

**ASSOCIATIONS:** In addition to official Town Boards and Officers, there are several non-governmental associations in Pelham that make important contributions to the life of our Community:

**The Parent-Teacher Organization (253-3595)**

All parents of students in the Elementary School are automatically members of the PTO, an organization that works with the School staff to support and improve the programs of the School.

**The Pelham Lion's Club (256-6240)**

The local Club of this international organization sponsors fund raising events help the blind, to support several charities, make awards to honor outstanding citizens and to fund scholarships. The Club assists in PTO and Historical Society events as well.

**Pelham Historical Society (253-3970)**

The Society conducts public educational programs on the history of the Town and region, manages the **Historical Museum** in the historical complex on Pelham Hill, and supports the Local History Room in the town library.

**Pelham Hunting Club**

Club members are local hunters and fishermen who each year sponsor a children's fishing derby and a roast beef dinner to raise funds to sponsor a child to attend the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp.

**Friends of the Pelham Library (256-0657)**

The Friends is a private organization of individuals who support the Pelham Library by raising funds to support the library and its needs. They fund programs that encourage reading, acquire new books, tapes, videos, and CDs, and foster increased use of the library.

# A GUIDE TO THE TOWN OF PELHAM

Massachusetts

Est. 1743

*Prepared and Distributed by the Pelham Historical Society*

## Welcome

Pelham is a small, pleasant town perched on the ridge dividing the Connecticut River's Pioneer Valley from Quabbin Reservoir and central Massachusetts. The eastern one-third of the Town is state owned Reservoir watershed land. About 1,440 people (some 1003 registered voters) live in Pelham. Most employed residents work out of Town at businesses, nearby colleges, and the University of Massachusetts. Pelham is home to many retired people who enjoy the environment and cultural opportunities of the region.

Books and poems have been written in and about Pelham. But the town has not always been the quiet place that it is today. Pelham citizens took part in the French and Indian, Revolutionary and Civil Wars. It was home to **Shays' Rebellion** (1786), led by Capt. Daniel Shays of Pelham, against the state government in Boston. The state legislature was biased towards business interests in Boston and ignoring the needs of the small towns and rural citizens, especially in western Massachusetts. The rebels succeeded in closing down the courts, but were defeated after their attempt to seize the federal Armory in Springfield. However, the rebellion spurred a major change in the form of our nation's government. Shays' Rebellion is credited with spurring the United States to abandon the Articles of Confederation and adopt the federal Constitution we have today. Thus Pelham carved itself a permanent niche in U.S. history.

Pelham once had extensive fields and farms. Water powered grist and wooden turning mills dotted the streams. West Pelham served as a terminus of a regional electric trolley system, was the site of the Orient Springs health resort and the first factory to produce bamboo fly fishing rods in the United States. Building stone was quarried from several locations in Town and shipped throughout the region. Old

Chapel at the University of Massachusetts and Johnson Chapel at Amherst College are faced in Pelham stone. Jones Library in Amherst is faced with stones taken from a Pelham stone wall.

Today, most of Pelham is forest and laced with residences along 21 miles of roads, all of which have been designated as scenic roads. Large forest tracts in Pelham are owned by the Town of Amherst for drinking water supply, and by the University of Massachusetts and Amherst College for research and recreation. The Town has acquired several key tracts for conservation and passive recreation.

### **Introduction to Town Government**

Since its founding in 1743, the Town of Pelham has maintained the traditional **New England Open Town Meeting** form of government. Major decisions, like electing Town officials, raising taxes, passing local by-laws and setting the budgets for all town services are made by the registered voters meeting as a local legislative body, called the Annual Town Meeting. One or more Special Town Meetings, are called as needed. Every registered voter may attend the Meetings, speak and vote. The elected **Town Moderator** is in charge of the Meetings.

In advance of Town Meeting, all of the actions proposed for vote at are sent to each voter in the form of the **Town Warrant**, which is also publicly posted. Annual Town Meetings are held in the Pelham Elementary School on Amherst Road on a Saturday early in May. At least one Special Town Meeting is held each year in the old Town Hall in the historical complex on the top of Pelham Hill. All residents are strongly encouraged to register to vote, to attend, and take part in Town Meeting.

The ordinances and by-laws adopted by Town Meeting are published in the Code of Pelham, available from the Town Clerk.

**The Pelham Town Hall** has been the site of Pelham Town Meetings since 1743. The building is on the state and federal registers of historical importance as the oldest Town Hall in continuous use in the United States.

- **Pelham Free Public Library (253-0657)**  
The town library is unique in that it is a combined school and public library. The School Librarian manages services to the school. Public library services and scheduling the use of the Ramsdell meeting room are managed by the **Library Director** and governed by an elected six-member **Board of Library Trustees**.
- **Town Archivist (253-7647)**  
Appointed by the Selectmen, the Archivist maintains the older town records in the Town Vault and serves as the Coordinator for the Local History Room in the Pelham Library. Here are collections of books, maps, oral histories, and local genealogical information of the Town and Shays' Rebellion. Donations of local historical items are welcome.
- **Cemetery Commission** (three members, elected), **253-5841**
- **Historical Commission** (seven members, appointed by the Selectmen) **253-7129**
- **Recreation Commission** (five members, appointed by the Selectmen), **253-7129**  
These Commissions have respective responsibilities for maintaining town owned cemeteries, historical properties and fostering town recreational activities.
- **Arts Lottery Council** (five members, appointed by the Selectmen), **253-7129**  
This Council uses funds from the State Lottery to support projects that bring artists and cultural events to Town, primarily to benefit children's groups in the town.
- **Council on Aging** (five members and two associates, appointed by the Selectmen), **253-7129**  
This Council is responsible for providing information and organizing programs to benefit Pelham residents over 60 years of age. An outreach staff member is available to advocate for seniors, answer questions, help with referrals to other agencies and work with families and caregivers.



- **Town Clerk (253-7129)**  
The elected Town Clerk keeps the birth, death and marriage records, issues birth, death, marriage and business certificates, sells dog, hunting, fishing, trapping, and cat kennel licenses; records the business conducted at Town Meetings; and conducts state and local elections. The Town Clerk is often the best person to ask for information or who to see to solve a problem. The **Administrative Assistant** schedules the use of meeting rooms and assembles the **Annual Town Report**, containing a great deal of information on Town government.
- **Board of Assessors (253-7129), Tax Collector/Treasurer (253-2267)**  
The three elected members of this Board are charged with setting the valuation on all real estate in Town and seeing that the taxes on real estate are fairly calculated for all land and buildings. The amount of tax paid in Pelham is based on the tax rate. The tax rate is determined by on how much Town Meeting votes to spend each year. This Board works closely with the **Tax Collector/Treasurer** who is appointed by the Selectmen.
- **Finance Committee**  
The **Town Moderator** appoints the five members of this important Committee. They receive budget requests from all Town officials, boards and committees, draw up a recommended annual budget for the Annual Town Warrant, and allocate funds to meet emergencies that arise between Town Meetings.
- **Police (Emergency 911; other business 253-0484)**, 2 South Valley Road
- **Fire (Emergency 911)**, 2 South Valley Road
- **Public Works (253-5245)**, 353 Amherst Road  
The Selectmen oversee these three departments and appoint the **Police Chief, Fire Chief, Public Works Superintendent** and the police officers, constables, fire fighters and public works crew.  
The police patrol the roads and handle public safety, civil defense, **Dog Officer**, and **Field Driver** (stray animal) duties.  
The fire department is a volunteer force that handles building, brush and forest fires. Both departments are first responders to

rescue and life emergencies. The public works department maintains the town's roads, buildings, and their utilities, and is responsible day and night for winter snow plowing. All three departments cooperate closely in major emergencies.

- **Board of Health and Quabbin Health District (253-7129)**  
This elected three person Board, assisted by a district professional health agent, issues permits for septic disposal systems, and issues licenses and permits for food handlers, wells, and trucking rubbish and septic tank wastes. The **Animal Inspector**, who is appointed by the Board of Health, handles domestic animal health inspections and rabies clinics.
- **Water Supply, Trash Pick-Up and Recycling (253-7129)**  
Most homes in Pelham are on private wells. The West Pelham area is on the Town of Amherst water system (256-4050).  
Trash pick-up is mandatory in Pelham (Call The Town Clerk). Residents take recyclables to the Fire Station parking lot the first Saturday of each month. Homeowners are encouraged to separate out bottles and cans with a deposit value for donation to the **Parent-Teacher Organization** at the same time.
- **Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer (256-3590)**
- **Gas Inspector (253-2228)**
- **Wire Inspector (256-6088)**  
The Building Inspector/Zoning Enforcement Officer is responsible for issuing building permits, inspecting building construction and ensuring that buildings and other activities meet the requirements of the Town Zoning By-Laws.  
The Gas and Wire Inspectors are responsible for ensuring that gas and electrical installations meet the State code standards.
- **School Committee (253-3595)**  
This elected three person Committee is responsible for the **Pelham Elementary School** and school building at 45 Amherst Road. Two of its members, along with members from the Towns of Amherst, Leverett, and Shutesbury, comprise the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee, which is in charge of the **Regional Middle and High Schools, serving** the four-town region.

▪ **Planning Board (253-7129)**

This elected five person Board holds public hearings and drafts the Zoning By-laws for vote at Town Meeting. These By-laws control subdivisions, the size of building lots, placement and size of buildings and structures. This Board issues certain Special Permits provided for under the By-laws.

▪ **Zoning Board of Appeals (253-7129)**

This Board consists of five members and three alternates appointed by the Selectmen. It issues permits for subsidized housing, and for Variances and Special Permits provided for under the Zoning By-laws. It hears appeals from individuals who have been denied approvals by the Zoning Enforcement Officer.

▪ **Conservation Commission (253-7129)**

▪ **Tree Warden/Insect Control (256-0661)**

▪ **Fence Viewers (253-7129)**

The Selectmen appoints the five members of the Conservation Commission. They are responsible for issuing permits under the state and town wetland protection laws, for developing natural resource conservation plans for the Town, and for acquiring and managing town conservation lands.

The Tree Warden, an elected position, holds hearings and issues permits related to the protection and management of the roadside shade trees in Town.

The two Fence Viewers, appointed by the Selectmen, assist in settling disputes between landowners over the location of boundary fences.

▪ **Board of Registrars (253-7129)**

These three Board members are appointed by the Selectmen and are responsible for registering voters, maintaining the voting lists and compiling the annual Town census.

Between Town Meetings, elected and appointed officers, boards, committees and a small number of Town employees conduct the business and services of the Town. Most of the people in these positions are unpaid volunteers who accept appointment or stand for election because they are interested in helping to serve the people of Pelham.

## This Guide

This Guide is intended to help new and current residents to identify whom to contact in Town government for information and help. The meeting times and places of all boards and committees are posted in the Town Clerk's Office in the **Rhodes Building** (Town Offices) near the top of Pelham Hill (Junction of Amherst Road and Daniel Shays' Highway (U.S. Route 202). The names of Town officials and the places and time of Town board meetings are printed in the Town Annual Report published in May and distributed to each home in Town.

• **Board of Selectmen (253-7129)**

The three people on this Board are the chief elected officials of the Town. They conduct key Town business and see that the decisions made at Town Meeting are carried out. They also handle unexpected problems. In major issues they act in consultation with other Town officials and hold public hearings to get the sense of the citizens before making major decisions.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT PELHAM?

The Pelham Historical Society sponsors public programs and tours on local and regional history; and has for sale historical books and pamphlets on the history of the mills, quarries, and early settlers of Pelham.

**Become a Society Member!      Visit the Museum!**  
**Attend the Programs and Tours!**

For Information and Schedules  
Call 253-3970