

Berkshire County Retirement Board Meeting
August 26, 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 Mark Bashara, Elected Member, Timothy Sorrell, Elected Member and Ericka Oleson, Advisory Board member. Michael Ovitt, Chairman, was absent. Jon Charow IT Bug Busters was in attendance.

Mark Bashara: The meeting will now come to order, open at 9:02 a.m. Note that Michael Ovitt is absent.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- 1.) Members of the public have the opportunity to address the Retirement Board. There were no public comments.

NEW BUSINESS:

- 2.) The Board reviewed and approved the Cyber Security Manual for the Berkshire County Retirement System. Presentation by Jon Charow

Sheila LaBarbera: For the transcription, Jon Charow, IT from Bug Busters Computers, is here to present the Cybersecurity Manual that has been presented to the board. This is the conclusion of last year's cybersecurity grant that we received from MIIA. If you have any questions at the end of the presentation, we will talk about the approval of the Cybersecurity Manual. If approved I will work with Tom Gibson to integrate that into our personnel policies.

Jon Charow: We prepared a cybersecurity policy. We came in and did an analysis of the infrastructure. We looked at other organizations that do similar work to the board and we came up with a cybersecurity policy that we broke out into different categories. We have some recommendations that we feel the board and the members should be working towards implementing. It is a living document, so everything that we have generated is considered version 1. In each section of the cybersecurity, policy there is a date that the board or the committee who is doing the work can sign off on. When we update it, those pages can be replaced, and the version will be revised in order to reflect that it is current. We recommend that the agency review the security policy at least once a year and update the approval date. You do not necessarily have to revised the version but just so that everybody is familiar with it and that, it is still meeting the needs of the agency. It is based on the National Institute of Science and Technology's cybersecurity framework, CSF 2.0, so that comes directly from governmental recommendations, and I assume everybody's had a chance to review the document. Does anybody have any questions?

Ericka Oleson: A lot of it just seemed very generic, what is recommended nowadays, so I think a lot of it was very straightforward.

Jon Charow: They are common sense. If you get an email with an attachment from somebody you are not expecting an email from, then you should not open it. Call your IP vendor, your managed service provider, and say, I am not sure about this email, can you look at it? We can remote in and look at the headers, the different features of the email to say, yes, no, this looks legit, or no, and you see here is why. Many times, they obfuscate the actual email address or spoof it, you may have heard that term, to show that it is coming from somewhere else like Microsoft when it is really coming from some domain in the middle of

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Russia. Those are all things that are hidden within the headers that are not normally visible to the user and sometimes need a little bit of help.

We did have some recommendations on some additional security that we should implement for email, phishing and malware antivirus. We have applied for a grant for this year to implement that. We also recommended, at bare minimum, an annual penetration test both internally and externally to look at the agency's exposure externally from the outside world coming in but also as important you want to know what your internal network looks like and what vulnerabilities may be exposed going out letting a hacker, giving a backdoor into the inside – internal network, getting around firewall. Those are all tools that we have at our disposal that we recommended as part of the grant.

Ericka Oleson: MIIA does an annual testing too, or not?

Sheila LaBarbera: Not that I am aware of, no. They come in and they review what we have for our network, what kinds of programs, it is really detailed. Jon has helped me a couple of times to fill out the actual policy, do we have multifactor authentication and are we using tools to protect ourselves. I know Jon has mentioned it, the insurance agency has mentioned it that we are way ahead of others and being proactive in protecting what we have here. For our insurance purposes, I think we are on solid ground, but there is always room for improvement. We have had other retirement boards that have had fraud they are starting to figure out that the retirement boards and the municipalities have money. I am waiting for the final piece for cyber with the grant. We will know that by our next meeting next month where we are at with that. My suggestion would be if we do not get the grant, we should do it anyways. We do have money in the budget to do it, but the grant helps. I found that manual to be thorough. We did have some issues with passwords and things of that nature. This document straightens that out; it is put forth very clearly.

Jon Charow: It targets the areas in the infrastructure that applies to you. There's a lot of sections in the CSF that are for large organizations and technologies that you don't have, so the document may seem generic, but it would be twice as thick if it was for a bank.

Ericka Oleson: Oh, absolutely.

Jon Charow: Just to add one more thing. You know, one of the big pushbacks we get when we talk about spending money on cybersecurity is, well, we are just a small agency, they are not going to target us, and they are going after the big people. You need to flip that thinking on its head because the big people have the heavy-duty security in place. It is the little people, the 5 and 10 or less employees, the small organizations that are not implementing this and they are easy pickings, low-hanging fruits so to speak. It is a lot easier for them to get in and get a couple hundred thousand dollars than to go after the million-dollar big people. In some cases, it takes them as little as an hour or even less depending upon the criticality of vulnerability to get in, compromise and transfer that money. You have seen in the news how elderly people are being scammed out of their life savings. Fifteen minutes for them to do that and transfer it out. The smaller organizations really need some kind of protection or more protection than the bigger people do because they are the targets. They are what the hackers, the Chinese, the Russians, and all of these bad hackers are going after. There has been a number of them in Massachusetts. We have a local organization who was compromised, personal identifiable information got out, and they are now part of a class action lawsuit by all the people who were affected by it. That is right here in our little town of Pittsfield, so it is going on everywhere.

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Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion that we accept the policy and set it up for an annual review as recommended.

Ericka Oleson: I will second.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the Cybersecurity Manual and annual evaluation, the vote was unanimous.

Sheila LaBarbera: Thank you, Jon; I will follow up with MIIA about the grant. We should know by September, and if for some reason we are not approved for any or part of the grant then I will just put forth the request to implement the penetration testing at our expense.

Jon Charow: We are ready to set it up whenever. It involves installing some software on the server and configuring. I guess the only other thing I want to mention, one of the things that I noticed while we were doing the research, any business that is going on by email that relates to the board needs to use board email addresses.

Mark Bashara: That is what we do?

Sheila LaBarbera: No. Beth had a problem with her email for the past at least 6 months. I asked her to either to contact Jon or to get it straightened out, and I was told by the chair to continue to send her emails to a private Gmail account. She was the only one that was outside of that. I have no idea why she could not get it fixed.

Jon Charow: That was one of the things that I saw in the traffic exchange. From a security standpoint, if something happens to her account and it is compromised, we have no recourse to get in and reset the password. We have absolutely no control of it whatsoever. In fact, the only way we can do it is to get a hold of Gmail or Google. We have clients coming in all the time, walk-ins off the streets, saying, I am locked out of my account. We cannot do anything and Google's response is sorry, open a new account.

Mark Bashara: The fact that you said we're ahead of the curve, I think you remember I said years ago it's a cat-and-mouse game, okay, but I think if we can show due diligence and good faith that we're doing everything we can so if something does happen, someone such as yourself could even say, hey, listen, they've done everything they can do up to this point and it wasn't why we left this open, we were negligent about this and that, so I just want to make sure that keeps going.

Jon Charow: The first thing that cybersecurity insurance is going to ask is, you have a firewall, is it a commercial-grade firewall, next-gen antivirus, was everything up to date. We have got all that. We keep all that in our manual.

Mark Bashara: Will there be a report or something that you will generate like you say, okay, this is all-good, this needs to be done, and you are fine?

Jon Charow: As part of the penetration test, you will get a report. Sheila also gets every month when the bill comes in as part of the package that the retirement board is on three hours. Part of that is used for maintenance and the updates and security and making sure the logs are not – there is nothing bad in the logs as far as malware, but questions that come up, issues, and things that we do. When we update the firewall, we are going to – there will be a line item on the ticket that says there is no charge for it unless you go over the three hours. There'll be a line item on the ticket that says we implemented security updates on the firewall, so that's all tracked and included in the invoice that comes out every month.

Mark Bashara: Well, thank you, Jon.

Jon Charow: You are welcome. Thank you.

Sheila LaBarbera: Thank you.

Jon Charow: Nice to meet everybody. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

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- 3.) The Board is asked to consider a COLA base of \$17,000, effective 07/01/26
- 4.) The Board is asked to approve a funding schedule for FY27

Mark Bashara: What I am going to suggest that we table the COLA and the funding schedule until Mike is back so that we have all of us to discuss it because they are two important things. Do I need to make a motion to table that or we just table it?

Sheila LaBarbera: You are going to table Item 3 and 4?

Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to table #3 and #4.

Ericka Oleson: I will second.

A roll call vote was taken to table item#3 and #4, the vote was unanimous.

Sheila LaBarbera: Just note, I did include the email in there for you from John Boorack I just want you to be aware that we will not have our letters until you approve the funding schedule.

Mark Bashara: Yes. No, no, that is good.

- 5.) Legal Update: Presented by Board Counsel Thomas Gibson -No legal update presented in August.

- 6.) Directors update: Degrenier Settlement, Bartini Hearing, Larkin Remand Mark

Sheila LaBarbera: Most of this is just informational for you. We have the DeGrenier settlement, the ADR is complete and he is on payroll. There has been a lump sum agreement made it was reviewed by Tom Gibson and approved. We are just waiting for that payment. Once that payment is made, then the Worker's Comp offset is removed and he will be back to his full pension. He is being paid but at a reduced rate because of the Worker's Comp offset. As soon as we get something in the mail that says it has been stamped by the court, approved, and signed off on it, we will get a check and we are all set.

The Larkin remand letter is our response to PERAC. The process that we went through, the application comes in, the medical panels are all done, the board approved it, and PERAC had some issues with it. This remand letter is Tom's attempt to prove the case of the board voting for the approval of that disability. It will go into PERAC for their review and, hopefully, approval. If for some reason PERAC does not approve after the remand letter, then Mr. Larkin would be issued an opportunity to make an appeal. He will have to do so with his own attorney after today. Tom and I spent an awful lot of time putting all of this information together. We have covered all the bases, and so hopefully it will come back approved.

The Bartini hearing was postponed. His 91A – has been submitted properly. He has a letter that said he is an over-earner. I met with Mr. Bartini last week. I think he has some legitimate concerns. I am going to talk to Tom about the issues that Mr. Bartini has brought forth and maybe through legal counsel have him ask PERAC how they came up with the

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calculation. It appears that he filed his taxes appropriately. It is the way that PERAC has apportioned the earnings all to Mr. Bartini. I believe him that he has been trying to stay within those limits, thought he was within those limits, and the way that it was calculated was a little bit different from what they did last year. I believe him and I think he has a legitimate concern. He will be here next month in September to present his case.

Mark Bashara: Otherwise, we are in blind.

Sheila LaBarbera: Exactly. Those are the only three items that I have for the Director's Update. I have been talking to Chris Lodge at PTG about a renewal of our contract. We have a contract for five years, but we are also offered an opportunity to begin the upgrade and go to the PensionPro+. We are kind of negotiating on price I understand it is a new product. There may be some slight increases in cost. I do like and appreciate the way that they are approaching the PTG update so that we can do it in kind of like modules or segments so it is not one big turn on a switch and I've got a brand-new system. We can kind of ease into it with the different pieces that we use. The learning curve would be a lot easier I am very pleased with what they are offering us. The updates are great. The other thing is it moves us away from the problems that the two vendors are having. I will not at this time suggest that we consider Bay State Pensions right now. We are with PTG and we are solid with them. Their performance as far as service has been excellent.

Mark Bashara: It sounds like they are keeping their word.

Sheila LaBarbera: Absolutely, Ericka, you have probably even heard from some of the treasurers the insurance portal, the deduction uploads everyone is very happy with those changes. I do not have anything from him until next month; I do not have anything else to report at this time.

7.) Old Business: Board Bylaws- tabled

The Board is asked to appoint the 5th member of the Berkshire County Retirement Board. The term will begin July 1, 2025 and end June 30, 2030.

Mark Bashara: Under Old Business, there is nothing we already did the fifth member so we are just waiting for PERAC, right?

Sheila LaBarbera: Before PERAC – their meeting is on September 10th in Medford, and the board bylaws are still tabled.

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Consent Agenda Detail:

MINUTES:

a.) The Board minutes of the regular meeting held July 30, 2025 were signed and approved.
Minutes provided as an attachment to email

INVESTMENTS:

b.) The Board received from PRIT a statement of performance for July 2025. The PRIT Fund returned 0.60% for the month of July.

BANK STATEMENTS:

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

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MONTHLY WARRANTS:

d.) The Board is asked to approve payment vouchers:

08-01-25	\$135,531.81
08-02-25	\$4,534.29
08-03-25	\$22,188.96
08-04-25	\$6,872.84
08-05-25	\$1,881,849.67

REQUESTS FOR RETIREMENT:

e.) The Board approved the application for superannuation retirement from Robert Palmer, New Marlboro, laborer. The retirement will be effective 09/08/2025.

The Board approved the application for superannuation retirement from Sandra Albano, Dalton, Accountant. The retirement will be effective 10/02/2025.

MEMBER TRANSFERS OUT OF SYSTEM:

f.) The Board approved the notice of transfer of the account of Messiah Vision, a member in GB, to the State Retirement Board. The Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 11 months of creditable service. The amount of the transfer is \$4,534.29.

REQUEST FOR SERVICE BUYBACK:

g.) Jeffrey Spratt, a member in Hinsdale, is eligible to buy back 1 year and 3 months of prior creditable service. If Mr. Spratt pays \$6,757.60 into the annuity savings fund by September 30, 2025, the Berkshire County Retirement Board will accept 1 years and 3 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)

Jeremy Baker	Lee	\$8,816.53
Diane Barnes	Richmond	\$594.87
Cameron Forest	Gt. Barrington	\$51,773.91
Kathryn Harty	Lee	\$573.70
Ralph Julieano	Stockbridge	\$5,158.25
Rebecca Lilley	Gt. Barrington	\$2,283.10
Katherine Mason	BHRSD	\$6,984.15
Kylie Nestle	CBRSD	\$1,016.18
Ana-Lisa Parise	Dalton	\$10,333.43
Dakota Schaefer	Lenox	\$48,878.39

INJURY REPORTS:

i.) There was an injury reported in the Town of West Stockbridge.

NEW MEMBER APPLICATIONS:

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

8145	Richard H Parsons	SBRSD	7/24/2025	Custodian-Building & Grounds
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8146	Kaitlin S Beckwith	Lee	8/28/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8147	Jamie M Jennison	Lee	8/28/2025	Life Skills Paraprofessional	1
8148	Jared A Genzabella	Hinsdale	8/5/2025	Water/DPW	1
8149	Daniel H Munch	BCRHA	7/7/2025	Housing Search Case Manager	1
8150	Phineas S Steiniger	BCRHA	7/7/2025	TPP Service Coordinator	1
8151	Paula Ferreira Rodrigues	CBRSD	8/25/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8152	Joselise Melendez Mossetty	Lee	8/21/2025	SPED Paraprofessional	1
8153	Jennifer Spirito	Stockbridge Housing	8/4/2025	Administrative Assistant	1
8154	Sierra M Blodgett	Becket	7/9/2025	Assistant Treasurer	1
8155	Eric J Zanconato	BHRSD	8/25/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8156	Steven R Franco	Lee	9/2/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8157	Margaret A Clemons	Lee	9/2/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8158	Jaymee Lyn Griffin	Lee	8/21/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8159	Diane Rosario	BCRHA	7/7/2025	Service Coordinator	1
8160	Allison Szabo	Lee	8/21/2025	Paraprofessional	1
8161	Kasha M Tworig	Clarksburg	8/25/2025	Board Certified Behavior Analyst	1
8162	Romana D Messer	Clarksburg	8/25/2025	Assessor	1
8163	Kiana W Petersoli	Lee	8/20/2025	Cafeteria Worker	1
8164	Ashley R Salvini	CBRSD	8/25/2025	Paraprofessional	1

PERAC APPROVALS

k.) The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Marc Portieri, West Stockbridge, as of 07/07/2025. Annual pension amount is \$58,871.16.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Pamela Broderick, Lee, as of 7/16/2025. Annual pension amount is \$18,106.68.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Beth Carroll, Lanesboro, as of 04/24/2025. Annual pension amount is \$25,294.56.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Linda Vermilyea, BHRSD, as of 07/16/2025. Annual pension amount is \$19,500.48.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Christopher O'Brien, Lenox, as of 06/30//2025. Annual pension amount is \$75,820.56.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Kurt Degrenier, SBRSD, as of 12/07/2023. Annual pension amount is \$50,617.08.

The Board received approval from PERAC to grant a retirement allowance to Thomas Hutcheson, Dalton, as of 06/30//2025. Annual pension amount is \$44,270.28.

3(8)c REIMBURSEMENTS:

l.) There were no Sec 3(8)(c) to reimbursements for the month of August.

PERAC CORRESPONDENCE:

m.) The Board received no PERAC memorandums in August

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

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TRAVEL & EDUCATION APPROVALS:

n.) The Board approved the travel expense for staff to attend the Emerging Issues Conference at the Doubletree Inn Westborough MA, 9/17/2025. Including hotel.

MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE:

o.) Election schedule for fall 2025 election

Mark Bashara: Well then, that is it. Do we have a motion on the Consent Agenda?

Sheila LaBarbera: I have one thing for Item N, which is the travel and educational expenses. There is an Emerging Issues Conference in Westborough in September, Wednesday, the 17th. They start early at 8:30 in the morning, so they offered a local hotel for some rates. I would like to go, but I am not getting up at 4:30 in the morning to drive down, so if the board would consider the hotel for the evening.

Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to approve going down the night before and billing it to the retirement board.

Mark Bashara: What did they say the cost was?

Sheila LaBarbera: I want to say that it was like \$120? Not sure.

Mark Bashara: All right. This is one night, right?

Sheila LaBarbera: Yes just one night.

Ericka Oleson: I will second.

A roll call vote was taken to approve the additional travel expense, the vote was unanimous.

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

Ericka Oleson: I will second that.

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

The next regular board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 24, 2025 at 9:00am.

Timothy Sorrell: I will make a motion to adjourn.

Ericka Oleson: I will second.

A roll call vote was taken to adjourn the meeting at 9:26am, the vote was unanimous.

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RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Sheila LaBarbera, Executive Director

APPROVED BY:

Michael Ovitt, Chairman

Mark Bashara, Elected Member

Timothy Sorrell, Elected Member

Ericka Oleson, Advisory Council Member

5th Member Appointed - vacant

