

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, January 7, 2025, began at 5:30 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen's Conference Room at the Town Hall.

Members Present: Derek DeBarge, Manuel Silva, James Gennette, Antonio Goncalves, and William Rosenblum

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2025 JAN 22 A 10:04

TOWN OF LUDLOW

Members Absent:

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

CORRESPONDENCE

1 Application for the Pink W.A.Y Foundation to have a "Purse Bingo" on Friday, February 28, 2025, at the Polish American Club from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to approve the application for the Pink W.A.Y Foundation to have a "Purse Bingo" on Friday, February 28, 2025, at the Polish American Club from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. **Mr. Silva second. Motion made by Mr. Goncalves that in the event there is a fee it is waived. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

2 Joe Eugenio – Letter expressing interest in being a member of the Bylaw Committee.

Mr. DeBarge: Marc, are you ready to start forming it?

Mr. Strange: Yes. Before I saw the agenda I didn't realize we had so many letters of interest. I guess we'll reach out to these folks and make sure they're ready to go. We'll have to do a little bit of research in our office. This was a previously constructed or put together committee.

Mr. DeBarge: Yes it was. Not many members of that original committee are even here.

Mr. Strange: For you and the public, the intent in my mind is to pick away at some low hanging fruit that the Charter Committee looked at and maybe the Town Meeting members saw as good changes and any other bylaw changes coming down the pike. Maybe capital. I haven't looked at the guidelines or the bylaws for the committee yet. We wanted to gauge interest. The fact that we got 6 members interested is good.

Mr. DeBarge: Do you want to hold off on appointing until you get a game plan of when you want to start and what you want to do?

Mr. Rosenblum: How much time do you have before the process ends for you to take them in?

Mr. Strange: The deadline was 12/31. What do you think? Should we accept these folks.

Mr. DeBarge: I wouldn't appoint anybody tonight. I'd put a cutoff date on it, take all the applicants.

Mr. Strange: The deadline has passed.

Mr. DeBarge: The ones we have are the only ones we have.

Mr. Silva: I see some applicants that look like husband and wife. Can you check? Most committees you can't have family members serve on the same committee.

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: This is for 2 citizen positions, right? You're going to do department heads or more?

Mr. Strange: My thought was to make it predominantly if not exclusively residents, really Town Meeting members because Town Meeting members will be the ones approving any bylaw changes. Again, this is the beginning of the process. Do you think we need more members of the committee? Would 7-9 be better? We could supplement the applications we got with a couple town employees to help guide discussions.

Mr. Rosenblum: This is nothing against the people because I don't know them, but if you have a husband and wife and you have 2 sets of them you're probably looking at the same thought process. I would want it to be a little bit more diverse than 4 people from 2 households. I think we have to figure out what the composition of the committee is going to be first and go from there. I would say we have 4 applicants. I would have a hard time having 2 people from the same household.

Mr. Gennette: What is your anticipation for how many members

Mr. Strange: Seven. I can put together an outline, a scope, and the 21st you guys can take a look at it.

Mr. DeBarge: Why don't we do that?

Mr. Gennette: I agree. I love the idea of it.

Mr. Rosenblum: What was the process before when we had a bylaw committee?

Mr. Strange: It was all town employees.

Mr. DeBarge: And 2 from the public. We never had a meeting because we couldn't fit it in everybody's schedule to make everybody happy.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do we maybe do something to that effect? To stay consistent with what was done in the past? Or if what was done in the past didn't work then all citizens?

Mr. Strange: Feeling the tenor of recent town meetings, I would like the Town Meeting members to have more of a say in what's going on for any bylaw changes. If certain departments have something they want to put forward they can come in and advocate for it. Having department heads or town employees pushing the bylaws feels like it would be better coming from meeting members.

Mr. Gennette: It adds to transparency.

Mr. Rosenblum: At the end would there be a vetting process of the bylaws once they're being submitted by a group of citizens? Qualification wise.

Mr. Gennette: It's just a review committee. All that has to be reviewed by Town Counsel.

Mr. Rosenblum: Is there a vetting process at the end?

Mr. Strange: Yes. Whatever the committee wanted to put forward we'd run by Town counsel and maybe have the Bylaw Committee bless it at Town Meeting.

VISITATIONS

5:35 p.m. – Eversource – Pole Hearing – 44 Riverside Drive – **PUBLIC HEARING**

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to open the pole hearing with Eversource for 44 Riverside Drive at 5:38 p.m. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Eversource: I'm Desiree from Eversource. They're putting some lighting in the parking lot on Riverside Drive and they want a new service. Due to the existing equipment, we already have the space so we're looking to install 1 more pole to accommodate the customer.

Mr. Goncalves: It says you're coming in from, it's on the right side near the first parking lot before you get to the bungalows.

Eversource: I'm not familiar with the area but they're building a new Tandem Bagel, it's right across the street.

Mr. Goncalves: There's not much there so I don't see a problem with it.

Mr. Strange: There was 1 pole that was knocked over in that area. Is this the pole you're replacing or is this a new pole?

Eversource: This is an entire new pole. If there is one that is leaning over if you want to write it down we can take care of it while we're out there.

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Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve the petition for the pole and wire locations as per drawing 19445656. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to close the Eversource pole hearing for 44 Riverside Drive at 5:41 p.m. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

CORRESPONDENCE

2 Joe Eugenio – Letter expressing interesting in being a member of the Bylaw Committee.

3 Margaret Szlosek – Letter expressing interest in being a member of the Bylaw Committee.

4 Kathy & Fred Nowak – Letter expressing interest in being a member of the Bylaw Committee.

5 Richard & DuAnne Pasquini – Letter expressing interest in being a member of the Bylaw Committee.

Mr. DeBarge: Item #'s 2, 3, 4, 5 are individuals or couples stating their interest to be on the Bylaw Committee. Thank you for your interest. Our office will be getting back to you once we have an outline and a system of how we're going to move forward.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to file 2 – 5. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

6 Springfield Water & Sewer Commission – HAA5 Water Quality Violation and Public Notification.

Mr. DeBarge: I wanted to make sure the public knows that you've reached out to Springfield Water quite a while ago with the interest of this board having a member on their committee so that we can be much more well informed as to what's going on. I did notice a comment on one of our forums about this today. We don't have enough information to be able to comment on this. I do want people to know that with all these warnings we're getting, read the warnings, there is phone and email information. They're going to tell you it's going to happen because they're building this new water treatment plant. We are trying to get onto that board.

Mr. Gennette: Is that a city or state entity?

Mr. Strange: It was created by state law. All the commissioners by state law are Springfield residents. I think the Mayor of Springfield may be the executive director. It's difficult to add members of other communities. There's multiple communities. I have been talking to Rep Saunders who has been speaking with reps from delegative legislatives of the other communities who are not represented on the board. There are discussions going on about it. It needs a legislative change, which is difficult to do, but there might be other ways for other towns to have a voice at the board meeting. We can go and at least now they're sending us information and letting us know when the meetings are. The communication has gotten better but the towns that are serviced by Springfield Water & Sewer Commission need to have a vote at the table.

Mr. Gennette: MMWEC is a Governor approved position.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to file. **Mr. Rosenblum second.**

Mr. Goncalves: If people didn't read this notice or didn't get it, it says very clearly this type of violation is not an immediate health threat or hazard. People shouldn't get overly concerned that if they drink the water they're going to get sick. It is something they're watching. The new facility they're building won't be complete until 2028. For the next 3 years we're going to be going through

a lot of this. Their systems are deteriorating a little bit. For now, there's no immediate danger. You can drink the water and we'll keep you informed.

Mr. Silva: They do mention if you are worried just boil your water.

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All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

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VISITATIONS

TOWN OF LUDLOW

5:45 p.m. – Sharon Bittner-Wiles – Treasurer/Collector Interview

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you for your application and coming in tonight. We'd like to start with a statement from you to tell us a little bit about yourself.

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: I am a 30-year resident of Easthampton. I've lived in the Pioneer Valley my whole life so I'm not local to Ludlow but I'm local to the area. I was a little late coming into the college degree game. I got my bachelor's degree in 2020 through Baypath University. My focus was in accounting. My background is in healthcare. I was an office manager for a chiropractor facility for 17 years and an office manager at an assisted living facility. I ended up in the City of Holyoke about 3 ½ years ago. Municipal government was brand new to me. I loved it. It's challenging and exciting and no 2 days are the same. I'm an accountant in the auditor's office. We're the last line of defense in the city for anything that goes through money wise. I saw this opportunity and thought I would be a great fit. I have the accounting experience so I know the end result. I work closely with the Treasurer and Collector in Holyoke to reconcile accounts and post receipts and I felt like my experience would dovetail nicely into this position. It would be a great opportunity for me to continue to learn and grow.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thanks for coming in. I do work in a municipality with a grasp in Munis. You feel well versed in that aspect?

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: I feel very well versed in that aspect. We use Munis on a daily basis. We just went through an upgrade and had a consultant working with us. I was on the committee to run and test things. I feel very comfortable. I wouldn't say I'm an expert by any means but I can run reports, I know how to pull account inquiries, I know how to reconcile accounts. I'm comfortable.

Mr. Gennette: I have a question as far as investments. The Treasurer usually handles the investment portfolio. Do you have any experience in that area?

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: I have not had direct experience. I'm on the tail end of the process. If there's any earnings that have to be accounted for in the general ledger that's my job to post that. I have not had any direct experience investing funds. I do know you currently have Mass Munifin and I worked with her in Holyoke while I was interim Treasurer for 2 months. We had a great relationship. We worked well together. I'm sure if there was any questions she would be willing to help and point me in the right direction. I would reach out to whoever your financial manager is for advice or guidance.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you for applying. It's great you know how to use Munis. With this position you'd have 4 people working under you in your department. Do you have any experience managing a department?

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: Yes. Right now, there is only 1 lady that I supervise. I guess you would term her my assistant. We used to have 2. My job is to make sure she is getting the work done that she needs to get done. I help her if she gets behind. She comes to me for job tasks. I used to supervise 2 people at the chiropractic office.

Mr. Silva: Nice to meet you. Credentials. There's going to be several credentials needed to do the job. Do you have any of those now?

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: I do not. That doesn't daunt me. I earned my degree working full-time taking classes and doing things at night and weekends. That doesn't daunt me to take certification courses.

Mr. Silva: You're pretty adverse what happens in a Treasurer/Collector office and I'm sure you know it's hectic. It's not an easy position to step in, especially where we are, dealing with a lot of transition. It's going to be very difficult and I want to make sure you are steadfast and will be here for a while.

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Ms. Bittner-Wiles: When I was appointed interim Treasurer for the 2 months, the Treasurer had given her notice and I was tasked with going into the office and running daily operations to get us through until they could find a permanent Treasurer and that was chaos. I didn't know anything. I had no training. I learned as I went. I was there late at night, on the weekends. I kept that office running.

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Mr. Silva: We have a service helping us out with that right now and I don't know how long they're going to be here to help.

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: I'm not sure. I did work with them in Holyoke and we do have a great rapport.

Mr. DeBarge: I'm focused on your managerial skills as well because the position, since we've merged our tax collection and Treasurer offices has been tumultuous because there's been 2 offices merged into 1. Fantastic staff in the office but it's also a department head. When I talk about the staff in that office, they do a fantastic job, it's not only dealing with staff but we deal with public. Do you have a certain style of management? How would you handle an upset citizen coming in who thinks his taxes are too high.

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: In my past positions I've had to deal with irate people and I find a lot of times people want to be listened to. They want you to understand and empathize with them and say I'm really sorry this is happening to you. If it's something I can address right there I will, if it's something I can't I will say I will get back to you. Let me look into this. Let me find the answer. I will call you by 3:30 this afternoon with an update. That's my philosophy. I find that patience and understanding goes a long way.

Mr. DeBarge: Do you have a time frame? Are you ready to make the move?

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: In my position I'm pretty well entrenched. I have a lot of things I have my hands in. I would not feel comfortable leaving before the end of January. I would do the same in any job. I would not leave anybody high and dry.

Ms. Ribeiro: We met with Sharon December 10th. We had a good conversation and talked about what's going on in the office, our goals and expectations, extensively about Sharon's background. It's great she's got Munis experience. I think it's great she works on the accounting side. It's nice to understand. Their budget is much larger. We had a nice interview.

Ms. Bittner-Wiles: We had a great conversation and I appreciated Carrie & Marc's time. I appreciate your time and the opportunity. I do feel like my experience in the accounting side would benefit me in this position because I know what the accountant needs from me. I feel like I would be successful in this role.

Mr. Rosenblum: Seeing that her timeline is a little stretched out I don't know if I'd want to make a decision right now. I'd like to chew on it but I can be swayed any other way. We've been in this position quite a few times right now I just want to be sure.

Mr. Silva: Is the process done for applications?

Mr. Strange: It's rolling. In years past you'd have a deadline because you'd have 10-12 applicants. That's not the way it is anymore.

Mr. Goncalves: We don't have a deadline.

Mr. Rosenblum: Open until filled.

Mr. Strange: We have been getting applicants, mostly from the private sector. That's such a big learning curve, municipal and Munis learning curve. We're focusing on trying to get someone in who does have municipal or Munis experience.

Mr. Silva: We have people in there now. We have nobody in there that's familiar with a lot of the aspects of the job that want to step up?

Mr. Strange: No.

Mr. Gennette: Is it better to make a move earlier so she can plan on it, or do you think that waiting to make a decision is better? What would you do?

Mr. Strange: It's up to you guys. I've been in your situation and I've felt more comfortable being able to think about it. My colleagues were ready to make decisions and I wasn't. Either way it's whatever you feel most comfortable with. As Carrie said, we liked her. She's seasoned; she has life experience. She has pragmatic experience. You never really know when you're sitting in the chair if there's going to be an avalanche of challenge, an avalanche of learning curve for Treasurer/Collector tasks. The question is, will that person rise to the challenge. Will that person stay late and come in on weekends until the wave crashes and there's more of an even keel to the job. If that person can get through that we're going to be good to go. The question is, is Sharon that person that can do that. In speaking with her in a 45-minute conversation you're trying to project what this person is going to do. She seems like that kind of person. She seems like she's gritty and has good work ethic. Do we think she can do the job? Yes. Do we think she can rise to those challenges? Yes. But we've been here more than 1 time and it just hasn't worked out. My recommendation is that you hire her, but that's your prerogative. If you have reservations that's understandable as well.

Mr. Gennette: I think delaying this only puts her a month out no matter when we decide to make the move. If it's the end of January now and we wait 2 weeks to do it, it's going to be the middle of February before we can bring her in. I don't know if waiting is a benefit to us or if it would hurt us. More things could happen. If she makes a decision she doesn't want to come here, at least we know in January and we can move on. I would prefer to make the move sooner than later. If you're comfortable with the hire I'd like to do it.

Mr. Strange: The other thing is if there's no decision made tonight, either yes or no, she might withdraw anyway because now she's exposed herself to her employer. Now the Mayor of Holyoke knows she's applied elsewhere. It's going to make it awkward. Does she want to wait 2 weeks to get a no answer. She's highly regarded in Holyoke and there's opportunities for her there so she might just say thank you.

Mr. Gennette: That's what I mean by her backing out. We've done this now so we need to at least give her an answer one way or the other.

Mr. Goncalves: We've been here before. By comparison to the previous person, we put in that position it's day and night. I feel ultra comfortable with her. Nobody else has applied. It's been out there.

Ms. Ribeiro: There have been other applicants.

Mr. Goncalves: Not at this level with this type of qualifications and municipal experience.

Ms. Ribeiro: Nobody with Munis. We were very particular with this because I think that was a big challenge last time. This is the only applicant that was qualified.

Mr. Goncalves: I don't know what waiting 2 weeks is going to accomplish.

Mr. Silva: Did I see somewhere where it was OK for us to check with her previous employer?

Mr. Rosenblum: I would think something like that to say no to your current employer is probably common. That doesn't bother me because once they find out or someone happens to view this meeting then it's going to be run up the pole. I don't have a problem with her saying no do not contact my current employer.

Mr. Strange: If you vote to extend an offer then there's the due diligence, checking the references, negotiations, all that stuff.

Mr. DeBarge: It's a department head position. We don't get a lot of applicants for positions with qualifications like that. I agree with Mr. Goncalves. I had my reservations about the last hire but when you only have 1 applicant and they have somewhat experience and you need a department head in the office I have no problem giving anybody a shot. It just didn't work out the last time and we reacted to it. I'm also in agreement that postponing this does nothing for our side, nor does it do anything for her. My concern is our office. I am eager to support you and Carrie if you both liked her, then I'm eager to make the offer.

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Mr. Silva: Are we going to keep the service we have so that if she runs into complications they're going to be able to step in?

Mr. Strange: We would like to keep them on as long as we can. We have to check our budget. Maybe we wean them off so they're available on an on-call situation.

Mr. Silva: If we have that I have no problem. It's a difficult thing to step in and do.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to authorize the Town Administrator and HR Department to make an offer to Sharon Bittner-Wiles for the Treasurer/Collector position. Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

6:05 p.m. – Antonio Valazquez-Budlong – Police Officer Interview

Mr. DeBarge: What we do in this interview process is you can start off with an opening statement, tell us a little bit about yourself, why you applied, we'll get into some questions, Chief will have some information for you, you'll make a closing statement and we'll move on.

Mr. Budlong: My name is Antonio. I've been in the military for the past 10 years. I'm a big family guy. It's always been one of my priorities to take care of my family, being there for them minus the part when I leave when I have to. I have 2 little sisters; my girlfriend has 2 kids and I like to work.

Mr. Silva: Nice to meet you. You know what's happening out there. Have you dealt with some of the things happening in the public and the police department? It's coming back but there's still an adverse feeling out there. What do you feel about stepping in and bringing this back to where it should be?

Mr. Budlong: I feel great about it. I haven't had to deal with it in a personal level other than going out to different countries where they don't like me based off of the fact that I'm American and I wear a different uniform. The difference between that and whatever job you're in, I'm glad it's coming back. I hope to make a difference in the department. I carry a lot of things that would contribute to that success and upholding that strong fist you need to have when it comes to interacting with the community and the people. I'm a huge person guy. I can have a conversation with anyone. I don't come with any negative background or nothing to have a biased judgement towards anyone. I'm fair to everyone and I treat everyone with respect and kindness, even if they don't like me. It's what I'm here to do and I hope to succeed in it.

Mr. Goncalves: Nice to meet you. Why Ludlow Police Department? Why not State Police or FBI or CIA?

Mr. Budlong: I was born and raised in Wilbraham. I graduated from Minechoag but my family has grown up in Ludlow too. My aunt, cousins, uncles and stepfather. I've moved over to Ludlow in 2012 because we had a foreclosure on our house unfortunately. It's always been one of the areas I'm very familiar with. I would like to give back to the place I've grown up in.

Mr. Gennette: Thanks for coming in. What do you know about the department's use of force policy?

Mr. Budlong: Not a lot. I don't think I've seen any of the police around here use force. I don't know if it's lethal or non-lethal.

Mr. Gennette: What would your idea of a use of force policy be?

Mr. Budlong: Use of force policy would probably be an ROE, rules of engagement. There's SOP's that we stand by and rules and procedures we have on hand. I know where to find that.

Mr. Gennette: As far as the military goes, can you expound on use of force?

Mr. Budlong: Our rules of engagement is there has to be an aggressor. A very aggressive aggressor. Not like hey buddy, I don't like you. We don't have 3 shots it's your time to engage. We give them the opportunity to have 3 shots and it's no fun after that.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you for coming in and your interest in Ludlow. Congratulations on making it into the room. What do you believe to be your biggest weakness and how do you feel you can address it?

Mr. Budlong: My biggest weakness right now is communication. I'm very good at communicating. I'm a military technician, the fueler, so I have to talk to the pilots and flight ops, but it seems to me that whatever I do communicate doesn't stick with them as I would like it to. I've constantly engaged in different ways to focus on communicating to my higher ups or anyone that falls in that line of flight ops and fuel and getting those pilots into aircrafts so they can do missions, Bambi Buckets around Western Mass, Central or Eastern. I've continuously tried to make effective ways to communicate.

Mr. Rosenblum: How do you feel you can address it?

Mr. Budlong: Making changes. Seeing if there's a solution that can stick. In the military it's a little different. There's someone that wants a certain procedure. I'm constantly trying to find ways to maintain that level.

Mr. DeBarge: I enjoyed reading your packet. I'm a Minechoag grad. When I saw the 92 Foxtrot I was very happy. I was also a 92 Foxtrot. I was in the National Guard. It was nice to see. I thought this was a cool answer to one of your questions in one of your references. References were asked about your capability of handling high pressure situations. We usually ask that question quite a bit. I love this answer. Yes he is. Weekly the Blackhawk pilots have problems and he has to switch and work fast to ensure the Blackhawks are able to leave on time. Refueling Blackhawks and keeping pilots happy is very difficult. What qualities to you believe are best to be a police officer in the Town of Ludlow?

Mr. Budlong: Self of service is a big thing. If you're familiar with loyalty, duty, respect, self of service, honor, integrity, personal courage. I feel the whole Army values goes hand in hand with police work itself, or firefighter, any first responder. It's core values I stand by even outside the uniform. Self of service is definitely one of those things. You have to be able to put those blinders on and do service calls. You're out there for the community, just like I'm out there for the nation for the people I'm surrounded by. Courage is another thing. You don't know what situation you're going to get into. I never knew what situations I was going to get into in the military until I went to Iraq last year. On the turn of a dime, you could be cool and not so cool.

Chief Valadas: There's a list of requirements that are prerequisites if you were to get hired. We would support you in all this and we would follow up with you. There's a pre-academy screening; you would have to complete a recruit officer course and that includes a medical exam. The standards are through civil service and the Human Resources division and the POST division. They would entail a hearing, eye exams, cardiovascular functions and physical exam. There's drug testing to include THC. There's a psychological exam that has a POST requirement. POST is a certification through the state. There's a PAT, which is a physical assessment test, which is run through the Mass HRD. There's a PT test, and you're familiar with that being in the military. It's a Cooper standard. You need the 30th to get in and the 40th to get out. There is an intake requirement form, which would be completed prior to the academy. Those have already been met through your packet you've already completed. You'd go to the next recruit officer academy class. I believe that would be in Boylston sometime in the spring. That is the earliest, closest academy. If you successfully graduate from the Mass ROCK academy you'd go to an FTO program through the Ludlow Police Department for about 2 ½ - 3 months. You have to maintain a Mass license to carry, Mass driver's license. You have to maintain a non-decertification status, both in and out of state. You cannot use tobacco to include cannabis products. You have residency requirements in Ludlow of 15 miles, that's direct route. This is for a patrolman's position with a special-order assignment

most likely to the overnight shift, which includes holidays, weekends, mandatory overtime assignments and you must complete a 1-year probationary period. We would support you in all that. Some of those you already have.

Mr. Budlong: It's always been a passion for me to do any type of first responding, especially a police officer. That was one of the routes I was trying to take before I went into the military. I've done my time in uniform wearing the camouflage. I would like to give back to the community. I think it's time for a different career and it would be a pleasure to be here and start giving back to the community that helped me get into uniform.

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6:25 p.m. – Angela Tobiasz – Police Officer Interview

Mr. DeBarge: Welcome. Thank you for applying. The way we do this process is you'll give us an opening statement, tell us a little about yourself and why you applied, we'll get into some questions from each member of the board, Chief will give you some information, you'll have a chance for closing comments and we'll move on.

Ms. Tobiasz: I graduated from Ludlow High School in 2020. I furthered my education at Westfield State University where I received my Bachelor of Science in criminal justice. I graduated with Latin honors cum laude. I did my internship as a senior at Westfield State University at the Chicopee Police Department where I received a lot of hands-on experience along with going to the police academy in Holyoke. I was able to do a lot of motor vehicle situations where we would pull people over. I would have a scenario to do. I worked at the Women's Correctional Center in Chicopee as summer help this past summer. I was a seasonal correctional officer. I had to supervise and monitor the activities of the women in custody maintaining the safety and security of the women. I was able to handle and deescalate situations verbally without using any weapons. That helped me with a lot of complex situations. I speak fluent in Polish.

Mr. Rosenblum: Congratulations and thank you for considering Ludlow. What do you believe to be your biggest weakness and how do you feel you can address it?

Ms. Tobiasz: My biggest weakness is I say yes to everything. It is hard for me to say no so I take on a lot of responsibilities. From working at Hubbard Memorial Library and as a JV coach and Ludlow High School along with the jail I've learned to do the most important things first, accomplish that and finish with the less important things at the end.

Mr. Gennette: What do you know about the department's use of force policy?

Ms. Tobiasz: I believe you tend to use less lethal force. You would rather use verbal instead of using weapons like guns or tasers. I know that because at the jail we would do that. They wouldn't give us any weapons. I know you use the use of force calmly as much as possible. You want to keep the community safe and you don't want them to feel threatened. They want trust in the police department and police officers. For use of force, you need to build trust with the community and not use as much, but verbally.

Mr. Silva: Nice to meet you. It's nice to see a Ludlow graduate come in. With everything happening around the country and how police are frowned upon, although it seems to be getting better. How are you going to be able to help out and get things to be a little bit better of a situation?

Ms. Tobiasz: My determination and passion is a good quality that I have. I have good work ethic and pay attention to details and would make sure to follow the department's policies and procedures. I'm good at reading non-verbal signs such as body language and facial expressions. I have very good communication and interpersonal skills like teamwork, patience and leadership.

Mr. Goncalves: Of all the things you could be or work in law enforcement, why not the jail, State Police, FBI, CIA? Why Ludlow Police?

Ms. Tobiasz: Working at Hubbard Memorial Highway since I was 15 I was isolated in a building and working with the community I wanted to bring myself out on the streets. Because I was able to have that opportunity to work customer service inside the library in Ludlow I was able to build a good trust with the community. They know me when I walk in. They know I'm a very good

employee. I wanted to open up my experience to go outside and continue working with the community out in the streets.

Mr. DeBarge: Can you give me what you think are 3 of the top personality traits or characteristics that you believe a police officer should have serving in the Town of Ludlow.

Ms. Tobiasz: Confidence. They should be very confident in the decision making and confident in their colleagues. Confidence is very important in every police officer to have in each other and themselves. Another would be patience. Every officer should be patient with whatever situation they may be in and whatever they encounter. You never know what situation you may come to. Every officer should be patient and learn to be patient with others. Another is self-aware. Being self-aware of your surroundings and the public, if you're in a situation you should be aware of what's around you for your and everyone's safety.

Chief Valadas: I want to go over some prerequisites. If you're appointed today by the board, some of these you've already met, we would support you and go through these. Part of it is to get working on the job. One is a medical exam. You're subject to a medical exam with civil service for HRD standards and also POST standards. A hearing exam, eye exam, cardiovascular functions and a physical exam, etc. It will include drug testing including THC, a psychological exam is required through the POST commission. You'd have to take a PAT test through the Mass HRD, which is an obstacle course. You'd have to pass a physical assessment test, PT test, like the one you already took. You'd have to qualify for the academy under the Cooper's 30th %, you'd have to achieve a 40th% to graduate. POST commission has an intake form. You've already met most of the requirements because we've gone through the packets for your pre-employment. You would attend a ROCK academy, which is for full-time police officers. It would be sometime in the spring, either in Holyoke or Boylston. If you successfully complete that you'd have to complete the Ludlow Police Department FTO program, 3-4 months. You have to maintain your Mass license to carry firearms, your driver's license. You have to meet all 6E POST standards. You can't use smoking products to include tobacco, cannabis and THC products. A resident requirement in the State of Massachusetts is to be 15 miles in a straight line to where you live from Ludlow. This is for a patrolman's position on the midnight shift. It includes holidays, weekends, mandatory overtime and a 1-year probationary period.

Ms. Tobiasz: I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to speak in front of the board today. I am passionate about serving the community and the town I grew up in. Thank you.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Board to approve and sign Executive Session Minutes from December 17, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign executive session minutes from December 17, 2024, with all members present. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to sign VIP Motors Class II. (Corrected)

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to sign the VIP Motors Class II license. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to sign Entertainment License for KFC.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the entertainment license for KFC.

Mr. Goncalves: What kind of entertainment is this?

Mr. Gennette second.

Mr. Silva: Any type of music. If you have a radio or television.

All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

6:45 p.m. – Christopher Clarke – Police Officer Interview

Mr. DeBarge: Welcome to the interview. We appreciate you applying for the Ludlow Police Department. You're going to give us an opening statement, tell us a little bit about yourself, why you applied here, we're going to ask you some questions, Chief will give you some information and you'll have a chance for closing comments and we'll move on.

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Mr. Clarke: I started in EMS with AMR in Springfield. I did a few years there. While doing that I thought I wanted to be a firefighter so I volunteered at Three Rivers Fire. I liked how the communications with the police department had clear communication and how everyone knew their role. I transferred to Cataldo in Holyoke and did a year there as an EMT. I went to the corrections officer academy in Worcester. I graduated and served about 1 year full-time but wanted to be closer to home so I transferred to Hampden County and that's where I currently work.

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Mr. DeBarge: What's your position at Hampden County?

Mr. Clarke: I am a corrections officer, the 4-12 shift.

Mr. Gennette: What do you know about the department's use of force policy?

Mr. Clarke: I don't know the policy.

Mr. Gennette: What would your representation be?

Mr. Clarke: I would say reasonable force. Not using excessive force based on anger or anything besides the situation. Force that is justifiable to subdue.

Mr. Gennette: You're a corrections officer. Have you been in a situation where you've had to observe use of force?

Mr. Clarke: Yes. I've been in situations where I've had to use force to protect myself and my trainee at the time. In Worcester there was a trainee up in the booth and popped an accidental door and there was a known enemy with another inmate and they charged at each other. I tried breaking it up and they took their anger and pointed it at me so I had to use reasonable force to protect myself before resources came in. During that time, I did what I learned in the academy.

Mr. Rosenblum: Congratulations, welcome and thank you for interviewing for Ludlow. What do you believe to be your biggest weakness and how do you feel you can address it?

Mr. Clarke: When it comes to the laws, I don't really know them. Being a corrections officer, our scope is so limited so we only know our policy inside the jail. Assuming with reasonable training I would get it down but right now that would be my biggest weakness.

Mr. Silva: With the events and things that are happening across the country, although it's getting better, what would you do to help and make it a lot better?

Mr. Clarke: One big thing I've learned is treating everybody like people no matter the situation. Right now, police reforms are on the shaky side. The biggest thing at the end of the day is everyone is human so you can talk to them as normal human beings. That can usually go a long way. A lot of people are scared of the uniform.

Mr. Goncalves: Why Ludlow Police? Not a bigger city, State police, FBI, CIA or even a career at the jail?

Mr. Clarke: I grew up in the Town of Ludlow. Ludlow feels like home. I want to only apply to Ludlow because this is home for me. Me growing up here has had a lot of positive interactions with people in the community. If someone recognizes me it could take the nervousness or scaredness off of someone.

Mr. DeBarge: I'm looking for 3 of the top personality traits or characteristics that you believe a police officer should have while serving in the Town of Ludlow.

Mr. Clarke: Integrity, honesty and compassion. Following your protocols and policies by the department standpoint and always being truthful, even when not wearing the uniform or the badge.

If you're out and about just being professional. If you do anything or get into trouble, it's never in the newspapers just your name, it always has the department underneath it.

Chief Valadas: This is a list of prerequisites you have to complete if you're appointed by the board today. You'd go through a pre-academy screening. This would include a medical exam that's governed by civil service HRD standards and POST standards as well. It includes a hearing exam, eye exam, cardiovascular functions and a physical exam. It includes drug testing to include THC, a psychological exam. You'd have to go through a physical assessment test, which is an obstacle course and that's governed by the Human Resources Division. You have to do a PT test similar to the one you just took. The MPTC uses the Cooper standard which is 30% entry and 40% to graduate. You'd have to complete an intake of core requirements through the POST. You've already done most of them through your packet. You'd have to attend a ROCK academy class which most likely would either be Holyoke or Boylston. It would be the next one in sequence. If you graduate the academy you'd have to successfully complete an FTO program roughly 3 months or so. You have to maintain your Massachusetts license to carry, a Massachusetts drivers license. You have to maintain your POST standards and certification under the 6E law. You couldn't be decertified anywhere or in another state. There is no use of tobacco products or cannabis or THC products. You have a residential requirement in the civil service to be no more than 15 miles from the municipality that hires you. This is a patrolman's position most likely assigned to the midnight to 8 shift to include holidays, weekends, mandatory overtime and you have a 1-year probationary period.

Mr. Clarke: I want to say thank you to everyone for taking their time and consideration. Just getting through this interview process is a big step for me. I didn't think it would happen. I'm appreciative of that and I thank all of you.

7:05 p.m. – Cory Rodrigues – Police Officer Interview

Mr. DeBarge: Welcome to your interview for a full-time police officer position. Congratulations for getting into the interview. We'll give you an opportunity for an opening statement to tell us a little about yourself, why you want to be a full-time police officer here in town. We'll ask you some questions, Chief has some information for you. We'll give you a chance for a closing comment and then we'll move on.

Mr. Rodrigues: First and foremost, thank you so much for having me here. I've been a special police officer in town going on 10 years. Born and raised in Ludlow. I graduated from Ludlow High School in 2006. Shortly after graduating high school, I went to college with the major of fire science. My intention was to someday become a firefighter. My daughter was born really young when I was 19 and I didn't have a full-time job so I needed to take a break from college in order to obtain a full-time job. My goal was to become a firefighter and I knew that most fire services require you to become an EMT. I took that opportunity to take a leave of absence from STCC and go into the EMT program. I obtained my EMT about 6 months later and have had that going on 17 years. I will re-cert in April. After getting my EMT I started working full-time for American Medical Response. I was primarily in Springfield and Holyoke with their 9-1-1 contract. I also worked East Longmeadow and Hampden. There I was quickly appointed to the disaster relief team, which is a deployable unit that goes to man-made and natural disasters and provides medical aid. I was also appointed field training officer after about 2 years. I was then appointed to their tactical response unit. I was a tactical medic that worked alongside law enforcement. While I was doing the tactical medic trainings and operations I got to know law enforcement officers and they suggested I go back to school and change my major to criminal justice, which I thought was a great idea and I did. A couple of my friends suggested self-sponsoring through the reserve academy to hopefully become a part-time police officer. I was signed off by Granby because at the time that's where I lived. In January 2015 I was appointed a special police officer in town. I just hit my 10-year anniversary. Very quickly I knew that it was the right move. This was the place I wanted to be and the career I wanted to have. I took every opportunity I could to be the best special police officer I could be. I did FTO ride time and most of the guys I did it with are now supervisors. Lt. Irwin, Sgt. Knox, Sgt. Tierney. After I graduated from the FTO program as a special I took every opportunity to work with other specials as often as I could. I went above and beyond my volunteer hours and worked as many shifts as possible. I also worked with other full-timers so I could learn the way to do the job well. I've always been a very proactive special. I do a lot with motor vehicle enforcement when I'm not taking other calls. I work about 2 shifts a week. I make sure if there's no calls going on and we're not busy, I'm out there taking care of motor vehicle issues. I also put

myself out there to be at as many events as I possibly could throughout the town. The open houses, the rag-shag parade, Portuguese festival, Memorial Day parade and even the 250th celebrations. I think it's important that we engage with the community and show another side of law enforcement, not just the one pulling you over or taking you to jail. I've worked as a security officer at Holyoke Medical Center. Functions are very similar to a police department. There I was promoted to field trainer and then shift lead. I became the security supervisor, which is in command and I only reported to the director of security. I had an opportunity to work for the Department of Youth Services in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. That's where I am now. I work in juvenile corrections. I'm on the special response team. They call us security, but we're in the bubble. We watch the cameras; we respond to codes and work with the youth. I've obtained a lot of experience working with youth, which is huge, especially to help me in policing because the juvenile law element of policing now is one of the trickiest to navigate so I've been fortunate enough to get some experience there. For a 3-year period I was a dispatcher with central dispatch. I worked per diem. It was something a little extra and I wanted to see the department from the other side and see how to use the various systems like CEJIS and IMC and Open Fox. I was able to see the department from the inside and outside. Because of all those things put together I think I would be an excellent candidate for this position. Most recently, I did complete the Bridge Academy, which is a new criteria set forth by the POST Commission. I graduated from that and submitted all my hours, over 900 of which were volunteer hours to the town that I did patrols with that went unpaid. The rest of it was paid patrol. I am completely POST certified and do not need to complete a full-time academy. Thank you for having me.

Mr. Silva: Knowing what's happening in the country and all the events as far as police officers and the wrath you get, although it's getting better, what do you think you can do and how would you make it even better?

Mr. Rodrigues: The most important thing for anybody going into a career in law enforcement; I've obviously been in for 10 years on a part-time basis, the thing is when you go into a career like this you need to have the mindset that you're going to go in and on that day whoever you encounter, maybe you can change their mind if there's a negative connotation with police. If you go in with that mindset, even if you only change 1 person's mind a week, we're getting somewhere. That pendulum will start swinging back in our favor. You have to go in there with that mindset that you are going to do the best you can and help the community you're there to serve despite what they might think of you and give them a reason to think better of us as a whole and represent the town the best way possible.

Mr. Gennette: Thanks for coming in. What do you know about the department's use of force policy?

Mr. Rodrigues: Like I said in my opening statement, I'm a graduate of the reserve intermediate police academy as well as the Bridge Academy. I have defensive tactic certifications from there. Every year at Ludlow Police we recertify in defensive tactics and we have to go through our use of force policies through the PMAM system. The best way I can describe it to you is the least amount of force possible in order to achieve compliance. I don't believe we need to go hands on with absolutely everybody that we talk to. Through Holyoke Medical Center and DYS the primary force that we use is our own voice. We're there to try and use verbal judo. We want to calm people down with our presence, with the way we talk to them and if we can do that we have a happy ending with compliance. Sometimes force is necessary but we want to use the least amount possible. We're not trying to hurt people, we're just trying to do what they need to do for our safety, their safety and the safety of the public.

Mr. Rosenblum: Congratulations for making it into the room. Thank you for your service to the town already. What do you believe to be your biggest weakness and how do you feel you can address it?

Mr. Rodrigues: I'm my own worst critic. Any situation, be it law enforcement, EMS, everyday life, home with the kids. Something happens and my mind after it is resolved immediately goes to how can I handle that better. How could I do that a different way? If I had done it this way in the first place I would have had a better outcome maybe. It's not a terrible thing to have because at least there's quality assurance and quality improvement going on with each situation. I try to be confident in my training, in my skills and life experience and in doing so I try to make the best decisions. Improvement will happen and we'll be better the next time.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you for your 10 years. You've answered most of my question but out of curiosity, why stay here in town? Why not grab the experience and go to the State, FBI, CIA or bigger city?

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Mr. Rodrigues: When I initially graduated from the reserve intermediate academy, I'm not going to pretend that Ludlow was the only department that I applied for. At the time I was living in Granby. When I started in Ludlow in 2015, the welcome I got there was phenomenal. Everybody I've worked with over there are great people. They've become a family. I love the department and I don't think that I would leave my state job that I have, which is a good job and I love the work I do, for anything but Ludlow. Ludlow is where I want to be. That's my dream and I think leaving Ludlow would make it worth it but I don't see myself leaving for any other reason. I grew up in and graduated from Ludlow and my family works for the town. My mother works for the school system, my wife works for the school system, my brother works for the school system, my stepdad is retired from the school system. It's been in the family and I'd love to come home.

Mr. DeBarge: What was Hadley's policy on tattoos?

Mr. Rodrigues: That was the problem. No tattoos that are visible. I went through the interview process and made it to the day before the Board of Selectmen meeting and I was told that day I was not to come in because they found out I had tattoos.

Mr. DeBarge: What are your top 3 characteristics or personality traits for a police officer serving in the Town of Ludlow.

Mr. Rodrigues: First and foremost, you need somebody that is going to put the needs of the community they serve over the needs of their own. When I worked at AMR I was on the day the tornados touched down in Springfield. I was running late for an appointment with my now wife to go look at a place. We were finally moving in together. As I came over the South End Bridge, the radio started chirping that there was a funnel cloud forming going over the Memorial Bridge. I was on the disaster team and I am now active. As I hung up the phone it hit me, she was picking up my daughter in Springfield in the same path the tornado was crossing. I made my way over to the scene. We made it to Main Street and it looked like a war zone. There was debris everywhere. Some of the South End Community Center had collapsed. I remember seeing a tree through the driver's side of a windshield and the car was at a stop sign so there was clearly an operator in there at one time and now I need to find that person. I was able to locate her in a nearby bar. She wasn't severely injured and because of that I triaged her to take a bandage and move on. The wall had come down and all around it was children's shoes. We started calling out thinking some of the kids were buried in the rubble and didn't hear anything. The police officer tripped and we were concerned that the building was going to come down so we made our way out of the front, which put us in front of the Hampden County facility across the street. We were ushered over there and we found out they evacuated the South End Community Center and all the children were out but they were injured. I had no idea where my partner was with the ambulance and I had 20+ kids in the lobby. I had to triage every one of them. One of my supervisors arrived. Radio communications were down, cell phones were bogged down, I wasn't able to reach family or co-workers. We were eventually able to locate my ambulance and take some of the most critical patients out. We worked throughout the night. We got sent out to Monson and covered out there. I was able to make my way past my house to change into a dry uniform and see that my family was ok. There were so many different levels of stress to that night and you need to be able to see past it and get the job done. You need to be willing to get the job done despite the fact you're worried about your family. It's important to put them first. Somebody that is decisive. You need somebody that is able to make split second decisions and be confident in the decisions they're going to make. You need somebody that is knowledgeable of what the job requires. I think I fit into all 3 of those categories given my experience.

Chief Valadas: There's a list of prerequisites. The list of requirements to be a police office in Ludlow through the civil service system there is a medical exam required, which includes hearing exam, eye exam, cardiovascular exam and physical exam. Drug testing to include THC, psychological exam which is held to a POST standard. The PAT and PT test you wouldn't have to do because you don't have to complete a ROCK academy. There is an FTO program you'll have to complete. You have to maintain your LTC and driver's license. You have to meet the 6E checklist, which we've already completed. You can't use tobacco products, cannabis or THC

products. You have to live 15 miles from Ludlow. It's a patrolman's position, most likely midnight to 8 that includes holidays, weekends, mandatory overtime. You have a 1-year probationary period.

Mr. Rodrigues: I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity. It's been 10 years that I've been on special and I haven't scored high enough to get in the room with you up to this point. This is exciting to be here, especially the week after my 10-year anniversary. My closing statement is more of a question to you. Is there anything I could have done that would have made me a more desirable candidate?

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Mr. DeBarge: What I would like is preparedness, which you showed. When I applied for the PD a long time ago I went to our community policing office and talked to them. I wanted to make sure I was ready for questions that I didn't know the answers to. You came in more prepared than some of the others. If I was to answer your question I would say I appreciate when candidates come in prepared and know a little information about the PD.

Mr. Gennette: I'm not going to give an answer because we're going to have police interviews in the future and I don't want candidates to be ready for me.

Chief Valadas: You have 4 candidates in front of you. It's for 1 position. I would request, as you have done in the past, to appoint an alternate. If something does happen we have an alternate. We have used the alternates before. By civil service order you have Mr. Budlong, Ms. Tobiasz, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Rodrigues. In my opinion, you have 3 younger candidates and 1 in a different position in life. I only make recommendations if you have a standout candidate and you have a standout candidate. You might remember earlier last year we had interviews and I mentioned this with officer Texeira who was coming from Rhode Island. He was in a situation where he had already been in the police academy so he was already a police officer and already POST certified in another state. Mr. Rodrigues is even better than that. He's already POST certified in our state so he's a police officer. He works shifts. In the past few years, he's been working a lot more shifts because we've had the opportunity to do so and he's availed himself to work even though he has other employment. I think that's exemplary. He's the standout candidate. You already have a police officer you could automatically hire and save the town thousands of dollars. Beyond that he has to complete the FTO, he has to complete his probationary period. He's an outstanding candidate. His dedication to Ludlow is exemplary. I think the other candidates have a bright future with the fact that they have ties to Ludlow. The veteran Mr. Budlong, the town employee Ms. Tobiasz, and Mr. Clarke who works for the Sheriff's Department all are good candidates, but you have a police officer and he's willing to leave his very good employment with a good history. He also has an excellent history in Ludlow. Officer Rodrigues is a fine family man and I would be honored to have him.

Mr. Goncalves: When does this position start?

Chief Valadas: The position is open so he could start upon his separation from his current employer. It would be a Monday start.

Mr. Silva: There hasn't been very many times in interviews where I've said that 1 candidate is very far apart from the others but viewing his experience, his time in Ludlow, his time with the police department. As the Chief said, all the designations he has already. It's unfortunate for the other candidates, although they are very good candidates and I would love to employ them, but I think this candidate is far above the other candidates. I would have no issue going with Mr. Rodrigues as our appointee. For the alternate I would go with Mr. Budlong.

Mr. Rosenblum: This goes back to the age-old question we've been fighting for the last few years. The fact that you guys do an exemplary job in vetting your candidates and civil service. This has nothing to do with any of the candidates it's just civil service holds a little bit of a cloud over our head. I've always said you and fire do such an exemplary job it's almost like why are we doing this but that's who we are. We are the appointing authority. I look at the candidates based on experience and what's in front of us I 100% agree with Mr. Rodrigues being the appointment. Then again, we have to deal with, right now I would have Mr. Rodrigues and Ms. Tobiasz as the alternate but we have to address the elephant in the room of civil service. How your board graded it is pretty much how I find it but we need to discuss civil service.

Mr. Gennette: Chief, do you have a recommendation for the alternate?

Chief Valadas: I won't on the 3. I caution the board for civil service HRD standard you need reasons for a bypass. I won't because I think the 3 candidates are of the same caliber. I think veteran status is excellent. With that said, Ms. Tobiasz is a town employee and Mr. Clarke works for the county.

Mr. Gennette: My vote is for Mr. Rodrigues and alternate is Mr. Budlong.

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Mr. Goncalves: If we have the ability to hire somebody immediately I don't know if the other 3 candidates could meet Mr. Rodrigues' abilities, standards, knowledge and experience 4-5 years from now. We'd be doing a disservice to the town. In my mind I can dig deep enough on the list and bypass whatever question there might be based on this interview, which I think was 10 times better than the other 3. He's more prepared tomorrow to jump into this and more prepared in life in general based on his answers and experience. Then Mr. Budlong for an alternate.

Mr. DeBarge: I've been a big advocate with both Chief's to leave civil service for this exact reason. So, you can hire who you want when you want. That's for a whole other discussion because this causes us going down to get somebody. In the interviews I've been involved in it causes a lot of stress and strain if you're bypassing somebody that has nothing negative in their packet to get somebody else, especially a veteran. I have a very hard time passing a veteran, especially one that has done a year in Iraq; however, this is a case that I find an exception to. I have gone to a hearing before as Chairman when we bypassed someone and we had to explain the reasons why. This is another situation. As impressed as I was with Mr. Budlong, not only because he's a veteran but the fact that he came in here not knowing a lot about law enforcement and to answer questions that he wasn't aware of certain things but still working through the problem. I would have liked to have seen more preparedness but still working through the problem. I appreciated Ms. Tobiasz's answers. I think a little more experience would be better in the field but a promising candidate. I've known Mr. Clarke and his family for quite a long time through sports with my son. I would have liked to have seen Chris more prepared. I would have liked to see the candidates come in and know what the use of force policy is at least for the State of Massachusetts. This is the situation where we saw it. This would be easy for me as the chair if I got called in to explain why I voted to bypass someone who was above the candidate I would vote for. Experience is easy to talk about but experience is important here. It's not just experience in life, it's law enforcement. We're in the interest of public safety and as the Board of Selectmen we should be in the interest of putting someone on the street as fast as possible. That's an added bonus that we don't have to send somebody to the academy. I don't think it's a reason alone to bypass but I think the totality of the circumstances and all of the information we have, the answers to our questions by Mr. Rodrigues was probably some of the best that I have seen. Very well-spoken, very confident, very experienced. His experience vastly outraces the others. To me this is an easy one. My alternate choice will be for Mr. Budlong because of his veteran status, because he is number 1 on the list but I think he's got some more work to do to be selected first tonight.

Mr. Rosenblum: All of us in our career in one way or another, everything is a learning experience. I think the 3 other candidates; what this does for them is makes them better for the next time. We've had a couple other instances as long as I've been here where we have to deal with civil service, but I think we have a very good argument or reasoning to bypass.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to appoint Cory Rodrigues as a Ludlow police officer based on separation of current employment.

Mr. Goncalves: You have to talk about the bypass. Withdraw your motion.

Motion withdrawn by Mr. Rosenblum.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to designate or hire Mr. Rodrigues based on his experience, based on the interview questions and answers, based on preparedness for the position and that we bypass the list as presented and offer the job to Mr. Rodrigues. I would also move that candidate Budlong be named the alternate.

Mr. DeBarge: Also add in the motion that Mr. Rodrigues is equipped to start working now.

Mr. Goncalves: Based on the preparedness for the position and his ability to start work immediately.

Mr. Rosenblum: Based on separation of current employment.

Mr. Silva: What about the process we have for the scores received by the committee? Should that be in there?

Mr. DeBarge: For our reasoning, yes.

Mr. Goncalves: Furthermore, based on the final evaluation report for the police candidate review board submitted having Mr. Rodrigues as the top vote getter by about 80% more than the next candidate.

Mr. Silva second.

Mr. DeBarge: Is everybody happy with that motion or do you want to redo it so it's better?

Mr. Silva withdrew second. Mr. Goncalves withdrew motion.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to offer the position to candidate Rodrigues and bypass the civil service list based on his experience, POST certification, his ability to start immediately based on the interview questions and answers from today and the basic preparedness that he presented for the position. I would also include that the candidate review board scored him about 80% higher than the next candidate. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to offer candidate Budlong the alternate position. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Board to continue FY26 budget discussion.

Mr. Strange: Last time we met was December 17th. The next night we met with FinCom. Based upon discussions with you gentlemen and FinCom, we went back to the drawing board and put in a \$200 trash fee instead of \$300 but also made some other changes. We lowered the COLA from 3% to 2% for non-union folks. We're also assuming a 2% COLA for any unions that we're currently in negotiations with and we've communicated that to them. We lowered the school increase to 3% from 4%. We're assuming an 8% health insurance increase. The annual convention for municipal managers is in 2 weeks. One of those days MIIA will give their increases for fiscal 26 so we'll know what our increase is going to be in a couple weeks. I have an 8% placeholder in there. If it's above that we're probably going to have to have more serious discussions.

Mr. Goncalves: I thought we were in the 2nd year of a price freeze.

Mr. Strange: We have an agreement where we will not be charged any more than the average of the trust. If ours would have been 10 but our trust averages 7 ½ we're at 7 ½. We're in a good spot relatively speaking for fiscal 26. James and I had a good conversation around capital. We ended up taking the cost of the trash barrels out of the operating budget and using free cash to pay for that. The annual cost of the barrels is \$152,000 so we took that out of the DPW budget and put it into our 5-year capital plan. I had a conversation with Sean McBride about the lifeguards at Haviland Pond. Although the effort was there, Haviland Pond has not been used much over the past couple of years. We took out the salaries to pay for the lifeguards. That was about \$60,000. We backed out some of the reclassification requests. After doing all of that, we're now \$218,000 over capacity. Again, the school is at a 3% increase, the total town department increase is 2 ½ %, our total general fund, which is all the town departments, school department, employee benefits and debt service is at 3%. Our total town budget, which is our general fund plus our enterprise funds is at 3.17%, which I think is pretty good. With a little more finessing with free cash, we can always increase our local receipts a little bit. We're always very conservative with our local receipt's estimates. I think we're in relatively good shape depending on what our health insurance number comes in at.

Mr. Gennette: Have you been able to certify free cash yet?

Mr. Strange: We're working on it. We had a meeting today with the team. Derek from Mass Munifin is finalizing our June 24 report and sending it to accounting team and they will be finalizing it. Then we have to submit a document with Gateway, which is a state form. We've been pushing. I told them capital needs to know what our free cash is before they make decisions on awarding capital requests.

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Mr. Gennette: I'm probably going to argue to not approve much. I think we need to clear our leases if we can if there's no early payoff penalty. I don't know what the world looks like in coming years. I think we're headed for a little bit of a storm. I think we need to be prepared for what could come and I don't want a lot of debt coming out of the backside. If we have to cut budgets because we're not getting anything from the State I think we have to get ahead of the game a little and we need to play it safer than we normally do. I'll never go over 2 ½.

Mr. Silva: To go on record, I'm still not in favor of increasing the trash fee. I think we have to find a better mechanism. Only the people that use the trash and pay that trash fee are supplementing the general fund. I don't think that's right. There's a lot of people that don't even pay those fees. I don't think it's fair. I think we should find a better way, whether we implement that fee based on the units that are across the board. I didn't like the first one we implemented. The DPW boggled it and we had to come up with that money.

Mr. DeBarge: It's going to be that way every year.

Mr. Goncalves: It's a \$700,000 difference.

Mr. DeBarge: What other fee do you want to bump up?

Mr. Silva: I don't know, I just want to be fair. There's a lot of people out there saying it's not fair. It is not fair for these people to have to pay for the general fund for everything. Commercial uses it sometimes.

Mr. DeBarge: Everybody has had a comment on this. Whether they think it's fair or not. Something is going to have to happen. We've talked about this ad nauseum that tough decisions are going to have to be made by this board, whoever is on this board whether it's trash changes, changes to dispatch to go regional to save money, changes to health insurance so our percentages aren't 78/22, but all we do is talk. We don't do anything. You complain about a fee. I get it all the time from people. Nobody wants a larger fee but when you tell them about the barrels, the single streaming and you tell them the fee has to go up every person I have talked to, maybe they didn't shake my hand and say thank you for going up in the fee, but when you tell them about the barrels, the single streaming and how we're trying to get progressive with automated pick up, everyone I have talked to and I am confident in saying it, has said they understand. If there are those that don't, then solicit questions or answers from them as to how we can come up with \$700,000. We don't know because we're not giving Marc any direction. We just say we need to make hard decisions but we're not doing it.

Mr. Gennette: You're both right where I'm thinking. I don't like the trash fee because I don't think it should have ever been instituted. It should have stayed on the tax base in some way, shape or form and we should have tried to manage that. I also understand we have to go up in certain fees. I agree if we're going up with the transfer station fee and those kinds of fees, but when it's a general fee, sewer fund fee, that's wide ranging. I don't agree with offsetting your tax base with a fee like that. Once you go over what the bill is it's easy to just start cranking it up. My justification for that is what's the bill, what is it going to cost us and that's what we should charge the community. It's easy to tell the community this is the bill we have; this is what everything costs and this is what the bill comes out to. This is why we're charging you this. It's justifiable. That's why when you talk to people and they don't have a problem with it because they're getting what they pay for.

Mr. DeBarge: Which is my point. Conversation and communication works. Not just coming here and complaining.

Mr. Gennette: Manny is saying the same thing. You can't just crank up the bill, you have to have justification for what you're charging for.

Mr. DeBarge: The justification was the \$700,000.

Mr. Goncalves: The mistake was initially charging that fee outside to avoid the 2 ½ because the DPW at that time fell asleep at the wheel and we were put in a position 2-3 days before Town Meeting and we found out the bill was a million dollars more than what we were told it was going to be. There was no way we could go to the high school and pass a budget. They approved it that night as we closed out the warrant getting ready to go to the high school with a budget. That was the only way we were going to get away with it because we couldn't find \$700,000 anywhere else.

Mr. DeBarge: I still don't understand one point. Trash went up and is going up. If you don't find a way to make that money to offset the higher costs then you cancel it. You don't want to cancel it so you have to pay for it.

Mr. Silva: When did it go up? My understanding is that the contract is \$100,000 give or take a year. That's all it is going up.

Mr. Gennette: Only half of it is getting funded by the community. It's a 1.4-million-dollar contract existing that only \$700,000 is coming in from the community.

Mr. Goncalves: Since that \$100 was put in place the trash has gone up almost a million dollars.

Mr. Silva: From last year to this year the trash did not go up. Am I wrong?

Mr. Strange: No, the health insurance is going up.

Mr. Silva: Understood. My thinking is we're making the people pay these trash fees responsible for others.

Mr. Goncalves: Those old ladies that have a problem with this that don't put out bags don't have kids in school. Should we take that off of their bills?

Mr. Silva: No, that's not the point. That's a better point that this is a municipality and we pay as a municipality as a whole, not certain people paying for certain people.

Mr. Goncalves: There's always going to be people in town that put less stress on services than others but we have to average it out.

Mr. Silva: I've always had a big problem with condominiums. They don't pay trash.

Mr. Goncalves: Of course they do.

Mr. Silva: They have their own. They don't pay community fees.

Mr. Goncalves: Every condo pays \$100 and now they're going to pay \$200.

Mr. Silva: The condos don't have this and that yet they're going to still contribute to the community.

Mr. DeBarge: Everybody has made their point about trash. The fact of the matter is something is going to have to be done to move forward with all of the stuff we've talked about. Change in health insurance deduction from 78/22 is going to take a long time to go on and negotiate with all of the unions.

Mr. Goncalves: What can change is the plan that we offer.

Mr. Strange: It wasn't on the agenda but I can update you soon on that. You guys went through this process before.

NEW BUSINESS

Board to open Meeting Warrant for the May 12, 2025, Annual Town Meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to open the meeting warrant for the May 12, 2025, annual town meeting. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly raise Municipal Lien Certificate fee from \$25 to \$50.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to raise the municipal lien certificate fee from \$25 to \$50. **Mr. Rosenblum second.**

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Mr. DeBarge: What is a municipal lien certificate?

Mr. Silva: It's when they call the tax collector to find out if there's any taxes that are due and if they put a lien on the property. They want to make sure when you're buying a piece of property that it's free and clear.

Mr. Goncalves: It's the method by which attorneys calculate the portions at closings at what's paid, when it's paid through and what's been paid. The bank uses it out to figure out what they're going to put additional in escrow. It comes of the computer and takes about 3 minutes.

All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to sign the contract between the Town of Ludlow and DLT Solutions in the amount of \$17,401.14 for Blackboard services.

Mr. Goncalves: What are Blackboard services?

Mr. Strange: It's our robocall.

Mr. Silva: That's a lot of money.

Mr. Strange: It's in the ballpark of where it's been.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the DLT Solutions contract in the amount of \$17,401.14 for Blackboard services. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to sign the contract between the Town of Ludlow and M.E. O'Brien & Sons, Inc. in the amount of \$11,174.75 for the Topsy/Turny at Whitney Park.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to sign the contract between the Town of Ludlow and M.E. O'Brien & Sons in the amount of \$11,174.75 for the Topsy/Turny at Whitney Park.

Mr. Gennette: \$11,000?

Mr. Strange: It's ARPA. That includes delivery and installation. The equipment was \$7,000.

Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to sign the contract between the Town of Ludlow and Tighe & Bond in the amount of \$12,600 for temporary traffic plan & small bridge grant application.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to sign the contract with Tighe & Bond in the amount of \$12,600 for temporary traffic plan & small bridge grant application. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Goncalves: This is the bridge near the fire station, Higher Brook, that we were told years ago that we had a serious problem there with a couple of the beams. We're going to be getting a good portion of that money from the grant program. Tighe & Bond will be paid for all of their work going forward in addition to whatever we get for a grant. The State picks up the engineering.

Mr. Silva: That's Center Street.

Mr. Goncalves: We're responsible for the bridge. We're going to get 70-80% from this application.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Gennette: With the budget stuff coming up I think we need to figure out a strategic plan for the coming years. I know we have to get outside May Town Meeting but we've got to think further ahead than what we're thinking and I think we need some better information. I've talked to Marc about some ideas related to that but at some point we're going to have to put it on the agenda and have an in-depth conversation about where we're going.

Mr. Goncalves: We've got to start talking about scams again. Right now, is the perfect time for the IRS scams. My phone has been going nuts and everybody I know, just those texts are starting to come in now. They're telling you your phone has been infected. Nobody is going to send you a text telling you your phone is infected. You might get an email from Apple. Make sure it is Apple. Be very careful of what you click, what you open. Happy New Year to everyone.

Mr. Silva: Since we're going into the budget process, I'd still like to see an article where we can get \$5-\$10,000 for the beautifying during the holidays and even clean up. We have nothing.

Mr. Rosenblum: Light poles.

Mr. Silva: East Street. I go to certain communities and they're beautiful.

Mr. DeBarge: 250th is doing that. Stuff for when you come over the bridge, light poles, East Street. We talked about it last night at the meeting.

Mr. Silva: Do you think you should have an article? 250 is not going to be available all the time. At some point I think we should have a vote.

Mr. DeBarge: Marc, can you put on your agenda next time a discussion on some kind of line item for decoration?

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mr. Rosenblum: Hapy New Year to everybody. Some kids are still home from college. It's a good time to be with family and enjoy your family. School is back in so be careful when you're driving around. Support your high school athletics.


Mr. DeBarge: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. I hope everybody's weekend and holiday was quiet and everything you wanted. Thursday this week we have the annual First Responders Appreciation dinner Thursday, January 9th from 5:00 – 7:00 at the Gremio Lusitano Club. This is a free event for first responders and their families who live and work in Ludlow, Wilbraham and Hampden, including Police, Fire, EMT, Hampden County Sheriff, State Police, Emergency Dispatchers and all department retirees. My invitation to this to the DPW workers as well because you are first responders. Great raffle prizes. Eric Segundo and PV Financial and Josh Desforges VFW group do a great job at getting some great raffle prizes and good games.

Mr. Silva: Can the public go if they buy a ticket?

Mr. DeBarge: You can go; you're a Selectman. This is meant for first responders. Next Wednesday at the Veteran's center, Eric Segundo and I thought we would try to do a teacher's supply drive through the Veteran's Center. We wanted to try to give back knowing the teachers in our town always go out of their own pocket for their supplies. Eric and I thought about doing a drive. It's been out in the public for a while. We've gotten some great items from people that purchased and dropped them off. As always, PV Financial heard about it and wanted in on this. They're fantastic to work with. I appreciate them. We were able to collect a good amount of supplies. On Wednesday, January 15th from 3:00 – 6:00 all of our teachers in town can come to the Veteran's Center and we will have all of the supplies strewn out throughout our conference room. We're hoping to do this annually. This is our first one. The 250th has their Last Night. Last year it was 250th's First Night in February to commemorate when Ludlow was incorporated. We did a huge party. Bonfire outside of the high school. Vendors inside and outside. We're doing the same exact thing to commemorate the closing of the year of the 250th anniversary. That is on Saturday, February 22 11:00 – 6:00. I am going to address one more thing. That is the Register. The Register that came out last week had Ludlow's year in review 2024. It's about a quarter of an inch thick.

This year in review was horrible. I can't tell you how many great things we have done, other departments have done and other incidents that could have been in this paper. I'm sorry to see that people picked this up and saw a year in review and there's not much about the 250th anniversary. There's nothing about the Mills complex. We opened Mill 8 and the clock tower, a 60 million dollar build out, Tandem Bagel coming in after AJ Crane comes in and does the old carpentry building. Riverside Drive exposes out to the 32.675 buildable acres. The key of this town's progress and prosperity is the mills and there is nothing. There's a 10-million-dollar lawsuit on the front page. There's nothing about the Senior Center and their record number of seniors coming in for lunches and programs. There's nothing about the Veteran's Center and the fact that we do food pantry 2 times a week where over 120 people come in each time to get food. We have dental services at the Vet Center. We have counseling available. Nothing. Five-million-dollar track and field at the high school was opened. Nothing. We, as the Town of Ludlow, do great things in this town and it should be represented better than this.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to close the adjourn the meeting at 7:59 p.m. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.


_____ Chairperson
