2025.

The Board approved the application for superannuation retirement from Karen Tonelli, Peru, Asst. Assessor. The retirement will be effective 2/28/2025.

MEMBER TRANSFERS OUT OF SYSTEM:

f.) The Board approved the notice of transfer of the account of Mackenzie Fenn, a member in SBRSD, to the Hampden County Retirement Board. The Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 3 years and 5 months of creditable service. The amount of the transfer is \$11,028.91.

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The Board approved the notice of transfer of the account of Rebecca Geary, a member in Lee, to the Pittsfield Retirement Board. The Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 3 months of creditable service. The amount of the transfer is \$842.86.

The Board approved the notice of transfer of the account of Elisa Paoloni, a member in MGRSD, to the Massachusetts Teacher's Retirement Board. The Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 3 years of creditable service. The amount of the transfer is \$6,016.84.

The Board approved the notice of transfer of the account of Andrew Provost, a member in Savoy, to the Hampshire County Retirement Board. The Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 10 months of creditable service. The amount of the transfer is \$4,432.787.

REQUEST FOR SERVICE BUYBACK:

g.) Aaron Goodell, a member in Cheshire, is eligible to buy back 4 months of prior creditable service as a police officer. If Mr. Goodell pays \$1,911.97 into the annuity savings fund by March 30, 2025, the board will grant 4 months of creditable service.

Kevin Leighton, a member in Gt. Barrington, is eligible to buy back 5 months of prior creditable service. If Mr. Leighton pays \$2,094.19 into the annuity savings fund by March 30, 2025, the board will grant 5 months of creditable service.

Asa Mervis, a member in Gt. Barrington, is eligible to buy back 2 months of prior creditable service. If Ms. Mervis pays \$684.05 into the annuity savings fund by March 30, 2025, the board will grant 2 months of creditable service.

REQUESTS FOR REFUNDS:

h.) The Board approved the applications for refunds from the following members: (Pending approval from Dept. of Revenue- child support division)

S. Abellie	BCRHA	\$25,681.58
J. Callahan	Clarksburg	\$17,555.84
A. Chaffee	BHRSD	\$1,622.84
J. Duquette	BCRHA	\$4,694.71
M. Lesage	Clarksburg	\$5,382.95
W. Lenox	Williamstown	\$2,067.44
S. Messer	Lanesborough	\$11,227.92
N. Miller	Becket	\$21,898.27
L. Neville	Clarksburg	\$1,847.86
M. Santana	Otis	\$10,978.89
M. Tobet	CBRSB	1,220.73

INJURY REPORTS:

i.) There was one injury reported in Sandisfield for the month of February.

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NEW MEMBER APPLICATIONS:

j.) The Board approved for membership in the Berkshire County Retirement System the following members:

8070	Raymond Duprea	Williamstown	3/4/2024	Police Officer	4
8071	Jay Green	Lenox	1/6/2025	Town Administrator	1
8072	Charles Graham	BHRSD	1/2/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8073	Ronald Boucher	Clarksburg	1/13/2025	Town Administrator	1
8074	Katy Schlaefer	Lee	1/21/2025	Permanent Substitute	1
8075	Ashley Gagne	Savoy	1/27/2025	Teacher Assistant	1
8076	Eammon Coughlin	Lenox	1/21/2025	Land Use Director	1
8077	Felicia Seeley	Lee	1/17/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8078	Joseph Dinofrio	Dalton	2/5/2025	Collector	1
8079	Ella Quinto	Clarksburg	1/5/2025	Teachers Assistant	1
8080	Denise Diaz-Araya	MGRSD	1/6/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8081	Sarah Harris	MGRSD	1/31/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8082	Alfonso Champion	CBRSD	2/10/2025	Assistant Cook	1
8083	George Bolotin	Lanesborough	2/8/2025	DPW Laborer	1
8084	Brandon Sommers	Lanesborough	2/10/2025	EMT	1
8085	Sandra Furey	CBRSD	2/10/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8086	Justin L'Hote	Washington	1/28/2025	Operator	1

RETIREMENT ALLOWANCE APPROVALS:

k.) The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Mary Jo Barrett, CBRSD, as of 1/01/2025. Annual pension amount is \$14,667.96.

3(8)c REIMBURSEMENTS:

l.) 1.) The Board received a letter from PERAC ordering the Berkshire County Retirement Board through the provisions of MGL Sec 3(8)(c) to reimburse the Teacher's Retirement Board \$3,647.34 a year toward the retirement allowance of Lisa Mendel.

PERAC CORRESPONDENCE:

m.) The Board received from PERAC the following memorandums:

#09/ 2005 Actuarial Data

Note: Copies of memorandums and letters given to each Board member

TRAVEL & EDUCATION APPROVALS:

n.) The Board approved the travel expense for Sheila LaBarbera to attend the Mendel DALA Appeal hearing on February 18, 2025 at DALA offices in Malden, MA.

MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE:

o.) -PERAC Pension News January 2025

Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Mark Bashara: I will second it.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, the vote was unanimous.

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NEW BUSINESS:

2.) Legal Update: Presented by Board Counsel Thomas Gibson

Mendel Hearing

Thomas Gibson: We had a hearing this past week or two in the Lisa Mendel case, Gerry why do not you update the Board on what happened at the DALA hearing.

Gerry McDonough: Lisa Mendel is the individual whose claim has morphed a little bit. She is short a few days of getting to the 34 years she needs for the teachers' Retirement Plus expanded retirement option and it's going to cost her several thousand dollars a year. The Teachers' Retirement Board worked with her to try to address it, and they were unable to. We went to a hearing. It was all about when did she actually start to work, when does she become a member, or when should she have been a member of the Berkshire County Retirement System. All the paperwork says she started on September 5, 1989, she claims that she was in there working on the Friday evening before the Labor Day weekend and then she came in and worked all day Saturday. She claims she was paid for it although there is no record of her having been paid for it.

We went through a hearing. The magistrate is very difficult sometimes and he is very anxious to make changes in the law. He seemed to be very sympathetic to her contention that she was at work on Friday evening and then Saturday. I do not know what the implications of that are but we have good solid legal arguments and factual arguments as well that we are preparing. There was some testimony that was unexpected and some claims made by the petitioner that don't seem to be consistent with the payroll records we have, so we're looking at that and trying to figure out what to do. I am waiting for a transcript of the hearing we will have to do a post-hearing brief, and we will keep you updated on what is going on.

Thomas Gibson: Thanks, Gerry. The magistrate sent in the transcripts late yesterday afternoon. It is unfortunate that this case is taking a life on its own. The Board's exposure here is a 3(8)c payment retroactive. With any retiree where Ms. Mendel did spend time in the retirement system, the Board is responsible for paying a proportion of her retirement allowance when she retires. She is looking to increase that retirement allowance significantly, and this is why this time is so important to her to qualify for that Retirement Plus program that Mass Teachers offers. That would then also increase the Board's liability on the 3(8)c if her retirement allowance were increased.

Its work that we wish we did not have to do in a case like this. Sometimes, you have to get out there and do the work and defend the Board's action. This case seemed from the outset to be a little bit ridiculous. We have the records, we have the member's enrollment form, and we have payroll records that indicate she started working on the Tuesday - after Labor Day. She claims she started working the Friday before. She has charted out a couple of witnesses who say, I remember her being there on the weekend, and that is about it. There was a payment made to her, a couple of payments on the payroll that she could not explain, but she claims its overtime and it is just a crazy case. We will keep the Board apprised as to the progress of that.

Larkin Remand

If I may report quickly on the Kevin Larkin ADR case. We are still waiting for Mr. Larkin to bring in some information. We have drafts of clarification requests to the medical panel

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prepared and we have a draft response of the Board to PERAC's remand. If Mr. Larkin does not bring the information in then we will send it out with what we have but we wanted to give him that opportunity to respond.

Sheila LaBarbera: He came in on Wednesday and took notes I was hoping that he is going to have it back today, but it would probably be early next week.

Timothy Gibson: So when I return on March 9th, we will put this thing together and get it shipped out to the medical panel for their opinion as PERAC has suggested. Any questions on Mr. Larkin?

DeGrenier ADR

Thomas Gibson: Have we received the medical panel notices yet of his appointments?

Sheila LaBarbera: We have not.

Buzzella ADR

Timothy Gibson: For my own records, was Bustin Buzzella approved by PERAC?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes, he was and he was on payroll in January. He has had the retro amount for the ADR paid out as of January of this year.

PTG

Timothy Gibson: The Board will recall last year they had gone back and forth between PTG and Bay State Pension as a vendor for the pension software and we spent a lot of time on that. Now PTG is suing Bay State as we expected that would happen. All of our clients who did transition to Bay State Pension have received subpoenas to provide documents, emails, contracts and proposals in that case. There was a motion to stay the deposition, which was allowed by the court until the court rules on an original motion to dismiss the complaint, which was filed by Bay State Pension. The Board is not involved in any of this thankfully but there are other retirement boards that are involved with this and they have to go through the time and expense of preparing a response to the depositions but I just thought the Board would be interested in knowing that that is going on right now.

Beth Matson: Can I interject for a second, Tom? I am involved in that. Attorney Sacco has made a motion to quash. I know that he bought us some time and perhaps their argument is everything they are asking for is in the possession of Bay State.

Thomas Gibson: While the court did quash the subpoena at the request of Bay State pending the determination on the general complaint itself. Mr. Sacco probably wants to go beyond that so that the Board does not have to do anything as far as producing documents. We are going to wait and see what happens with the court's allowing the deposition to go forward or not before, we proceed.

SFI

The Statement of Financial Interests due by May 1, 2025, for those board members who have not signed up and filed their SFI. The statement is on Prosper.

Open Meeting Law

Thomas Gibson: PERAC sent out a memo yesterday and we had mentioned this at the last board meeting that waiver of the Open Meeting Law, which expires on March 31, 2025.

Absent an extension by the legislature, the April board meeting will need to be conducted at the offices with a physical quorum present of the board members. That does not seem to

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have been an issue for Berkshire County, which customarily does meet in the office with a quorum present. In the event of unusual circumstances where, for example, only two board members would be able to appear at the office, the open meeting could not proceed because that waiver will be gone. The board members may recall that a couple of years ago, on the cusp of the expiration of the previous waiver, the legislature did step in at the last minute and extended it. PERAC believes that that is going to be the case as well this time around.

Ericka Oleson: What date last day?

Sheila LaBarbera: March 31, 2025.

Michael Ovitt: Tom, what likelihood are you hearing that they are trying to extend that?

Thomas Gibson: Well, they are trying to extend it. There has been a lot of push to get that done because public bodies are used to operating this way. The public seems to like it as well. There has been some pushback from some of the smaller communities who claim that this is an unfunded mandate by the state that requires them to go out and purchase technology to allow them to do this. The governor's bill that she submitted would allow this is, as one part of an omnibus bill would make it optional, so a town does not have to do it if they do not want to do it. This is the way of the world these days and even if it doesn't continue, boards will still be able to allow two members to participate remotely, vendors and members or anybody else with business before the Board could also participate remotely. We will keep the Board posted on the progress of that as soon as we hear anything.

Michael Ovitt: I believe it appeared to state that the chair had to be there and could not participate remotely?

Thomas Gibson: Well, the chair or the vice chair has to be present at that board meeting to conduct the meeting, so if you can't be there physically, then the vice chair would have to be there physically to conduct the meeting and you can then participate remotely as one of the two board members who can do so.

Michael Ovitt: Do we need to designate a vice chair?

Thomas Gibson: It might be a good idea to have a vice chair just in the event you are not around for whatever reason and somebody can step in and run this. I think that is a good idea to have especially if the Open Meeting Law waiver is not extended.

Michael Ovitt: We can deal with that next meeting.

Thomas Gibson: I have some bylaws I am happy to share. They are not anything complicated. We did this for a couple other boards just to have something in writing. The document says the Board will organize every year and appoint a chair and a vice chair and will conduct these meetings on a monthly basis. We believe that you may want to look at that and they might be helpful to you. You do not have to adopt it, but it might be helpful if you do.

Governor's critical shortage in a certain positions

Thomas Gibson: The governor's bill includes an item she put in last year as well. It did not get any traction that would be to allow a municipality to declare a critical shortage in a certain positions so that it can hire a retiree to provide those services without regard to the hours and earnings limitations that are set forth in Section 91. It would only be applicable to superannuated retirees and not disability retirees. During the pandemic, those restrictions were waived for retirees who returned to work in the public sector. This would make that a situation where if the decision was allowed to be designated a critical shortage, which we see existing now in many finance departments in municipalities, we've seen it in Middlesex

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County and I'm sure it's happening in Berkshire County as well, that they just can't hire and retain qualified employees. It is causing problems, and the ability to bring in a retiree to help is of immense value to the public and to the taxpayers. To put restrictions on that is also impeding the ability of the municipality to do its business. We are hoping that gets some light this year.

Beth Matson: Would that include directors as well for retirement boards?

Thomas Gibson: I did not see that language in there. A retirement system, of course, is not a municipality. Whether it's going to be broadly applied to any governmental unit not just municipalities, it is called a Municipal Empowerment Act, so it really is targeting the towns and cities, but by extension perhaps, by the time it gets through going through that legislature process who knows what's going to come out of that.

COLA

Thomas Gibson: The COLA vote, is that scheduled for a vote? Has notice been provided to the Advisory Council?

Sheila LaBarbera: No, not yet.

Thomas Gibson: We would have to give 30 days' notice to the Advisory Council before you can vote on a COLA. If you give notice in March, you will not be able to vote on that the March meeting. You will have to vote on it on the April meeting, keep an eye on that and not let it go too long because it has to be done before July 1, 2025.

Sheila LaBarbera: The Board votes that they would like to do the 3%, and then it goes to the Advisory Board for approval, yes?

Thomas Gibson: It is an agenda item, but you have to give notice to the Advisory Council 30 days in advance that the Board will have this on its agenda. If you give the notice next month, you can probably get it done in April if you want to do that or you can let it go to May or June.

Michael Ovitt: And what is the Advisory Council's role in that?

Thomas Gibson: They have no role in that. It's only when the Social Security COLA is less than 3%, and the Board is empowered to vote up to 3% of its base. Only in those circumstances do you need to provide notice to the Advisory Council that it is going to be on the agenda. They have no approval power. They just have to be made aware that this is going to be on the agenda. When the Social Security COLA is over 3% as it has been for the last several years, then there is no notice requirement to the Advisory Council. It is only when the Social Security COLA is less than 3%, and this year it is 2.1, so that is why you need to give notice to the Advisor Council.

Michael Ovitt: Do they need to have a meeting? We had difficulties getting a quorum for the Advisory Council.

Thomas Gibson: You do not need a quorum. There is nothing in the statute that says that the Advisory Council action is invalid because a quorum was not present, and in Middlesex, for example, we have 72 governmental units and we are lucky if we get 15 to show up at an Advisory Council meeting. That is a sign that the Advisory Council has a lot of trust and confidence and faith that the Board is doing the right job running the retirement system. Back in the day, we had a full house of the Advisory Council showing up every meeting criticizing our budget, criticizing our expenses, criticizing our operations. We do not have that anymore.

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Mendel 3(8)c

Michael Ovitt: There is an item on our Consent Agenda for a 3(8)c for Lisa Mendel. Because she is retired, receiving, and that is the old calculation. That is the correct calculation.

Sheila LaBarbera: That is the calculation, yes.

Michael Ovitt: So, that could change and be retro?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes.

Thomas Gibson: That is correct.

Michael Ovitt: I just noticed it.

Sheila LaBarbera: I do not think it will be that big of a difference, but it was recalculated anyways so if they send us a new one, we will recalculate it again.

WEP / GPO repeal

Thomas Gibson: The WEP and GPO repeal under the Social Security Fairness Act. Sheila and Beth have been receiving many calls from retirees on this particular issue. PERAC sent a memo out a while back about it and indicated in that memo that it might take up to a year to have those adjustments made. This week, Social Security sent out a memo saying, we are going to get it done in March. The retirees should see a lump sum payment in their direct deposits at the end of March. We have started to receive calls from members saying that Social Security is asking them for updated information regarding their retirement allowance because Social Security's records really are not up to date. I sent out an email to all my clients saying this is the latest from Social Security, I'm finding out that maybe Social Security isn't ready to make those adjustments yet for Massachusetts Retirees.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yesterday was the first day, we received two phone calls from retirees that needed their COLA update for '23 and '24. All of the others have said they have received notice that they are going to be paid.

Mark Bashara: The Mass Retirees sent out a statement that they have received information from some of their members and some of the deposits for the retro have already been made. They are discussing with some the teachers in Texas and these different places to find out what that has to do with that request of their COLA increases. The most important thing is apparently some deposits are being made into the people's accounts according to Mass Retirees.

Thomas Gibson: Well, that is a good sign. I do not understand the finances behind it, why the COLA increases would be of concern. If they are eliminating the WEP and GPO, what difference does it make what they receive and what COLA increases unless maybe they are looking to get more money into the hands of the retirees.

Gerry McDonough: Tom, the increase is for COLAs you got before January 1, 2024, so they are saying your state pension might have gone up and that may affect the WEP. That is my understanding. It will not affect anything after January 1, 2024, which is why they are looking for information from '23 or '22.

Michael Ovitt: Should that have already been provided?

Gerry McDonough: I would think so. I mean, they have access to all that information for our state pensions.

Beth Matson: I just think that the requests are coming from the retirees who are collecting on their spouse's benefit. It is not all retirees.

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Thomas Gibson: That might make sense why some are getting and some are not. Well, the good news is the money is flowing, and let us get them the information they need so that those collecting on their spouse's Social Security can get it.

Gerry McDonough: Well, I have to be because I was unaware that I was affected by the WEP. I always thought I should be but I didn't see anything in my Social Security website about being affected but then I get a letter saying I was affected by it and I would be getting something. I am excited about that. I might not be here next month.

Beth Matson: I have a question. Did you get an opportunity to look at that contract for the cybersecurity?

Thomas Gibson: The Bug busters contract?

Beth Matson: Yeah. Would that – should that have gone out for an RFP?

Thomas Gibson: Not necessarily. It is not required under 23B to have that process, so the Board has some discretion. We like to see some kind of quotes perhaps come in from other providers for unique service. You may have somebody who does that job very well and has done it for the public units, but there is no requirement for a 23B process to be applied to that.

Michael Ovitt: So, you have reviewed it, and everything is acceptable as written in the agreement?

Thomas Gibson: We made some tweaks to it. Bug busters is not a professional name, so we want to make sure there was a real company out there. I think they are trying to capitalize on the name Ghostbusters, and that is why they use Bug busters, but there are weirder names in the IT universe.

Michael Ovitt: So, I was looking we have a monthly estimate or a monthly quote of \$1080. Does that incorporate, I was looking at the compensation section and it talks about the client will receive two service hours each month based on the base package covering five desktops, laptops, and a server, but is that like a maintenance item? What are they going to do for two hours?

Sheila LaBarbera: That is for your call center if you got issues.

Jill Hersey: It is saying that two hours is included with that based on, I think, 15-minute increments.

Michael Ovitt: It could be zero if we do not have any issues.

Jill Hersey: Correct, but we are still paying.

Michael Ovitt: All right. We are receiving two service hours each month.

Mark Bashara: Well, what is your opinion do you foresee then that will be enough or too much? From past experience.

Sheila LaBarbera: Unfortunately, it does not roll up, which I was somewhat disappointed.

Michael Ovitt: Does it accumulate?

Sheila LaBarbera: It does not accumulate. I think it is enough. You know, the problem is you just never know what you are going to need for something.

Mark Bashara: I mean, could you ask them? Or did you ask if, because everything is negotiable, if possibly they could roll an extra hour over?

Sheila LaBarbera: I did ask them, yes. It was a no. I just do not know if they want the burden of maintaining it but I think it is also cost. That is why Ascentek is not in business anymore.

Mark Bashara: And what was it for –? So, if you used up to two hours, it goes you said in 15-minute increments, what is it for 15 minutes to charge?

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Mark Bashara: So, if we go over two and we used – you call them up and we used 2-1/2 hours, let's say, that's an extra half hour?–

Michael Ovitt: What is it? \$500?

Sheila LaBarbera: It is \$100 per hour.

Thomas Gibson: I think that's pretty much implied in the contract, and if there is an issue, we can always talk about it. If the Board is not happy with the agreement, if it does not work out the way they are looking at it, the Board can always terminate the agreement. It expires anyway by December 31, 2025. So, it's a good test period here to see how it works out, and if they are charging extra money and they're not going to be flexible and the Board is not happy for any reason, they can end this contract and go on to another provider.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, most Boards have something in place similar to this?

Thomas Gibson: We need cybersecurity it is a big issue and your budgets are being beefed up now for this. We have a managed service provider in Middlesex that we have a contract with. It is much more expensive than this I can tell you, and we use them for all sorts of reasons. We also have an outside contract that we use, CLA, CliftonLarsonAllen, to come in and evaluate our managed service providers to make sure that they are doing the job correctly. We have had issues at Middlesex with attacks and things of that nature. We have actually had some of our vendor checks that we sent out a few months ago were stolen outside of the post office where they were dropped off and were washed and cashed. We have recovered back some of the money. The bank is working on recovering about \$77,000. You cannot spend enough on security and issues. We're trying now to go entirely to electronic deposits and do away with checks, but it's so difficult no matter how much you try to do away completely with paper checks, but the more you can limit it, the better off the Board is. Cybersecurity is a big issue.

We have just signed up again for the EOTSS, the Executive Office of Technology Security. They have a program that you sign up for; it is a cybersecurity training for staff. We did it two years ago, and we are doing it again this year because we have new employees. There is so much phishing and scamming and fraudulent actions out there that you have to be able to demonstrate that you have taken enough steps to protect the system from these types of attacks and you do not want to get hooked up with any ransomware or things of that nature. This is a very important service and I think it is a wise idea for the Board to have it.

Mark Bashara: Sheila, do you think it is possible that – I do not know – to keep some feelers out there. I mean, obviously if we go with this, just in case we're not satisfied, you know, there might be – I know you looked already, but –

Sheila LaBarbera: I did.

Mark Bashara: Tom, can any of the ones out your way or a little further, since most of the computer stuff is done remotely anyway? I am not saying consider it for now, but should this not work out, we are not having to start from scratch, and then, you know, maybe we could look at a couple others for backup.

Thomas Gibson: Absolutely. I am more than willing to share that information that I have with Sheila so she can have it in her file. The company we use actually comes out of Taunton, which is in Bristol County. They are located about 80 miles physically from where we are, but as you said, Mark, most of its done electronically. There are some site visits, however, that are required when they come and look at our server or to replace equipment, set up computers, laptops, and stands, and things of that nature. It is a minimal amount of personal appearances, but there are some. We certainly will get some information over to Sheila on that.

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Sheila LaBarbera: Tom, the problem we have is that we only have three people in the office. Most of the MSP providers need 10. Ten is the breakeven point for security, so we have a couple providers here in the Berkshires that were not even interested because we do not have enough people. We are limited there, but certainly, we can, you know, if this does not work out, we can try to find somebody else.

Thomas Gibson: Yeah. It might be interesting to see who Pittsfield uses if they have an outside vendor for that.

Sheila LaBarbera: They have their own IT department.

Mark Bashara: Tom, if obviously, before you even send it they only do 10 or more, then there is no need as I said, we have something in our back that we may be able to use should this not work out. They could be wonderful, and that is great.

Thomas Gibson: Gloucester Retirement System has one that they use as well.

Michael Ovitt: And do they have a minimal response time?

Sheila LaBarbera: We do with Bug busters, and that was what Joel had suggested. With an MSP provider, you would really want to try to find somebody that is local.

Michael Ovitt: Is that in here though? That they have to be here within two hours or —?

Sheila LaBarbera: I think we got 24-hour coverage? I mean, we have a 24-hour line? I think he is aware of the need like when Brian's hard drive died; we had the warranty coverage for four hours, so they were here four hours.

Refund Question

Sheila LaBarbera: Tom, we have a member that had applied for a refund. The refund was going to be approved today at the board meeting. However, we just got deductions from them, and they were rehired in West Stockbridge? Are we still obligated or compelled to provide that refund? Should we be undoing it, redepositing, and not issuing any refund?

Thomas Gibson: Well, how much of a separation of service was there? When did they separate from service in the first unit?

Brian Shepard: She left last November, and she was just hired in this unit in February.

Thomas Gibson: I do not know how having knowledge of the fact that they now are enrolled in another system how you can give a refund and not transfer the money over.

Sheila LaBarbera: The money stays here; this is going to go from one town to another. She's still in Berkshire County.

Michael Ovitt: She is looking for the cash though.

Sheila LaBarbera: She is looking for the cash.

Thomas Gibson: The only way she can get the cash is if she separates from service from West Stockbridge.

Michael Ovitt: She did separate service, but now she has been hired somewhere else.

Sheila LaBarbera: The refund has already been processed. The check is on the desk. She is coming in to pick it up at noontime. You tell us what we do.

Thomas Gibson: Well, I say let's give her the check and if she wants to buyback that time make sure she understands that she is not going to be credited with any service that she had from her prior employment if she takes that check.

Michael Ovitt: And let her know that there is tax implications.

Brian Shepard: That is all in the refund form that she already signed.

Michael Ovitt: I would reiterate it and put it in writing that she is aware of it.

Thomas Gibson and Gerry McDonough left the meeting @ 9:43am

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- 3.) The Board will review and approve the 2024 Annual Financial Statement for the Berkshire County Retirement System. Prosper vote required.

Michael Ovitt: There is a Prosper vote required. Do we need a vote to approve that?

Sheila LaBarbera: I would vote to accept it. PERAC did suggest even though everything is on Prosper, we still have an original copy for some signatures that I will keep in the office. If you want to pass it around and sign it, I would appreciate it. After the meeting today, please vote in Prosper. Once all the votes are cast in Prosper, then their finance department will review and accept the statement.

Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to approve the 2024 Annual Financial Statement for the Berkshire County Retirement System.

Ericka Oleson: I will second that.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the 2024 Annual Financial Statement for the Berkshire County Retirement System as presented, the vote was unanimous.

- 4.) The Board will review and approve the cybersecurity contract with Bug Buster's/NOVA computers. Contract was reviewed and approved by legal counsel.

Michael Ovitt: So, on the agenda, there is no votes, but it has to review and approve the cybersecurity contract?

Sheila LaBarbera: You approved last month with the review and approval of legal counsel last month, but I did not have any signature.

Michael Ovitt: Right. It was pending review of counsel. Were there changes to it? Tom said he tweaked it.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes, he did. He asked for the stated rate for the hourly rate also the term of the contract and renewals.

Mark Bashara: I will make a motion to approve the cybersecurity contract with Bug busters.

Michael Ovitt: So, it is IT services as well.

Sheila LaBarbera: I think that maybe you should state your motion to say Bugbusters rather than NOVA.

Michael Ovitt: W9? So, the motion will be for Bugbusters.

Mark Bashara: Yes. I already said that.

Timothy Sorrell: I will second that.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the cybersecurity/IT contract with Bug Busters as presented, the vote was unanimous.

- 5.) The Board will review a proposal for Brian Shepard to be promoted to Assistant Director.

Michael Ovitt: If we can jump to Item Number 6. This may be relevant to Item Number 5, but Director's Update, review the workflow in the office. Item 5 is the Board will review a proposal for Brian Shepard to be promoted to assistant director.

Sheila LaBarbera: I gave you what we have come up with for a job description. We have put the statement of duties in there. Most of the other stuff is all general duties and we have talked about this before, but we are training everybody to do everything in the office. That does not change, but it just is one of those things where we are changing it to some more responsibilities if you will. If we look at across the state, all of the counties have assistant

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directors, 14 out of the 22 comparable retirement systems also have assistant directors, and I will just put it in my pitch. I think Brian has earned this consideration. His work ethic and his performance have been excellent and too as a retention tool to keep a very qualified staff member with this promotion and a little bit of financial incentive to retain him.

Timothy Sorrell: And I am going to say you did what we asked because I know we discussed this and we just wanted to make sure we had wording in there that said that in your absence, he is the next in charge. I know that was our discussion last time.

Michael Ovitt: We are also wondering what the difference of – what is going to change from – because of all the duties and responsibilities.

Sheila LaBarbera: Right. Well, I think it is more of really kind of taking more of a leadership role in the office, more decisions, perhaps regulating some of those things to Brian to make those decisions.

Michael Ovitt: And that would not be done now?

Sheila LaBarbera: No. I think that Brian and Jill both report to me, and I would like to give him a little bit more independence to do some things. That is all.

Mark Bashara: I am open to this, okay, in discussion. I just would like to get us get somebody hired. We are looking at replacing Jill. I would like to see that addressed and done with, but I am open to what you said doing something like this. I am not opposed to it, but I think we should do one thing at a time, and right now, you definitely need another person here. I would like to prioritize, do that, once we find someone, we have someone hired, you're, like, yup, they're on, they're doing the job, then that following meeting whenever that be, whether it's next month, then we discuss this and at that point I would assume it would give us time to either say yes, let's do it, or tweak whatever needs to be done to it or whatever else somebody else has for a suggestion.

Timothy Sorrell: My only argument to that is I think we need to designate a second-in-command before we start bringing in another body here. I mean, like we said, part of this discussion if I remember the last time was if we brought in somebody part-time, how are they going to know if Sheila is not around who'll they talk to, and talked about the fact that, well, Brian is here then you should be compensated for training this other person coming in the door. I thought that was part of our discussion last time, was it? Hey, he is going to be taking on the role of helping this person get adjusted for the new job and should be compensated with a title and salary.

Mark Bashara: When I say – maybe it did not come out right is that we hire whoever, okay? We have discussed it, we have interviewed. Whoever the person is, we say, yes, this is the person we want to hire and its official, and then the next step, that person is on, now we discuss this of an assistant director to do the thing. I do not think we are talking a long time by any means because we definitely want to hire someone as soon as we get a qualified person and then from there come back, you have already given us the information here, so I am not going to ask for – it is there. All right? I think that gives us the sense of we should be able to move I would say relatively quickly on it because there is not going to be a lot more to discuss on it. That is my view. I am just – I mean, Beth, you can have – do you –?

Beth Matson: Yeah, I do. I have a few thoughts. So, I do agree with you. I think there should be – it should be fully loaded with staff before you make any decisions on an assistant director, and I really strongly think that it should be advertised. I do not – you do not know what is out there. We have never advertised for an assistant director. I think there is quite

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possibly more experienced people out there, and that is my opinion on that. I think should be deferred until you get a third person in the office, so we know what we are dealing with.

Brian Shepard: May I ask something? Beth, you said somebody more experienced. Have you ever worked in this office with us? Do you know my experience?

Beth Matson: I do know your experience. I read your reviews, and I also –

Brian Shepard: Which are excellent.

Beth Matson: Yes, and I have dealt with you in a board meeting when you were not asked to speak and you were arguing with everyone.

Brian Shepard: No. I do not believe I was arguing. I was just setting up my own salary when you were talking down to us, and last year, you also said that me and Jill were not qualified enough to get an assistant director position, let alone, an executive director. I think Jill has put that to rest that the first one she was interviewed for she was hired as an executive director of a retirement system.

Beth Matson: And you are not Jill either.

Timothy Sorrell: If I can, Mr. Chairman. I just – I am sorry. No disrespect to the Board. I think we need to acknowledge the good help we have here and somehow reward them to stay. Otherwise, they are going to walk out the door.

Beth Matson: I think that there should be a fair and open process if you are going to hire an assistant director whose second-in-command to a county system.

Michael Ovitt: Well, let us get input from the Board members.

Timothy Sorrell: Can I just say, if we approve the assistant director, are we talking the salary today? –

Mark Bashara: That is what I am saying. We have so much going on. I know, in my view, the most important thing is to get another employee here. Then as soon as that is on, we go to this whether we – as I said. I made my point stated, so I am open to this, open to discussion. I am also open to what Beth said, but I think right now I want to just focus. I am not saying we table this and put it away and never address it or address it months from now.

Michael Ovitt: So, is there such a thing as the existing job description? Or is it, other than a few words, the same thing?

Sheila LaBarbera: All the body of it is the same. What I changed was the statement of duties and responsibilities. Communication, member service, accounting was just general.

Michael Ovitt: So, I guess I would like to see the changes – the exact changes on paper. I think I am hearing maybe we can table this for now and get a new employee on board and pursue it in the future.

Ericka Oleson: I would just like to throw out that I think we should consider it now seeing the applicants we got for the position we posted. I don't know that it's worth even advertising this position since we didn't get many qualified for the current one, and employee retention is really key nowadays when you have people who are doing the job. I do not know some of the prior history that Beth was referring to, but from the treasurer's side I do know that Brian plays a large part in working with the treasurers in the cities and towns, and he has gotten great reviews with all of them.

Timothy Sorrell: I support you on that.

Beth Matson: Well, thank you for your input on that, but as far as the advertisement going out, I think a coordinator and an assistant director are two very different positions, and I think it should be transparent. I just do not think appointing somebody because they are there or their prior work record reflects – you do not know who would apply for an assistant director position.

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Mark Bashara: Well, with a position like this, which definitely separates itself from that basic one, I guess, and even basic I don't mean that there's not a lot involved with it, if it was posted, I would think it would be very clear quickly from the applications to come in because this is a different tier of what the person needs to know. I would not think you would want an assistant director that you got to train him everything because then – am I correct? That defeats the whole point. But if it was posted, and you get the applications in, and we look at them, and – like I said, I would guess it would be pretty apparent quickly if somebody is really qualified or not, so we could look at those, all right, right away we're not going to waste our time with training an assistant director in the sense of everything that is already here, they should already know this. That would be put aside and then it would be quite apparent that at that point, if nobody came forward that was very qualified, they could basically walk in the door, and other than learning the logistics of a couple of things in the office, then we are right back to what I was saying. We have our new employee, we talk about this, we discuss it quite a bit, and we could, I would think, make the vote at that point on appointing Brian as the assistant director. At that point, we will have exhausted any search and we know this is who we have. I am not looking to prolong this. I am not, okay. To me, if it is another month or two, it is not the end of the world. I do not want to see this go on for six months, four months, three, anything like that. I want to do it.

Michael Ovitt: It was presented last month, and we were not prepared. We were not previewed on the name change. We have an office of two right now. And Jill working on Fridays, so. A police department of two people does not have a chief and a deputy chief and no –

Timothy Sorrell: But we are interviewing a third one today, right?

Mark Bashara: That is what I am saying. Get that in.

Michael Ovitt: Right.

Timothy Sorrell: If I can just for clarification just so I – not to paraphrase or put words in your mouth, would you be willing to support Brian's move to assistant director after we hire a new body hopefully today.

Mark Bashara: Well, that is what I am saying with what Beth brought up. I am not against if we advertise because I get it. It is better to go overboard than not with this. We are going to know right away by the applications. Either none of these people are even close or going to make it or there's going to be too much work involved to get them up to speed, so let's put the applications, nobody qualified, so now it defaults back to this because obviously we advertised, there's nobody qualified – when I say qualified, I'm talking ready to walk in the door and pretty much do the job other than as I said the logistics of it. Then that is where the rubber meets the road. We say, all right, Sheila says we had three applications; none were even close, now we are right back to here. At this point, the clarification, I think, Mike was asking of you, Sheila, will have been done, so I see no reason at that point where we don't say, all right, this is no the agenda, and make a vote, Brian for assistant director, and discuss salary because that's how I'm looking at it. As I said, I do not want this going off long-term, all right. I just want to see us get someone hired and then addressing your thing. Once that person is on and on board, she could post the position from today or not today but soon if the other members were in support of that, and then we go forward. Either we have someone – like I said, I am stating whoever applied for this I would want them to be almost ready to hit the ground running, not having to take them by the hand and lead them because that defeats the whole purpose. We already have someone here that can pretty much do the job, but as

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Beth said, I cannot disagree with that that they are two totally different positions. It would be like you mentioned police, okay, so if you put an application out there for a police officer, you are going to have a ton of people apply. If you put a position for police chief, it is going to be a whole different caliber of people that apply for the position. You are not going to probably have some guy with –

Timothy Sorrell: No, I've seen people come in and –

Mark Bashara: Well, I know, but I am talking in general.

Michael Ovitt: All right. We have our applicant waiting outside here. I guess I'd like to get all the questions and –

Mark Bashara: So, should we take a vote whether or not to put it out there?

Michael Ovitt: I would like to see us gather every possible question that we have. And we will take it up on the next meeting.

Brian Shepard: May I ask something?

Michael Ovitt: Yeah. So, is that acceptable to the Board?

Timothy Sorrell: Point of order. If I make a motion for Brian to be put in that position and it dies, can it ever be brought up again?

Michael Ovitt: Yes, it can be brought up.

Timothy Sorrell: I am going to make a motion probably only symbolic, but I am going to make a motion to make Brian given the position of assistant director.

Ericka Oleson: I will second that motion.

Michael Ovitt: All right. Discussion then – get back into discussion then. There was a salary figure mentioned last month that is not here.

Sheila LaBarbera: I did not put it.

Michael Ovitt: Pros, cons – I mean, I heard today that other systems have this structure, but I guess I would like to see that all presented to us to make a better decision on this.

Ericka Oleson: Like a salary survey? Is that what you are looking for?

Michael Ovitt: But we are talking about – Brian, what is that?

Brian Shepard: We have done the salary surveys. They did not go anywhere.

Michael Ovitt: Right, but –

Timothy Sorrell: Because they are so unique. I guess my motion is do we make the position today and then worry about the salary at the next meeting? Because I did not see it on the agenda for salary, but are we proper in doing it that way or –?

Mark Bashara: That comes right back to my point, what I said, let us just get a new person hired. Now, if you have a list of questions to bring at the next meeting, I think we should put them down now or discuss this so that we know, and then get this settled one way or the other, whether we advertise or not, whether we get somebody, so that as soon as that person is on, we're ready to roll with Brian or whoever.

Michael Ovitt: Do you want to communicate that to Sheila or me and we can finalize all the questions?

Sheila LaBarbera: That is what I was going to say. What I will do is I will send out an email with the job description again.

Michael Ovitt: Well, let me put those items together depending on the motion here.

Sheila LaBarbera: Right. I have two samples of assistant directors from comparable retirement systems.

Michael Ovitt: This is discussion regarding the motion. So, we have a motion. Do we have a second?

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Michael Ovitt: Yes. So, the motion – the discussion for the motion.

Mark Bashara: I mean, I do not know if this goes along with the motion. To me, the only question would be do we advertise or not? I am saying that is the only question I can think of that is out there. Otherwise, there's nothing else to discuss because we would, rather than narrowing this or salary, I think that should all be done at one time, discuss, all right, we're going to go with Brian, this is what we're doing for salary, or some superstar came in if we advertise. So, to me, the only open question now which I don't know if it goes along with this is do we advertise because if we don't, then the next time we discuss this, it should be settled.

Michael Ovitt: None of those items are coming into this vote. The vote is to give him the position or not to give him the position. The salary is not part of that. The comparison, all the other information is not part of that.

Mark Bashara: I got you. All right. That would come up separately. Okay. I got you. I do not have anything else to say because it would not go in line with this.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, the motion is to make the appointment to the position of assistant director.

Ericka Oleson: Yeah, promote him to assistant director.

Michael Ovitt: And the pay is not part of this right now.

Ericka Oleson: Well, I think if you are promoting somebody –

Michael Ovitt: Right, but that has not been discussed or debated.

Ericka Oleson: So, we are promoting just the description and not the pay?

Michael Ovitt: Well, that is what I am saying. There is a number of things that I think needs to be clarified before we do this. That is my opinion.

Mark Bashara: That is what I was saying.

Michael Ovitt: But the motion and the second are on the table. So, do you want to continue with the vote or do we want to clarify and get the salary and everything else part of this?

Timothy Sorrell: Well, and I understand what you guys are saying, but now that we know we'll get Brian a position then we can negotiate a salary for him rather than like you said we have some people that want to go outside and we bring in somebody with a Ph.D. or whatever if it were ever to happen, then, okay, yes, salary is going to be higher. We know Brian, we know what he is getting now, then the next time we can discuss, Brian, so what you are currently getting, now with this responsibility, this is what your raise is going to be. Do you agree with that?

Michael Ovitt: Or do you want to be prepared and do it all at once?

Mark Bashara: If we – right, because if we make an offer, all right, and it is not accepted, so now we have to advertise if he was not interested, so we're going backwards. That is what I am saying. I would like to see us –

Timothy Sorrell: This is like asking him if he is – we are giving you the position, are you interested in negotiating with us for your salary.

Michael Ovitt: I think it should have been part of this to begin with.

Mark Bashara: Well, he's here so, yeah, I mean if we would say – I'm not saying today, this is the assistant director position, we offer next month, and that's – it's all at one time.

Anyway, the vote is out there like you said. You made it, you seconded it, so it is in discussion. When discussion is over, I guess it comes to a vote at that point. Beth, do you have anything else?

Michael Ovitt: Any further discussion?

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A roll call vote was taken to promote Brian Shepard Assistant Director of the Berkshire County Retirement System. Michael Ovitt, Mark Bashara and Beth Matson opposed, Timothy Sorrell and Ericka Oleson in favor, motion loses.

Michael Ovitt: That motion is defeated, but what I would like to do is getting back to our points of the outstanding questions that we have. Would everyone get them to me within the week? And I can get Sheila to get everything that is presented.

Mark Bashara: My question is what she brought up. Do we advertise? That's really it because everything else is here, the expectations or what the duties are, and once we get that nailed in then I do agree that salary and the position should be one and the same, whether it's someone outside or whether it's Brian, so that he knows right off the bat, all right, we're offering it to you, and this is the salary.

Ericka Oleson: Yeah. You do not promote.

Michael Ovitt: Yeah.

Mark Bashara: So, that is my only question.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Mark Bashara: Do you have any questions?

Ericka Oleson: I will think about it.

Michael Ovitt: Think about it and get back to me within the week.

Ericka Oleson: Yeah.

Michael Ovitt: All right.

6.) Directors update: Review work flow in the office, notice of appointment of 5th member to Berkshire County Retirement Board, computer stations warranty Michael Ovitt: If we can jump to Item Number 6. This may be relevant to Item Number 5, but Director's Update, review the workflow in the office.

Computer Warranties

Sheila LaBarbera: I just wanted to update you on the computer stations; I tried to extend a warranty for at least another year. They expire on March 25, 2025, but they are not renewable as they are at the end of their useful life. I you want to do something with those computer stations after the warranty ends; I can always have Joel spec something out for us. We did appropriate some money and I just wanted you to know that after March 25th, there is no warranty.

Mark Bashara: These are what? The desks when you say the station? We have three of them?

Sheila LaBarbera: Three of the, yes. Actually, all of warranties are up now. The servers and the workstations are all up. The servers are from 2017.

Michael Ovitt: So, is that something Bugbusters would weigh in on?

Sheila LaBarbera: Actually, Bugbusters and Joel have been helping with the servers. We use the State buy so it is very easy for him to spec something out and get the cost to us.

Michael Ovitt: No, I mean, with our existing. Do we have a problem with that? We would just have to wait whether we want to replace or put the money into it.

Sheila LaBarbera: Correct.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, anything glaring right now? Any issues?

Sheila LaBarbera: No, but there was not an issue until three days before the other one stopped working. It is hard to say because you have some that will run forever. We have two

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stations back there. One of them is almost 30 years old, the other one is probably 25, and the stations themselves still work. They are useless because there is no power in them, but they still work.

Michael Ovitt: We are talking about the old payroll?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes

Mark Bashara: Do you have an idea on the turnaround time? Like if we did, you know, get new computers from getting them, ordering them, having them set up and up and running?

Sheila LaBarbera: They usually come pretty quick from Dell. It is only a couple of weeks.

Michael Ovitt: So, I mean, what is there that is 25 and 30 years old, is that compatible on a new operating system?

Sheila LaBarbera: No. That is why they are standalones.

Michael Ovitt: So, is there information on there that we need to –?

Sheila LaBarbera: It has already been transferred. We have what we call a virtual box.

Michael Ovitt: So, we don't need them then?

Sheila LaBarbera: We need one. We need the TACS but we do not need the old one. The virtual box for the system that we had back in 1985 is still there.

Michael Ovitt: Right. So, the data has been converted somewhere else? Where would that be then?

Sheila LaBarbera: Our desktop.

Michael Ovitt: And it is compatible with your current operating system?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes. You can access it. I do not want to say compatible because that is a different thing, but you can access all of the data through the desktop.

Michael Ovitt: And does it need to be printed? Does it need to be on a different platform?

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, it is on the only platform that it can be on because it is a DOS system, so you cannot convert it to anything else.

Michael Ovitt: Does it need to be printed?

Sheila LaBarbera: It was.

Michael Ovitt: Okay, so we have that.

Sheila LaBarbera: So, anybody that was old enough to have that old system before we converted in 2000, we actually made copies of their deduction history and an annuity card.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. I will talk to you later about a couple of things. All right.

Ericka Oleson: So, in the past, all of the servers and computers were all replaced at the same time?

Sheila LaBarbera: No. The servers are older than the desktops. I was able to get a couple of warranties for those. We are ready to do a server because these servers are actually running out of storage, what we will probably do is a Cloud and an on-site server. We are using two servers because one is the backup.

Mark Bashara: It is like mirrored? Is that – because I remember we did that at the station when we first got IMC in all our stuff?

Ericka Oleson: So, is there a plan to, like, replace one station a year or one server a year?

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, the servers were our plans for at some point this year. The desktops I had not really planned on that, but you know, as we go through this year, we will see how they are working. If one goes down, we might as well do all three because what it takes to reconfigure, we might as well just do it once.

Mark Bashara: The lap tops what kind of warranties do we have?

Sheila LaBarbera: I think these laptops have three, and I think there is a renewable after that. I will have to check and see.

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Michael Ovitt: So, this is a new one?

Sheila LaBarbera: Brand new.

Mark Bashara: And we have three laptops too, right?

Sheila LaBarbera: We have three laptops. We have the old ones. The old ones are not really worth anything because they just do not have the power to do anything.

Mark Bashara: And then is Joel or somebody who would go through to make sure everything is wiped off them if we get rid of them? Or are we just going to hold them on –

Sheila LaBarbera: Right now, they are just sitting in the backroom.

Michael Ovitt: So, we have three old laptops. Is all that information transferred to the new ones?

Sheila LaBarbera: There really is not any information on them.

Jill Hersey: Most just, log in to be able to access the desktops, so there was not any information that were actually being accessed.

Michael Ovitt: It was just a device to communicate.

Sheila LaBarbera: Correct.

Michael Ovitt: Would there be Microsoft on it?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes.

Michael Ovitt: Emails? I mean, you are using this for meetings. I think you said you primarily use this for board stuff, right? Okay. As opposed to your workstation?

Sheila LaBarbera: Correct.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Mark Bashara: Now, you were saying you have three years. Could you find out what the extended warranty to go past – you are saying there would be one to go past the three years?

Sheila LaBarbera: I would have to check and see what the warranty –

Mark Bashara: Okay.

Sheila LaBarbera: The laptops usually are not as long as the desktop.

Mark Bashara: Okay. The only reason I am asking is let us say they said, well, at the end of that three years, we'd extend it for another year, you know, something like that, then what's the cost because it might be cheaper to do that now than wait three years because everything goes up.

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, I do not think you want to buy in advance. What happens if, I do not know, something, like you lose it?

Mark Bashara: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They are not going to replace it.

Michael Ovitt: So, the laptops could be used for work at home. I think Brian –

Mark Bashara: Well, that was the original reason. If I recall, during COVID –

Sheila LaBarbera: The newer ones were good, right?

Brian Shepard: Yes.

Michael Ovitt: Right. The other part of it was going to the towns and doing the presentation?

Sheila LaBarbera: Correct.

5th Member Appointment

Sheila LaBarbera: We have an appointment the fifth member is up for reappointment in June. We have a policy from back in 2015 that you have to post it.

Michael Ovitt: PERAC requires it.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes. The posting I did edit the second page I just filled it in to bring it up to today's date because we have not done this since 2020. This is what I would use for right now. I would just put it out to PERAC and probably post it with the town treasurers. In the

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past, we did a public notice with The Berkshire Eagle. If you want to do that we could, but the data here I just filled those in because I just brought it forward to 2025. If you want to have applications, we received before or after whatever, just pick a date of what you want.

Michael Ovitt: So, the June 11th date –?

Sheila LaBarbera: I just picked a date.

Michael Ovitt: And when are you proposing to advertise for it?

Sheila LaBarbera: I would just put it out some time probably next month because it said that it would be four months before the position – four months before the term expires, so I would put it out probably sometime in March.

Michael Ovitt: So, what is the requirement?

Sheila LaBarbera: To post it. You should have a procedure for posting it publicly. That is your policy. That is what you approved.

Michael Ovitt: So, is it retrievable? Viewable?

Sheila LaBarbera: What is that?

Michael Ovitt: The process. The mandated process. What is PERAC's guideline?

Sheila LaBarbera: This is your policy.

Michael Ovitt: The Board policy? Or PERAC?

Sheila LaBarbera: This is the Board policy. You did this back on October 29, 2015, so this is the policy that you adopted.

Michael Ovitt: So, does PERAC tell us differently or –?

Sheila LaBarbera: I do not know if they tell you differently. I know that this process or procedure or policy was approved based on what PERAC had set for requests for putting out guidelines for this back in 2015.

Mark Bashara: So, if nothing has changed with PERAC, there would be no reason following the same procedure as we did last time?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes

Mark Bashara: I am guessing as long as nothing has changed through PERAC, and then there is no need to –

Sheila LaBarbera: I am not aware of anything. The question I had was where you want me to – what kind of posting do you want me to do. PERAC is free, so just put it out at the PERAC website. I can post it with the town clerks.

Jill Hersey: And our website.

Sheila LaBarbera: But at least, you know if you wanted anything that a public notice in Berkshire Eagle would be going out.

Mark Bashara: So, she would have to post it in March to go by our thing before the term expires.

Ericka Oleson: Is it worth it posting in The Eagle? Do you think it would be worth it posting in The Eagle? It is so expensive.

Sheila LaBarbera: We can do The Eagle. I could check.

Ericka Oleson: What about, like, BerkshireJobs?

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, that only works when people think it is a job.

Ericka Oleson: Oh, that is true.

Sheila LaBarbera: And so, what I would suggest though that you could do is you could look at Berkshire Eagle online because I think they have a section online for local boards. We used to have the Sunday paper. And so, we could do that. We already have a subscription with The Eagle, so I can call subscription and find out what they offer.

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Michael Ovitt: I guess having a link on our website would probably –
Sheila LaBarbera: Yes. I will have Jill do that.
Mark Bashara: So, there'll be a notice on the website, PERAC, and then possibly –
Sheila LaBarbera: I am going to send it out to the clerks too.
Michael Ovitt: And as far as the eligibility of who can –?
Sheila LaBarbera: This is more of eligibility of who cannot. They cannot be a member.
Michael Ovitt: Cannot be a member, right.
Sheila LaBarbera: They cannot have any association with any of the towns in Berkshire.
Michael Ovitt: Is that in here?
Timothy Sorrell: Yes, right down there. The last bullet.
Michael Ovitt: So, should not be an employee –?
Sheila LaBarbera: Should not be an employee –Or a retired official of the retirement system or any of its constituent governmental units.
Mark Bashara: Like you said, you do not want people thinking it is a job, apply, and just wasting a lot of your time.
Sheila LaBarbera: Yeah. I just do not know if those dates are good. You want to look at a calendar?
Michael Ovitt: Do you want to send us a draft? Or is this –?
Sheila LaBarbera: That is it.
Michael Ovitt: This is it right here?
Mark Bashara: So, it is just a matter of the date?
Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to keep the date as June 11th if that is what you want as a motion.
Mark Bashara: Well, if we can get it June 11th, then that June meeting we could discuss it. That would give a couple weeks. Actually, would it be better to even move it up a few days? Do you have a calendar?
Michael Ovitt: The notice is that it needs to go out four months prior. Is there any reason we cannot end it within 30 days? What is the idea of the deadline?
Ericka Oleson: In the past, about how many people apply?
Sheila LaBarbera: Maybe about four or five.
Michael Ovitt: We did interviews last time.
Mark Bashara: Yeah. June 11th is a Wednesday, I think, so do we want to just either do June 9th which is a Monday or the 13th, which is a Friday?
Michael Ovitt: I believe we are looking for a deadline for applications.
Sheila LaBarbera: Right. That is what I am saying. That is why I just picked that date.
Michael Ovitt: Can we do it April 1st potentially? Or do we have to give it the whole four months?
Sheila LaBarbera: I would put it out there and give it some time.
Timothy Sorrell: How about we split the difference and call it May?
Michael Ovitt: Right. So, what is our strategy with that? We need to interview, finalize,
Mark Bashara: We could do May 5th which is the first Monday in the month if that gives enough time to interview, discuss –
Michael Ovitt: Well, similar to hiring, there is going to be a deadline, there is going to be a review, there is going to be an interview and then a decision.
Mark Bashara: Right. And the position becomes official July 1st. So, if you did do it sometime in May, you would get the applications, we could, I guess, discuss the applications during the May meeting.

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Timothy Sorrell: Final interview.

Mark Bashara: We could do it in June and then we surely should be done three weeks to a month before the actual appointment.

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, the appointment ends on June 30th.

Mark Bashara: Right. Right. That is what I am saying. If we do it in May, it gives us basically two months if we keep it at the beginning of May.

Michael Ovitt: So, May 1st?

Mark Bashara: May 5th is the first Monday in May.

Michael Ovitt: Any business day, right? Do you want to go with May 1st?

Timothy Sorrell: Yes.

Michael Ovitt: Deadline for application, May 1st, and then we are going to –

Mark Bashara: I said the 5th, but 1st is fine too. Maybe it is easier for people to keep in their mind May 1st than May 5th.

Michael Ovitt: I am just wondering what the rationale is.

Mark Bashara: It will give us – do you have any input, Beth?

Beth Matson: I do not, but I think I should abstain.

Mark Bashara: Okay. So, I will make a motion we do May 1st. It keeps it simple. The beginning of the month.

Timothy Sorrell: I will second that motion.

Michael Ovitt: And that is just the deadline to apply. And then we're going to review and –

Mark Bashara: We can discuss it May's meeting. If we had questions or something for you to look into, you could do it. We could discuss this then in June and then have time to make the appointment. It gives us two full months basically, right?

Michael Ovitt: Okay. We have motion and a second.

Ericka Oleson: I just got a quick question first. So, is there an actual application? Or is it just a letter of interest?

Sheila LaBarbera: It is just usually a letter of interest. Then all we have to do is, once we get them is just to make sure that they are not in the system.

Michael Ovitt: So, the Wednesday, June 11th is going to be changed to May 1st, 3 p.m.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the application date of May 1, 2025 for the 5th member appointed position of the Berkshire County Retirement Board. The vote was unanimous. Beth Matson, abstained.

Workflow office

Sheila LaBarbera: You wanted to know what we were not doing and what was not being done here in the office. We are not doing any seminars. We are mailing welcome letters.

Michael Ovitt: Do you have that in writing?

Sheila LaBarbera: I just made some notes; I will give you a copy if you want.

Michael Ovitt: Yeah, maybe send that to the board members.

Sheila LaBarbera: Sure. There is minimal assistance to new members. We are giving them the guides, we are referring them to the ESS portal, but by not having all these seminars, we are not really reaching them. We just really do not have time to assist the treasurers and the payroll clerks, which includes the deduction portal, the insurance portal. Many of these towns have new personnel that require a lot of assistance. Once they get it, they seem to be doing well. We are doing that remotely and we have had some real bumps in the road with

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one particular unit. I think we finally got it straightened out, but they need a little bit more assistance that we are unable to provide because we just do not have time.

Michael Ovitt: All right. I guess, maybe send that out to us. As far as Jill. Jill is here today. How come you are not working now? Is there work ready? Prepared?

Sheila LaBarbera: For her when she is on a Friday? Yes.

Michael Ovitt: So, it is a matter of you are just coming in and we are loading everything up on you to crank it out?

Jill Hersey: Yes

Sheila LaBarbera: Brian and I have been able to kind of put things in a pile and say, not a priority today; we can do this on Friday. Jill can do it while she is here like paying the bills. We pay the bills on Friday.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, Jill is going to – you are going to continue? That is working out for you?

Jill Hersey: Yes

Michael Ovitt: Okay. All right. Workflow you are going to send that out to us.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes

Michael Ovitt: Notice of the appointment, computer stations warranty. We are good with that. Therefore, Item 6 is done.

7.) Interview applicants for open position in the retirement office.

Martha Read- final interview

Sheila LaBarbera: So, the first person that we have on the agenda today is Martha Read.

Martha Read: Hi.

Michael Ovitt: My name is Michael Ovitt.

Martha Read: Hi, Mike.

Mark Bashara: Are we still recording?

Michael Ovitt: This is part of the meeting.

Michael Ovitt: Do we have any restriction on questions or open session?

Sheila LaBarbera: No. It is a final interview.

Timothy Sorrell: We just have one page.

Sheila LaBarbera: We just have one page. Hi, Martha, how are you?

Michael Ovitt: So, welcome to our meeting.

Martha Read: Thank you.

Mark Bashara: Thank you for being patient.

Michael Ovitt: So, you have met with Sheila.

Martha Read: I have.

Michael Ovitt: You have done some preliminary interview and references and you are here to meet the Board and maybe ask a few questions or you can ask us questions and we will probably have a few questions for you.

Martha Read: Okay.

Sheila LaBarbera: Sure. So, Martha comes to us from the Barrington Stage Company. That is where she worked from 2017 until just recently; you can see from her resume she has a background in accounting. We had a nice interview about a week and a half ago. We talked a little bit about the retirement system. Your brother, Fred?

Martha Read: My father.

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Sheila LaBarbera: Your father, I am sorry, Fred. Fred Read was one of my pensioners. So we talked a little bit about retirement. She is here today to talk to you a little bit about her experience.

Michael Ovitt: So, that leads right into – I will ask the first question. Obviously, there was a How did you hear about the job? And what is your interest and what is your knowledge about the retirement system?

Martha Read: It was advertised on Indeed. I sent my resume in because, of course, it started with finance, accounting, and numbers, and that is me all over, but it also added that you would be dealing with people. I like to be around people also, so I do not like to be that cubicle count of accountant but definitely someone who can talk to people and be out in the community talking with people. I was a single mom for years, so I also bartended and did a lot of retail and restaurants, so I got along with people very well at night. But my main passion is figures, strategic thinking. I am organized and I kind of go on stress.

Michael Ovitt: Do you enjoy that? Do you thrive on that?

Martha Read: I do.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, you are in the right place.

Michael Ovitt: And you are – it is a public meeting and potentially – so, are you currently employed with them?

Martha Read: No. I actually left in August. I did not get a chance to redo my resume because my home computer is actually from Barrington also, but I am working at the Goodwill helping them out with their accounting, setting things up for them, and getting them more in routines and things like that. But with Barrington, I was there – that would have been my eighth season. I was on-call 24/7, and so I decided that I needed more of a work-life balance. I would be called at three in the morning to approve an MX charge for a costume, so it was a lot. And on the weekends, if I was not doing accounting, I was doing house management over at the theater or bartending or helping them out with scanning tickets even. But as far as accounting, I was the only accountant for them, and I have heard lately that most of the nonprofit theaters in the area at least have two or three. Since I left, they hired two to replace me. I did all of their – everything you can think of for finance. I did payroll. I did benefits. I did work comp. I also vended budgets and actual to two budgets. I reported to the Board. I sat it on the Finance Board, and I also sat in on the Facilities Board because part of the tickets – each ticket would go towards making sure that our facilities kept up, and so that became part of what I would look into also to make sure that they weren't overspending that account with redoing buildings and things. I did the P&L, the balance sheet, checks. I signed checks up to \$500, but then after that, the general manager and I would sign checks. I also did the audit annually, meaning I would go on the portal; I would do everything that the auditor needed, and then the auditor would come in and do the checking and balances and then that would be it. So, I did everything, and then insurance, of course, insurance, liability for the buildings. I kept up on mostly everything that has to do, and I was not beneath somebody coming in to ask me for a light bulb or someone coming in to ask me if they could spend some money. Most of them come in all the time in my office. We went from 22 year-round people to almost 250 in the summer.

Michael Ovitt: Right. And was your – did you work in Sheffield years ago out of the school or was that –?

Martha Read: No, I did not, no. Eight years would have been up here in this area. Actually, I came, I think, two weeks after they moved into the North Street building.

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Michael Ovitt: Okay. I believe they operated out of the school in Sheffield. But that does not necessarily mean that is where they were accounting everything.

Martha Read: Everything is up here. They have five buildings in the area. one being their production shop which is out on Merrill Road, the two theaters with the cabaret underneath one of the theaters, and they owned a house for the staff and then in the summertime we would also do rentals which we rented several properties in the area basically bringing 56,000 people to Pittsfield.

Michael Ovitt: And did you have helpers? Did you have a helper or assistance or –?

Martha Read: I did not.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, just briefly, if you can tell us what you understand about the retirement system. You had a family member that was –

Martha Read: Yes. So, my mother worked for the Lenox School System for the Lenox superintendent. That is where I went to school. I also grew up in Lenox. And so, she worked for them for a long time and when she passed away – she was only 49 and she passed away, and then my dad was able to get benefits from her retirement. And then my dad three years ago passed away, but he had Parkinson's before that, so I would help him out with his retirement. He also had my sister who was only 11 years old when my mom passed, so I understood that there were benefits for her as well. That is all I know about just retirement and benefits from the city.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. So, people have social securities and then 401(k)s, and this is a defined benefit system that most municipal employees, teachers are involved with.

Martha Read: Right.

Michael Ovitt: Sorry to take up all the questions.

Ericka Oleson: No problem. As somebody who also thrives on stress, I understand completely where you come from for that. So, I am wondering if you could share an example of a time when your attention to detail prevented a potential issue in the financial world.

Martha Read: Prevented an issue. Well, every month I would definitely be watching the budget to actual. I would report to my general manager earlier than the end of the month and we reported to the Board if there was anything going over or if there is anything way under because sometimes way under means something too. I always was keen watching that constantly on a daily basis. So, that is what I guess prevented any kind of issue.

Ericka Oleson: Yeah, that is great. Like you said patterns over or under.

Martha Read: Yes.

Ericka Oleson: Yes. Constantly watching numbers.

Timothy Sorrell: I have nothing.

Mark Bashara: Beth, do you have something? I have a question, but I figure Beth is on the screen there.

Beth Matson: Well, while we are on it, I am going to take my turn when I can. What would you consider your greatest professional accomplishment?

Martha Read: During COVID, the arts definitely suffered, and there was a grant called the SVG, which was the Shuttered Venue Grant. There was the PPP, which I think many people were able to get the PPP too, and then there was one for payroll. So, I was the only one in the office during COVID. I worked in three floors on North Street all by myself, and I ended up writing the grants for all of those and I brought in \$3 million. So, I think that was my best accomplishment most recently for sure.

Michael Ovitt: That is great.

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Martha Read: Oh, and I was seventh in the country. In writing those grants. I also spoke to the government out of all the theaters in the world, even Broadway.

Beth Matson: That is quite an accomplishment, thank you.

Martha Read: Thank you.

Mark Bashara: Are you all set, Beth? I am okay. So, I am Mark.

Martha Read: Hi, Mark.

Mark Bashara: My question is – one of my questions is what brought you to look at this position? Is it more of a necessity because you needed a job? Or is it just something because you maybe want to make a career change that kind of lines up with what you have been doing as far as financial?

Martha Read: I think what brought me here was obviously I do need a job, but when I was talking to Sheila, it did seem like a fit into a more work-life balance where I wouldn't have to be on-call all night long or all weekend long, so that, but also mostly the numbers, the accounting factors, just learning a new system, being able to help out and support wherever I could, and of course, being able to talk to people who are retiring and probably need support.

Mark Bashara: You know, you seem always very happy too.

Martha Read: Yes, I am. I approach everything kind of with a big giant smile or giggle, and I get along with almost everybody that I know of, and so it kind of made sense for me to do that.

Mark Bashara: Okay, well, nobody can totally predict the future. We are looking for people. This job has excellent benefits, security, pension; I could go on and on. Do you see yourself, like I said, I know nobody can completely predict the future, but do you see yourself wanting to learn and stay long-term? We really want to try to not have transient, someone's here for a year or two whatever.

Martha Read: Yes. I definitely want to stay like I did with Barrington for the eight years. If they had not – the founding director and the general manager retired two years ago, and they have gone through five different managing directors since then. So, it was really hard the last couple of years. I think I would have stayed on even longer, just though it started to wear a little bit being, like I said, on-call all the time, but I definitely want to stay in one spot for a long, long time. Unfortunately, some of my other jobs, people, they close, like Green River Lumber; I was only there a few years when they closed down. So, it's things like that that have happened in the past, but when I was – my first job I stayed there for, like, fourteen years which was doing Willowood Nursing Homes. I did a thousand employees' payroll by hand every day.

Mark Bashara: Well, we have some good systems in now over the years, so you are coming in at a good time. Several years ago, it might have been a different story, but you are coming in at a good time. You mentioned about you strive on stress and keeping busy.

Martha Read: Yes.

Mark Bashara: This job has – you will always be learning new things. And, as I said, you are working with retirees for the vast majority of the time. You are going to be dealing with people who are very happy but are also going to be very dependent upon your knowledge, which would come in time. And how you interact with them. One more question I just want to ask. What is your interpretation of integrity? Because what we are dealing with here is people's retirements.

Martha Read: Confidentiality is huge for me, and integrity, everything stays inside of me. I do not let anyone know anything even if it was their son or daughter unless they had permission of sorts. Yes, confidentiality has always played a big role in the businesses that I

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have done, and what I have done over the years especially with payroll, doing payroll for a thousand employees, and your wife calls or something, you cannot talk about anything to anybody.

Mark Bashara: So, what do we have? Like, maybe close to 900 retirees and maybe another 1000 active members?

Sheila LaBarbera: We have 950 retirees and then we have almost 1700 active.

Mark Bashara: Okay. So, that is how many people information, which is very privileged and private, so I am glad to hear that – and you are open to learning because you said you are not – you are looking for something steadier. Well, this is usually Monday through Friday, weekends, holidays, not that something could not come up, but typically, that is what it is, and that is a good fit for you?

Martha Read: Yes, definitely. And I would be willing if something did come up to stay for a little while obviously. And I have lived in this area all my life and planning to stay here.

Mark Bashara: Well, thank you. Appreciate it.

Michael Ovitt: Any questions for the Board?

Martha Read: No, not really.

Sheila LaBarbera: We had a long discussion when she was here.

Michael Ovitt: Any questions from your meeting with Sheila? Any clarifications or questions for us?

Martha Read: No. None at all.

Mark Bashara: And actually, we have two current retirees, Tim and myself, are retirees of the system. It was a long road there.

Timothy Sorrell: Yes, it was.

Martha Read: And Tim knows me.

Timothy Sorrell: I know Martha well.

Mark Bashara: And we will not hold that against you. I want to make that clear for the record.

Timothy Sorrell: She used to live down the street from me when I was growing up. For a few years.

Mark Bashara: All right.

Ericka Oleson: Small world.

Martha Read: Yes, and he went to school with my brother, but you were –

Timothy Sorrell: Jimmy was a year ahead of me, yes. But we took driver's ed. together.

Martha Read: Okay.

Mark Bashara: And we will not talk about – I am not putting him on the road and drive me.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Martha Read: I think you are calling references.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes. I have the three references. They all called in, and all the references have been very, very good.

Martha Read: Yes. Even the founder of the stage wanted to make sure I put her down as my reference. She was there for thirty years.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Martha Read: Thank you so much.

Timothy Sorrell: Thank you.

Michael Ovitt: We will be in touch.

Martha Read: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Sheila LaBarbera: Thank you. Thanks for waiting, for your patience.

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Martha Read: No problem. Anytime. Thank you.

Sheila LaBarbera: You are welcome.

Cynthia Perrea – final interview

Cindy Perrea: I did not want you waiting for me, so I showed up a few minutes early.

Michael Ovitt: It is always good to be early.

Cindy Perrea: Thank you. Better than late for sure, right?

Michael Ovitt: Welcome. My name is Michael Ovitt, the chair of the retirement system.

Mark Bashara: I am Mark Bashara.

Cindy Perrea: Oh, nice to meet you.

Timothy Sorrell: Tim Sorrell.

Ericka Oleson: Ericka Oleson.

Cindy Perrea: And Sheila.

Mark Bashara: And then behind you is Beth.

Beth Matson: Hi. I am Beth Matson.

Michael Ovitt: Do not pay any attention to the screens because we freeze up.

Sheila LaBarbera: So, you are just being recorded. You are not really on TV.

Cindy Perrea: Okay.

Timothy Sorrell: And if I can, Cynthia, I have to leave at 11:15. It is nothing personal. If you see me get up and walk out.

Michael Ovitt: So, we – this is a public meeting, and you are – our conversation is recorded and could be reviewed in the future. So, having all that in mind, the Board members and everyone involved, so you have met with Sheila. You have gone over a little bit about the system. I guess I'll start with how did you learn about the position, what is your interest, and maybe your knowledge of what you're getting into, what your understanding of what job you're getting into, and what will you be doing.

Cindy Perrea: So, my understanding is it is focused on accounting but also all of the tasks, and Sheila and I talked about cross training and everybody being able to do all the things in the office so that we have the capability to cover each other and help. So, accounting was a big piece of it. I know Jill took care of a lot of that, so you are looking for somebody to jump into that, and I have been working in finance at the bank for – this is my 17th year, so I have done a lot there. I started as a teller, so daily balancing, working with spreadsheets, things like that, and then I worked – now I am in the Loan Servicing Department in charge of that, so it is daily balancing there as well for any new loans that we have opened. Those themselves have to balance, and then you yourself have to balance anything that you post on anybody's account, so any issues that have been with payments that need to be reversed and reposted. You are, many times, waiting late charges for people or resolving any issues that have happened, dispersing construction loans, so obviously, I am in charge also of all the construction loans. We make sure that balances as well, so I have a lot of experience with all of those items, but also it was very interesting to me the whole retirement aspect and also working with people to set up their accounts. Sheila mentioned that you used to do and would like to start again having, like, retirement seminars and different events for people to come in. So, I think I would also be good with that. I have done some things at the bank where we implemented like a core value system, and that is part of that team, and they presented it to the Board. I have worked with customers on a daily basis mostly on the phone, sometimes in person, a lot of questions about escrow accounts.

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Michael Ovitt: Like tax and insurance?

Cindy Perrea: Yes. We do tax and insurance escrow, flood insurance, all of that stuff, so if people have questions and they show up, I'll go down to the lobby, sit with them, and explain their account, go over everything where they're at, where they need to be, things like that.

Jill who I worked with at the bank for a long time actually, because we started in the same time. So, she is the one who initially had mentioned that the position was open and then I did some research from there, looking at what the job duties were and what you were looking for.

Timothy Sorrell: Nothing from me.

Michael Ovitt: Since you are leaving?

Timothy Sorrell: No. I do not have anything. Sorry. I am just taking it all in and learning.

Cindy Perrea: Janice said hello by the way.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. Have you been promised anything by all your friends here?

Cindy Perrea: No. I mean, I know Tim.

Timothy Sorrell: Yeah, from the bank.

Cindy Perrea: Yes. She is getting ready to retire, so that is exciting for us to work with her.

Sheila LaBarbera: Paul McCroskey too.

Michael Ovitt: Paul McCroskey?

Sheila LaBarbera: Paul McCroskey is a reference.

Michael Ovitt: Yeah, I saw his name there. How did –?

Cindy Perrea: I know Paul very well. He is engaged to my mother-in-law, so if you have been to any of the parties, you probably have met Jean, my mother-in-law.

Michael Ovitt: And Paul is on the Board still?

Cindy Perrea: Yes. He has talked to me at length about the retirement system and had great things to say. He mentioned that you have a great sense of humor.

Michael Ovitt: Oh, really? Okay. He did not call me a clown, did he?

Cindy Perrea: He just said you were a great guy. And you have a great sense of humor.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Ericka Oleson: Sure. Can you share an example of a time when your attention to detail prevented a potential issue?

Cindy Perrea: Oh, yeah, definitely. We have daily reports that we check, so you have to go through, for example, one of them is line of credit, anything that has been advanced from over \$10,000. We actually had to identify an issue with HELOC where a fraudulent check was written on it, and if we hadn't checked that and checked – you know, we go through and verify the signature and all of that, so we were able to identify that as a fraudulent check and stop it and return it, so that it didn't get charged to the customer. So, that is just one example. We also go through different reports daily to make sure things are posted properly to accounts, and oftentimes you have to do a little more research. So, I really found that, because my background is more like psychology, I started at Hillcrest Ed Center, but then when I had my kids, you know, I'm trying to change my focus, ended up at the bank, and found that I really enjoyed the finance aspect and the numbers aspect of it a lot more than I maybe thought I would. You know, it's just something else different to explore, but, yes, so we have to do a lot of rechecking and researching possibly where that came in, is that where it's supposed to go type of things, making sure things are going to the correct accounts.

Ericka Oleson: Perfect. Thank you.

Cindy Perrea: You are welcome.

Michael Ovitt: Mark?

Mark Bashara: No. I would defer to Beth.

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Beth Matson: Oh, okay. What do you feel is your greatest professional accomplishment?

Cindy Perrea: Professional accomplishment. I would say the fact that I have made it to like the Loan Servicing – being in charge of the Loan Servicing Department because when I started at the bank, they did not even have that position, so they created it for me so I would think that would probably be the greatest.

Beth Matson: Thank you.

Cindy Perrea: You are welcome.

Mark Bashara: Okay, so how long were you at the co-op?

Cindy Perrea: This is my 17th year at the co-op.

Mark Bashara: All right. So, what you have explained about the numbers, and you have a good grasp of that, what makes you want to leave the job at 17 years?

Cindy Perrea: A couple of things, just looking for something a little bit different to do because I have been in this position for a few years now. It is the same stuff, and unless other people move out, there's – its okay, but it is the same thing, and I would like – this seems like it has a lot of different aspects to it and more things to learn. As Sheila said, it takes a good three years to even learn the position, so there would be many different things for me to explore that way and maybe find some more strengths that I have. Also, banking itself is really evolving right now, and a lot of the institutions are merging, so the smaller banks are kind of going away, and part of that is they are finding ways to save money and a lot of them are going to outsourcing their own servicing, so I'm just trying to be proactive and say, hey, this position may not even be there because we're going to be – if they outsource servicing, there's nobody then to supervise that system other than somebody who just communicates with their vendor.

Mark Bashara: All right. Thank you. Because one of the things I know we look for is, as I have said before is if we can avoid transient, like, it takes a while to train. I think you would be pleased here because there is always – because a lot of it is also laws, all right, and they are always changing. No matter how much you learn, there's always going to be something else new for you to learn, but at the same time, because there's so much energy and effort put into training an individual, we don't want to do that and then – once again, I know we can't completely predict the future, but we'd like to at least know in good earnest that you or whoever we would hire would want to make a long-term commitment because there are a lot of benefits to this job and position.

Cindy Perrea: Yes. I agree a hundred percent. I have been supervising a couple of people in my department, and investing the time and energy to get somebody trained to then have them leave is just exhausting, so I understand completely.

Mark Bashara: All right. Thank you.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. Anyone else?

Mark Bashara: Do you have questions?

Michael Ovitt: Do you have any –? Do you have any questions to the Board or Sheila? Any clarifications from last time?

Cindy Perrea: I mean, Sheila and I talked a little bit, but maybe just, like, what is the Board's role in the management perspective of it. We talked a little bit about how things work here, like, do you assign tasks and then just expect me to follow through or do you like to be hands-on and what is the Board's kind of –

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, in the office, Cindy, everything is connected. You can go a cycle for a month, a cycle for a quarter, and annual. Everything that you do touches somebody

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else. So, what we have tried to do over the last three years is train everybody to do a little bit of everything to find out where people's strengths and weaknesses were. What they enjoyed doing, what they didn't enjoy doing, so that over time, we've been able to develop kind of a workflow for everybody that they have something that they really like to do and then they might have one or two things that are, like, ugh.

Cindy Perrea: Yes.

Sheila LaBarbera: The cycle itself is really every month, it is the same but every month has things that are a little bit different based on, January, you're doing year-end close because it's a calendar year close, and then you have June, you've got health insurance deductions, so you've got hundreds of retirees that are calling about what's my MEDEX going to be. Then your cost-of-living is in July, and then you get into the fall and you have a ton of enrollments because you have new members. So, those are the things that are not – they are cyclical in a year but not necessarily a month.

Cindy Perrea: Okay.

Sheila LaBarbera: Every month we actually have a book that we do. It started as a year-end close, but I say it's the year-round book now, so every month you can take a look at that book and you can see what needs to be accomplished in that month.

Michael Ovitt: The Board generally meets at least once a month. If there is a disability case or a special project going on, hiring, elections, we would come in extra for that, but primarily everything goes through Sheila. You can certainly reach out to any one of us if there is any issues, clarifications, or questions, and we will deal with that. I think you have a good environment here. Sheila has a lot of experience, but as with any veteran employee, there is always going to be another twist to what the norm is, and what we have experienced in the past nothing seems to surprise me in my job and certainly Sheila presents stuff to us almost every month that might be a first time or some unique situation. So, we are here. Ultimately, everything falls on the Board and, bottom-line, we are responsible for the running of the system.

Mark Bashara: Yeah. Sheila runs the day-to-day.

Sheila LaBarbera: Because just when you think you have it down, then you get a PERAC memo that says, by the way we are not doing it that way.

Mark Bashara: Just the veterans' buyback.

Sheila LaBarbera: Absolutely.

Mark Bashara: Now, the WEP.

Cindy Perrea: Right.

Mark Bashara: But, yeah, she runs the day-to-day stuff here. You would be working for her, and we are kind of the overseers of the – if there was an issue that she had that needed to be addressed with the retirement or something came up to us.

Cindy Perrea: Great. I mean, there is obviously a lot to learn, the trainings –

Sheila LaBarbera: There is of course we have a whole bunch of how-to books now.

Cindy Perrea: Yes.

Sheila LaBarbera: We have concentrated that over the last three years.

Michael Ovitt: Have you seen our website?

Cindy Perrea: Yes.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. That is a resource. If you knew everything on the website, you would only have ten more questions after that. It is categorized.

Mark Bashara: We will not even send her to Chapter 32 or anything to start looking up laws because we would never see her again. What happened to her?

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Michael Ovitt: Yeah, if you are bored and you want to brush up on Chapter 32.

Mark Bashara: There is a lot.

Cindy Perrea: I was, like, oh my God. There is a lot to learn.

Michael Ovitt: Yeah. Okay. Anything else for us?

Cindy Perrea: That is about it.

Michael Ovitt: All right.

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, thank you so much.

Timothy Sorrell: Thank you.

Cindy Perrea: Thank you.

Beth Matson: Thank you.

Sheila LaBarbera: Thank you for your patience.

Cindy Perrea: It was nice seeing you again.

Brian Shepard: Thank you. Have a good day.

Cindy Perrea: You too.

Michael Ovitt: Tim, we have eight more minutes of you.

Timothy Sorrell: Yeah. Eight more minutes. I got to race to Lenox.

Michael Ovitt: And I am going to be right behind you.

Timothy Sorrell: Sheila do you have a preference?

Sheila LaBarbera: I think that both of them have a significant upside, and I would concentrate more on the positives that they bring. Certainly, I think that Martha has a command of all the financial aspects of what we do. I talked a little bit more in depth with her about the types of accounting software and things like that that she's used before, so I think she'd be very adaptable to that, and that kind of stuff I think would come relatively easy, so the training for that I think would probably be a little bit shorter.

Cindy brings a completely different positive. She is more of the – working at the bank brings organizational skills. It brings that interaction, that training as a supervisor, she has provided training before, and so she has that kind of positives for her. So, when you're talking about what are we going to do with her, there's things that you can learn right up front and that those are really good, positive skills to have because we know next week it starts. We're putting people on the pension payroll like crazy we're going to be running retirements between now and June 30th probably at a rate that I don't think we've ever seen. So, they both have very positive aspects. The pros for both of them are both high. They both have excellent references. Paul McCroskey had a great reference for Cindy. I can tell you that Julie Boyd she is a solid person and she was very, very complimentary of the work that Martha did as much as she did and she did it alone.

Timothy Sorrell: Okay. Unfortunately, now the elephant in the room, which one do you think is going to work best with your staff here? You and your staff? Do you know? Do you have a feeling?

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, you know, like I said, I think Martha brings the financial aspects that we're looking for up front, so the training is a little bit shorter for that, but they both have positives

Timothy Sorrell: Got you.

Sheila LaBarbera: I think that my preparing them would be much different, so my plan, if you gave me Martha is this, my plan if you gave me Cindy is this.

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Michael Ovitt: And Mark has a comment, but I want to come back to that. All-encompassing cross-training aspect of it as well.

Mark Bashara: So, quickly, they both interviewed well. I am glad that you like them both. What stuck out to me with Martha is she seemed to be more people – she discussed working and talked about people more, whereas Cynthia seemed to be more of a numbers person. I am not saying anything is a negative, but Martha seemed – I could see her interacting very naturally and comfortably with the people she would talk to which is very important.

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes.

Mark Bashara: And she mentioned people a lot in her discussions, what she liked, how she worked with this one and that one. She was excited about doing this. So, that impressed me. Once again, I am just saying. They are both good, but I mean –

Sheila LaBarbera: And I agree with you. Absolutely.

Mark Bashara: So, that's – I think that was – and that is important because you got to know numbers but if you sit down with somebody –

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, I'll tell you, Mark, for the first time in 29 years, Brian and I had somebody call us last week and it's the first time getting effed up on the phone and I just said that – not really necessary.

Mark Bashara: Right.

Sheila LaBarbera: And so, people are stressed, I think, from every day kind of things. So, you're finding people that, like you said earlier, most people are usually pretty happy when they leave here because we're giving them money and whatever, but we were giving her money, a lot of it, and she's still dropping the F-bomb all over.

Mark Bashara: No. She seemed very – like I said, they both interviewed well, but I like the fact that, as you had mentioned, she is good with numbers, but the people part of it, she seemed very natural and just very comfortable. That is all I wanted to say.

Michael Ovitt: Okay.

Beth Matson: I have an opinion if you got a minute. I think they did both do a very good job, and I think Martha is so much far more well-rounded for this position. She gets the bigger picture of the accounting where I think Cindy was very good, but I think she's pigeon holed into the banking loan aspect of things. I agree with Sheila that it would be an easier transition for Martha, but it is going to, Sheila, depend on you and the personalities, how they fit, and who is going to work the best.

Sheila LaBarbera: And to answer that, Beth. I think in the recommendations I found both of them to be very pleasant, and I think both of them would – with the three of us in the office, I think it would be very pleasant.

Michael Ovitt: I did not ask, but as far as the starting, did Martha indicate when she could start? Are there any limitations?

Sheila LaBarbera: I think Martha can start sooner than Cindy.

Michael Ovitt: Yeah, yeah.

Sheila LaBarbera: I think Martha can start sooner and the other thing is she did share with me earlier in the week that she does have another offer, but she would prefer this job.

Michael Ovitt: Right.

Sheila LaBarbera: So, if that is your choice, I certainly can – you let me know and tell me what you want to offer them.

Michael Ovitt: So, are we prepared to make a decision today? I guess I misplaced the advertisement for the position.

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Timothy Sorrell: The wage?

Michael Ovitt: Yeah, the wages.

Sheila LaBarbera: It was \$60,000-\$65,000.

Michael Ovitt: Okay. Is this part of our packet?

Ericka Oleson: Yes, there was a packet. This one was posted.

Michael Ovitt: Can I have this? Is this part of our packet?

Ericka Oleson: No, I do not think it was in this week's packet. It was prior. I had it with all of my advertisements.

Michael Ovitt: I will take a copy and get it back to you.

Ericka Oleson: Okay.

Timothy Sorrell: Do you want me to make a motion?

Michael Ovitt: Do you want to accept the person and set the salary?

Sheila LaBarbera: I would because that just makes it much easier for me to get them on board.

Michael Ovitt: How much would you offer?

Mark Bashara: So, we are waiting to figure out a salary, right? Because I'm voting for her, but I think –

Ericka Oleson: For Martha?

Mark Bashara: Yeah. Could we make it in one thing? Like, we vote to get her on at this amount? Or do they need to be two separate things? We vote to get her on and –? Just have it be together.

Sheila LaBarbera: Let us make a motion to hire her and then this is the salary that you are offering.

Michael Ovitt: And typically, what is the review on probation?

Sheila LaBarbera: Okay. So, that would be the same as for Jill and Brian, so 90-day probationary period. We did do an additional \$500 for the two of them when they finished their probationary period, so I am not sure if you wanted to start at \$60, and after the probationary period go to \$61?

Michael Ovitt: Or is it appropriate to just say that we're going to review it and –

Sheila LaBarbera: All right. So, start her at 60 and then review it after the 90 days?

Michael Ovitt: Yeah. And that is the minimum. The minimum is out there, and if she is going to accept that, know that we will potentially review –

Sheila LaBarbera: And frankly, after the 90 days, if you say, hey, you know what, this is a homerun and you do \$65.

Mark Bashara: If she's, like he said, that she has knocked it out of the park, it is doing really good, we can do that, but at least just start at the 60. So, then – Beth, did you have anything? I always –

Beth Matson: No, I like that idea. I think she is going to be valuable, but we will wait and see. I think that is a good plan.

Mark Bashara: So, I would make a motion then to hire Martha, and her last name?

Timothy Sorrell: Martha Read.

Mark Bashara: Martha Read at a starting salary of \$60,000 to be reviewed at the end of the 90-day probationary period.

Michael Ovitt: We have a motion.

Timothy Sorrell: I will second that motion.

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Michael Ovitt: We have a motion and a second. Is there any kind of probation past the 90 days or is the 90 days it?

Sheila LaBarbera: Well, I think that actually comes from our personnel policies. I have to look, but the 90-day probationary period is in our personnel policies. Do you want to make it a longer probationary period?

Michael Ovitt: Potentially.

Sheila LaBarbera: This is very common. You can Google it if you want. Human Resource across the board will tell you, you will never get more from an employee than you will in the first 90 days. So, if they do not cut it in the first 90 days, they are not going to cut it in six months, they are not going to cut it in a year.

Michael Ovitt: A lot of the new hires in the towns are for a year. They are on probation for a year. So, that way they can – with no reason they can –

Sheila LaBarbera: And I would say this. At the end of 90 days, if there's been a couple of hiccups I can say to the Board, look, it's not good enough to get rid of her, but we need to fix these, and we'll give her another 90 days to fix them, and if she doesn't, then she's done.

Mark Bashara: I am good with that. Like you said, this way, if –

Mark Bashara: Like you said, this way, like you said, there might be something that you are kind of not sure, not get rid of her, but at least it gives us more time.

Mark Bashara: At 60 and we review it in 90 days.

Sheila LaBarbera: Okay.

Michael Ovitt: Any further discussion? All in favor.

A roll call vote was taken to offer the Retirement Coordinators position to Martha Read at \$60,000, to be reviewed at the end of the 90-day probationary period, the vote was unanimous.

Sheila LaBarbera: I will call her this afternoon. I will find out from her the date that she can start, and I will email you at the end of the day when her start date is.

Mark Bashara: What I would ask, Sheila, I don't know if the others agree is that once she is on board, do you think you could, like, just once a week even just a quick, like, she's doing good. You don't have to give us a big detailed list, but just so we kind of get a feeling so we don't come in a month later and –

Sheila LaBarbera: Right. No surprises.

Mark Bashara: Mike, I am going to make a motion to adjourn if you are all set?

Ericka Oleson: I will second.

Michael Ovitt: Anything further? All in favor or adjournment.

A roll call vote was taken to adjourn, the vote was unanimous.

Michael Ovitt: And Michael Ovitt, aye. At 11:20, we are adjourned.

The next regular board meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2025 @ 9am.

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RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sheila LaBarbera, Executive Director

APPROVED BY:

Michael Ovitt, Chairman

Mark Bashara, Elected Member

Timothy Sorrell, Elected Member

Erica Oleson, Advisory Council Member

Beth Matson, 5th Member Appointed

