

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, February 4, 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

Members Absent:

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

#### MOMENT OF REMEMBRANCE FOR DOUG STEFANCIK

Mr. DeBarge: We're going to open the meeting with some sad news. We have lost one of our own, our Town Planner, Doug Stefancik. He suddenly and tragically passed away recently. It was a shock to all of us employees at Town Hall and the Town. Doug came here in 2007 when I was with the PD and came over on the Board of Selectmen. If you talk to anybody in the building about Doug, I guarantee you they will say similar things about him. Every time you saw him he was smiling, when you spoke to him he was always very soft-spoken, respectful, caring, he listened to what you were saying and he tried to engage in a conversation. As a member of the Board of Selectmen, anytime I called or went to see him or Sue in the office there was never a time when he didn't get back to me for an answer or provide information that I asked for. He was a perfect professional and all-around great guy. Some stuff I didn't know about him outside of the office is he was an accomplished gardener and cook. Doug was a cast of characters, all positive and he will definitely be missed. Our most heartfelt condolences go out to his mom Florence, sister Karen, brother Glen and his relatives and friends. I will also mention, as she has retired from here, I want to give our most heartfelt condolences to Elsa Barros for the loss of her son.

Mr. Gennette: Before I was talking about opening the ice cream shop I would come in and talk to Planning about everything we needed to do and my first interaction with the Town was with Doug. He held my hand through that entire process. You wouldn't believe what it takes for a small business. There's a lot of things involved and Doug was quite helpful through the process. He was always very patient and kind. I've always appreciated it. I've always stopped in to say hello and see how he's doing and I'm very saddened by the loss. I think the Town lost somebody very important and I feel very sorry for his family.

Mr. Silva: My sentiments exactly. I've also worked with Doug quite a bit. I've developed and done certain things and what I liked about Doug is he always helped. I've always told all of our employees is that we're here to help the public and he always did. My heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Same with Elsa. She was wonderful and also a nice person.

Mr. DeBarge: At the end of new business, you're going to see Board to discuss and possibly dedicate the Ludlow Dog Park to the memory of Doug Stefancik. This was an idea by Sue Urban who has been working with Doug for quite a long time and I thought this was a fantastic idea. Doug was pretty passionate about the dog park, along with the Whitney Park reclamation projects that we've talked about over the last couple of years. I thought this was a great suggestion by Sue and I think it's a great remembrance for him.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve dedicating the Ludlow Dog Park to the memory of Doug Stefancik. Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to appropriate from 40R \$1,034.49 to have a plaque installed at the dog park to read In Memory Of Former Town Planner Doug Stefancik Who Turned A Dream Into This Reality For Dog Lovers In Ludlow And Beyond. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

#### VISITATIONS

5:30 p.m. – Josue Irizarry – Ludlow Community Center/Boys & Girls club – Projects Update

Mr. Irizarry: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you guys and share what we're doing at the Boys & Girls Club. We have updated our pool. We painted the whole pool area. In December when we were closed we did some vent cleaning. We cleaned up the game room vents, all of our

office spaces, pre-school rooms and all of the school-age classrooms. There's still 2 more areas that we have to work on for this upcoming year. We're going to have to do the gym and that takes about a week, and also the vents in the pool area, to make the air flow a lot better. Since we've had it cleaned the air feels a lot better and we're getting better heat. We also did some updates in the gym. We were able to replace all the padding thanks to the Ludlow Rotary Club. We also gave the gym a new fresh paint coat. There were some delays on the sports court. We had a grand opening in April but we had to do the stairs and a little wall there. Thanks to volunteers and businesses that did come out we were able to do the islands in the parking lot. We cleaned out all the islands that had overgrown weeds, put rubber mulch on there because that usually lasts about 10 years. We replaced the rugs in our administrative office that were over 20 years old. Other projects we worked on were painting the shed out back to give it a fresh new look, we painted the school age classrooms on the second floor and during the summer we tried to give the locker room floors and the pool area deck a power wash cleaning. I laid out the projects we did and the total amount we spent on these projects, which was \$355,000. In 2024 we spent \$82,000 making these updates. Potential projects are pool bleachers because they're plastic and some of them are cracking, the pool steps, the mirrors are damaged, replacing the counter tops in the classrooms and art room. We're planning to repaint the fitness center, put door stoppers on the doors, clean the vents in the gym and pool. We received a grant to be able to update the conference room to a kitchen/conference room so we can provide programs to kids for cooking programs. We were able to renovate our staff lounge area and we're working on that right now because of the grant. Project Home Run that has been in discussion for 6-7 years, the goal is to accomplish that. We started a conversation on what we can do for the field. We're going to put dugouts and a fence where the pavilion is. In about 2-4 weeks they can finish that project. The project of doing the bathrooms in the concession area will take a lot longer because it's connected to the building. Those are potential projects we hope to be able to accomplish in 2025. We will be celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. I have invitations to invite you to our March 1<sup>st</sup> 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. At 12:30 we will be having an opening ceremony. The event is 12-4 but if one of you can attend and say a few words we would greatly appreciate it. It's going to be a family fun event. The pool will be open and we will have a scavenger hunt and a variety of activities. We're trying to go back to some of the things we used to do. There used to be a Mack Donnelly basketball tournament and we're going to bring it back this year. The goal is to do it April 12-13. In June on the last day of school we will be doing Slide into Summer, which will be the 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary for that. We will also do a pickleball tournament in June to be determined. It will be the Jen Aldworth pickleball tournament. We are also looking at projects that not only benefit the club but benefit the community. We have the only pool in Town and there has been talks about a score board. A lot of people in the community use our game room so we're replacing our air hockey and pool table area. The playground area is open to the public when our kids aren't using it, the plan is to put a bigger gazebo and play sand area. Our goal this year is to raise \$75,000 to be able to do these projects that will also benefit the community. Thank you for all the help you give us throughout the year and for helping us replace our boiler. Soon we'll have 2 boilers working.

Mr. Gennette: I love the services of Ludlow and the Club isn't any different. What you do over there is what Ludlow is. Your predecessors have done great and thank you for everything you do. Looking at \$85,000 for everything you did last year and that's incredible. All of our services make the best use of all our money that's given to them. Keep up the good work.

Mr. Goncalves: Manny and I grew up at the Boys Club with Mack Donnelly. It's a great program and invaluable for the kids. It's a great thing and we're very lucky to have it.

Mr. Silva: It's wonderful to bring us these updates because it not only keeps us informed about what's going on but also the public. Many people don't understand why the Town of Ludlow has a community center and how we support and have funds for the community center and this explains why.

Mr. DeBarge: I always appreciate your time, Josue, and your staff is second to none. I love the updates. Great work.

5:45 p.m. – Eversource Pole Hearing – Bruni Avenue – **PUBLIC HEARING**

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to open the Eversource pole hearing for Bruni Avenue at 5:49 p.m. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. Cosimini: This one was already done and it had to be repaired under emergency. The cable faulted there between 2 transformers leaving it if the other cable faulted there would have been no power back there. It was too bad for us to splice so they had to replace the whole cable. Between 85 and 101 we had to add a pole point. From one point to the other it was about 1,200'. It's a 36x36 hand hole.

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Mr. Suprenant: I'm Gene Suprenant. I own 230 West Street. At the end of my property there is a right of way. I just want to know if they're going to put a pole in my apron.

Mr. Cosimini: There's no poles going in. This was a concrete hole in the ground with spliced cable. It's all underground.

Mr. Suprenant. If I want to sell the property, there's still a right of way into my property?

Mr. Cosimini: If there's one currently, yes.

Mr. Laviolette: Richard Laviolette, 121 Bruni Ave. I live on the circle cul-de-sac on Bruni Ave. Is that tree going to stay there?

Mr. Cosimini: We don't touch trees typically.

Mr. Laviolette: There's a hydrant on the corner of my property and one across. Is there a transformer pad there?

Mr. Cosimini: If you're coming down Bruni, there should be a transformer and wires coming down on the other side into Folvi. The first transformer on Folvi. That's where the transformer that I know is.

Mr. Laviolette: I'm the first house on the left on the circle. They were doing work there today.

Mr. Cosimini: That's part of the work. They cut the ground so we could put pipe in with wire because the cable between that transformer and the one on Folvi blew up under the ground. If they didn't replace and repair that, once the other side blows up, you would have lost power completely.

Mr. Laviolette: Anything that has been done on my property will be restored?

Mr. Cosimini: Yes.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves** to approve Eversource's request to install one (1) 36x36 round handhole labeled 267/3-1D. The purpose of the work is to repair current faulted underground primary wire with new wire. The handholes to be located 3' above the road on the property lines between 85-101 Bruni Avenue according to drawing 19670934. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to close the Eversource pole hearing for Bruni Avenue at 5:53 p.m. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

5:55 p.m. – Verizon Pole Hearing – Harding Avenue – **PUBLIC HEARING**

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to open the Verizon pole hearing for Harding Avenue at 5:54 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Vonner: I was out there this afternoon. This is simply a stub pole for support. The reason is that's a gas station right there and now there's 2 guidewires from this pole. One of them runs right over the gas station pumps to a pole on the other side. Another one runs across the front of the gas station property. There's 2 aerial trespass going on and it's not the safest so they're trying to get rid of those and put that pole right there instead and act as a stub pole. It's not meant for other wires to go off of it. It's meant as a guide wire support. I assume they're going to get rid of the other guides that are over the gas station. I took measurements and it is 38'. The new pole would be right in between the sidewalk and driveway.

Mr. Silva: If I'm not mistaken, they are going to be remodeling and expanding there. That will probably change what you're doing now. I'm sure they'll make it a lot safer at that point. I don't know if you've gotten any word of that.

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Mr. Vonner: I haven't but it would make sense to me that if they are going to, that's maybe why they want to get those guide wires going across their property out of the way and move one up to the front on land that's not theirs anyways. That would make sense to me but I haven't heard anything about it. That certainly wouldn't preclude the plans. It would be making it better because it would be getting it out of their way.

Mr. Goncalves: Unless there's a curb cut plan exactly where that pole is it wouldn't be a problem for it to stay there either.

Mr. Gennette: You're saying this is a stub pole? It's just going to be a short pole connected to it?

Mr. Vonner: No, it will be the same size as the other one across the street. Stub is a reference term in the industry and it's basically a guide wire support pole.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve the petition for the joint pole location for Verizon job 1A7AW6Q Harding Avenue pole T.1S\E1S located near the corner of Harding and Loopley by Cumberland Farms. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Gennette: The last time you were here, I asked about poles that were cut. I said are they Verizon or Eversource poles. I'll have to get back to you. Those poles have been cut and they've been sitting there for a year already and there's 2 poles and they're stacked up next to each other. The residents are going crazy.

Mr. Vonner: Is this a double pole?

Mr. Gennette: There is supposed to only be 1 pole. The poles were replaced but Verizon hasn't taken the old poles out so now there's a half pole and a full pole and Verizon needs to move their equipment over. Hubbard Street.

Mr. Vonner: Feel free to reach out with specific information and I'll pass it on.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to close the Verizon pole hearing at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

6:00 p.m. – Pat Charbonneau

Mr. DeBarge: We are here as we were told by our Town Clerk that you have tendered your resignation as a poll worker and long-time warden. The Board thought it would be pertinent to and right to bring you in and honor you for all the years of service you have given our registered voters. I believe those years of service began in 2001. Do you remember the year you became a warden?

Ms. Charbonneau: I can't remember, but I know my uncle, Tim Collins, had his wife pass away and my mother passed away in 1997, and at that time I wrote a letter to the Board of Selectmen and Matt Pszeniczny was the Chairman and right after that was when I started.

Mr. DeBarge: Do you remember when you and I met?

Mr. Charbonneau: You were a policeman.

Mr. DeBarge: I had to work for you. If you're a registered voter you come into your precinct, you're greeted, you get your ballot, do your selection, put it in the machine and you walk out. What you don't see is all of the headaches that happen when things don't work right. That's all the warden's job. That's on the warden to call the Clerk. You have to be able to trouble shoot. That's probably the most important part of the job; you have to trouble shoot so quickly because people want to get in and out and our votes have become polarizing. I'm grateful to you and all of our workers in all 6 precincts. Do you have a favorite moment out of all the years you have served the community?

Ms. Charbonneau: Manny, when you were running and there was a re-vote, I was on that panel and my picture was in the newspaper with you and the other person.

Mr. Silva: That was back in the 80's for Assessor.

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Ms. Batista: She will be missed. I'm going to miss her. I've been with her for 8 years.

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Ms. Charbonneau: I started with Laurie Gibbons at the old Vet's School then I went to the high school. Between politics and law enforcement, both sides of my family are on both of them. It's in my blood. I enjoy doing it.

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Mr. DeBarge: You ran a tight ship. We are very grateful for you and all the years that you put in. What is the truest form of democracy and having your voice heard and that is going to the ballot and casting your vote. Without being able to have a safe place, a place that's run well and honestly, we lose faith in that. Thank you for all the work that you put in, Pat. We have a Town citation for you. On behalf of the Board of Selectmen and the Town of Ludlow, we want to extend our deepest gratitude to Patricia Charbonneau for your years of dedication and service as an election officer. You have served the Town as election officer and warden for many years. Your commitment to ensuring that every election ran smoothly within your precinct and that the voices of the people were heard has had an immeasurable impact. You've been a crucial part of our democracy in action, and we are grateful for your hard work, attention to detail and unwavering integrity. As you retire, please know that your legacy will be felt for years to come. Wishing you all the best as you embark on this new chapter in life. You've earned every moment of rest and enjoyment ahead. With heartfelt thanks and warmest wishes. The Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Charbonneau: It's been an honor doing my duty.

#### VISITATIONS

6:15 p.m. – Ludlow Pizza – Non-Compliance with permits.

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

#### CORRESPONDENCE

13. Board to accept & sign the FY25 Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant in the amount of \$19,000.

**Motion made by Mr. Gennette to accept & sign the FY25 Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant in the amount of \$19,000. Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

14. Letter from Thomas Ghazil resigning from the Ludlow Cable Commission effective January 22, 2025.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to accept the resignation and thank Thomas Ghazil for his service. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

15. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities – Approval for aggregation plan.

Mr. Gennette: The State has approved the electric aggregation that we talked about and Ludlow Power Choice is in full swing and is this just to file?

Mr. Strange: This is notification to the Board and the next step is getting some more information from Eversource and the program will be able to get started.

Mr. Gennette: Do we have a timeline? I'm hoping before the May Town Meeting. Hopefully we can start saving on our residents' electric bill.

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

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you James for all your hard work on this.

Mr. DeBarge: It's nice to watch someone who comes up with an idea and takes that from inception, through the work and then see that through. You did a hell of a job. You took this and ran with it. I'm looking forward to all the people learning about this.

Mr. Gennette: I appreciate that. A lot of thanks goes out to Peregrin Energy and Mr. Strange, who has been fielding the calls.

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## VISITATIONS

6:30 p.m. – Heather Jolicoeur, Assistant Director Senior Center – Age/Dementia Friendly Ludlow Project

Ms. Jolicoeur: I am the Assistant Director of the Senior Center. I am trying to spearhead the whole age/dementia friendly Ludlow town-wide initiative. An age and dementia friendly town is one that is more welcoming and inclusive of everybody from birth to death. All cross sectors of the Town work together with businesses, residents and town employees on every project to make sure they're using an age/dementia friendly lens. It's a natural position for the Senior Center to take on this. It's been tried once before, not with the Senior Center, and it obviously never happened. Jodi and I are trying this again. We got a lot of interest after our first emails out to people. We need to apply to AARP and the World Health Organization and we need the Town's commitment on this. With that said, we already have a small age-friendly project that we would like to apply for a grant. Age friendly and dementia friendly is not free but there are grants and funds out there. We would like to apply for an AARP challenge grant. That's going to involve getting a walkability study around State Street and Riverside Drive with the 2 new apartments of 55 and older. We would like to make more of a connection with them in the Senior Center. Maybe put in a couple extra benches and for the people with dementia a couple of signs that indicate where the Senior Center is because in our area there are no signs.

Mr. Goncalves: Are you talking about at the bridge or in the mill area when you park by the clocktower that says Senior Center that way?

Ms. Jolicoeur: That's the start of it. Age friendly is the life span of the Town. To start a small project for age-friendly we would like to start in our area, State Street, Riverside area.

Ms. Zepke: If anybody has been to the Senior Center, that's all everybody does is walk.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm at the industrial park a lot for other reasons and it's constant.

Ms. Jolicoeur: There isn't a lot of opportunities for people to sit down. For people with dementia, once they stand up and turn around they might not know which way to go so if we had a Senior Center sign it would help them. I sent you the online application to AARP but I'm going to do the application myself I just need to upload a letter from you.

Mr. DeBarge: I'm going to sign this. Usually when we have this kind of initiative we have a whereas, does it happen after this? Does it need to be approved?

Ms. Jolicoeur: This is the application but I will say we have already had working group meetings, we've had some listening sessions scheduled and we've done a lot of work on it.

## CORRESPONDENCE

16. Department of Environmental Protection – Permanent Solution Statement – 792 West Street.

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

Mr. Goncalves: This is the oil spill. So, people know where that is, it's on West Street going towards Granby, about 5 houses from the corner of Brook. It appears it's a house or 2 before Ed Lafayette's and the power lines that cross the street. It's not near any businesses and across the street there's very few homes affected there. Just FYI.

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

Mr. Austin: My name is Devin Austin. I run a landscaping business but more than that I'm more interested in the communities that I work in. I've been in business for 2 years. I've been working on some projects, not necessarily in Ludlow but I do a lot of work around here. I have a lot of clients that are engaged in the community. I go to the Westfield Juvenile Detention Center and I speak to the kids with the Chicopee Fire Department, Springfield Police and a realtor that goes there. I've been doing that quarterly. For kids that think that's their only destination, I'm giving people empowerment. I'm into landscaping but my main focus is community engagement. Making people into a positive mindset. I just wanted to pop in and say HI.

Mr. DeBarge: Tomorrow at 6:00 at Baird Middle School is CARES Coalition meeting and that's the one you're going to want to go to.

Mr. Austin: I specialize in helping Veteran's out. I'm looking to do volunteer work for the community. My team and I would be willing to do projects, just getting involved in Ludlow not just as an individual, but as a company.

17. Board to discuss and possibly approve \$6,619 in Building Infrastructure Funds for repairs to the public safety complex.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve \$6,619 in Building Infrastructure Funds for repairs to the public safety complex. Mr. Gennette second.**

Mr. Gennette: I'm looking at the estimate and I'm having a hard time putting \$6,619.

Mr. Goncalves: Check the 2<sup>nd</sup> page.

**All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

18. MASS DOT – Bridge Inspection Report – Miller Street/Chicopee River.

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

Mr. Goncalves: We're one step away from getting the other bridge grant.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Board to continue discussion on FY26 Budget.

Mr. Strange: I don't think we've met since the health insurance. We formally got our health insurance increase. It's 14.84%. We budgeted for 15%. To give the public some perspective on this, our annual cost for health insurance is a smidge north of 10 million dollars. 15% of 10 million dollars is 1.5 million. Every town in Massachusetts is limited by prop 2 ½ which means we can only raise an additional 2 ½ % on our property taxes and that limits us to 1.3 million. That's one source of additional revenue for our budget. Another source is our state aid. Our state increase in the Governor's proposal was less than 1% increase, that's \$150,000. Between those 2 sources, it doesn't cover our health insurance increase. That's before we pay any contractual increases, before utility bills or a dime for anything else. Long story short, we're a million dollars over and that's with a 2 ½ % total increase for our town departments, a 3% increase for schools and those are reasonable increases.

Mr. Goncalves: At this point, if everything stayed as it is today, we'd be looking at a \$24/year increase on the average home taxes.

Mr. Silva: The average is \$200 already.

Mr. Goncalves: It's \$24 right now if nothing changes. There's a lot of assumptions.

Mr. Silva: We just had the classification hearing and it showed \$240 is the average tax increase, and that's without this.

Mr. Strange: That's for fiscal 25. This is for fiscal 26.

Mr. Silva: We are in a crunch for 26. We just had a \$240 average increase so next year with a crunch we're only looking at \$24.

Mr. Goncalves: Right now, we've got a million dollars in the kitty that nobody has tapped yet that's sitting there that nobody is using.

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Mr. Silva: That's great but...

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Mr. Strange: It's the other way; we're a million in the hole so we have to come up with a million. The average tax bill is going to be impacted by the valuation increases so that number will be fluid.

Mr. Silva: Unless we are coming into some money somewhere you have to expect 2 ½ increase on your taxes.

Mr. Goncalves: Total added value from the Assessor of new growth, he's assuming 14 again as in previous years.

Mr. Strange: It's the average of the past few years. This year we fell a little bit short but it didn't hurt us.

Mr. Goncalves: Joe seemed to feel it was going to be much better than this number here.

Mr. Strange: In terms of how do we make up for that million dollars is we're meeting with the unions on Monday and we're going to be proposing changes to our health insurance plan in the way of increased deductibles. We like to think it's a reasonable proposal. Minor changes over the course of a year. That could save the town quite a bit of money, which would be a bit of a bigger lift is looking at changing the insurance splits. The town/employee splits are pretty generous for Ludlow when you look at some of the surrounding towns. There's a lot of discussions to be had with the employees and unions about how we can save money on fiscal 26 and beyond. The other possibility is increasing the trash fee further. Even if the Board decides to increase the trash fee to \$300 that still doesn't balance the budget. We've clarified that we can bill quarterly so even if the fee stays at \$200 we can still bill \$50/quarter to mitigate the impact on folks. We're assuming \$200 on this one. The other option is cuts. This is not a conversation that is unique to Ludlow. I get alerts every night on my phone for other communities and every community is having this conversation. The Berkshire Health Insurance Trust went up 16%, Hampshire County went up 15%, it's happening everywhere. It's driven a lot by Ozempic, the weight loss drugs are extremely expensive, but also the medical technology is exploding. These are conversations communities are having across the state. I was in the room when MIIA unveiled the increase and there was a gasp that came over the room because with prop 2 ½, town cannot absorb that kind of increase.

Mr. Goncalves: Didn't we have some kind of deal with them from the previous year that we got lucky because we made that deal?

Mr. Strange: Our deal this year is our increase wouldn't be more than the trust average, which is why we're 15%. It could have been more. I loathe having these conversations because it's bad news. In terms of what the solutions are, it's just more bad news for the employees and/or residents. We're having the conversations with the unions and I do plan on having a public forum on the 26<sup>th</sup>. I want to do a budget basics to show people what we're looking at. That we're really limited in terms of our sources of revenue every year with prop 2 ½ to summarize and show people what our limitations are and that the increases this year across the board are very reasonable and we just got killed with health insurance this year.

Mr. Goncalves: How much money comes on board from the mills next year? I know this year is going to be one of those where we're almost there but not quite. We have a DIF so it really depends on whether we get the bond in place for improvements to East Street and the projects that were approved at the last town meeting. In terms of the new growth that Joe predicted I would say let's stay conservative with that and anything that comes in on top of that would be gravy. This year we're probably going to have to use free cash in some capacity that we didn't expect so that could potentially backfill. We can use free cash to balance.



Mr. Goncalves: The free cash is a process of increased values in town just as much as it's money that's not spent in the budget, right? That free cash is created by homes selling for more money, etc, and I don't think there's a big problem with that. Some people think it's taboo.

Mr. DeBarge: I do.

Mr. Gennette: On having the stuff baked in like Tony had mentioned about the mills, what about the solar PILOT?

Mr. Strange: The solar PILOT has already been accounted for.

Mr. Gennette: I know we want to go up on the trash but if it's covering what the fee is, the expenses it's fine. As soon as you start going over that to try to get around 2 ½ and using it as a lever, I think that's where I run into a problem. If the bill is \$265 and that's where we've got to go, then it's \$265. I don't want it to be \$266. I don't know if the community is aware that right now the \$100 that they pay only gets us about halfway to paying the bill for the existing contract. If we could turn around and take the barrels off and put them on capital and we could free up a little bit of that using free cash for that one-time purchase then maybe we can decrease that bill down to something a little more manageable. I think there's some things we can do there but I really don't want to go over with that trash fee.

Mr. Strange: I totally agree with you. I would never advocate charging a dime more for the fee than offsetting the cost of the trash. That's completely unethical. We can do an analysis of that taking off the cost of the barrels and see what the cost is going to be. The \$100 fee averages about \$650,000, even though we have 7,300 households, we don't collect \$730,000 so we have to do the calculation.

Mr. Gennette: As soon as we can get that hard number it will be easier to say what the bill is. I don't want to say we have a short fall in the budget and we're doing \$200 and \$265 would have gotten us there. It's easy to justify to the precinct members that this is what it costs.

Mr. Goncalves: We're managing that for them instead of going out on their own. Where is capital with the barrels?

Mr. Gennette: We're going to talk about it again this Monday but we were waiting for free cash to be certified before we can really make a decision on anything. Once we know what free cash is we can manage that better. I'm prepared to put the barrels on capital.

Mr. Silva: Have we determined what the cost is for the barrels?

Mr. Goncalves: \$122,000/year for 6 years.

Mr. DeBarge: Instead of a trash fee, you're saying the households can pay for their barrel?

Mr. Strange: I think they're \$65/barrel.

Mr. DeBarge: So, \$130/house for the barrels a year?

Mr. Goncalves: We're financing them over 6 years.

Mr. DeBarge: So, cancel the trash fee, charge every household \$130. You don't want fees so I'm trying to even out your numbers. Cancel the trash fee, charge each household \$130 one-time fee for the barrels. They'll be responsible if it breaks.

Mr. Silva: It would be the same as we're doing now.

Mr. Goncalves: We're covering them.

Mr. DeBarge: My final question is how do you pay for trash?

Mr. Silva: Your \$100/fee is still there.

Mr. DeBarge: The \$100/fee does not pay for trash.

Mr. Silva: It doesn't pay for it, but did it increase more than the previous year?

Mr. DeBarge: Yes. The new contract drops but if you talk to Jim and Jamie, and don't hold me to the number, but I had a conversation with them and they were thinking that \$250/fee would pay for trash without extra money.

Mr. Gennette: The barrels aren't the problem. We can fund those. It's the year over year recurring costs.

Mr. Silva: Is it beneficial for them to do their own trash?

Mr. Rosenblum: Not even close. Longmeadow is instituting a trash fee for the first time ever. If you go to surrounding towns you're looking at \$50/month and that doesn't include a dump sticker which is another \$120. You're looking at \$600/year. Generally, in your taxes it's around \$250 to come out of your taxes towards trash fee. Now we're adding \$100 or \$200. The one thing you have to remember is these barrels are going up to 65 & 96 where we're at a 30 gallon before. Mr. Sanches from FinCom was in here saying he uses 1 purple bag a week. If you eliminate purple bags and now you're recouping \$120 back from going out and buying that roll of purple bags. The fee in other towns is much more than it is than if we went to \$300. I'm not advocating for \$300. If it stays at \$100 and we can do it, we do it. If we purchase the barrels for everybody they're still under warranty. If we purchase them over 6 years it brings down the cost of our trash. I've said to James before, it's a tough year, couple years. This could be a zero year for capital but if it's going to make a difference in people's taxes.

Mr. Gennette: That's why I want to pay for the barrels. I want to take that off of that recurring bill.

Mr. Silva: I know for a fact if we eliminate subscribers once you impose this kind of...

Mr. Goncalves: In speaking to other communities, and both Jimmy and Jamie will tell you, it's a serious problem when you have 4 different trash companies running trucks in our town and the destruction that is going to be done to the roads.

Mr. DeBarge: Marc, you want to do an open forum?

Mr. Strange: Yes. February 26<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 at the high school auditorium.

Mr. Silva: Is that going to be spelling out the whole trash program? I was going to speak with Jamie because I have some ideas where I see some revenues. Are these fees going to be implemented to the household? What if they don't want trash pickup?

Mr. Strange: They will get a bill unless they can show verified service by a different provider.

Mr. Silva: What if you have 3 neighbors, old ladies, who have 1 bag. What does that do for them? Why can't they get a trash bin and help out. When you see a big increase, it makes people think of ways to cut it. Somebody with 7 units, it pays for them to get a dumpster.

Mr. DeBarge: In preparing for February 26<sup>th</sup>, why don't you come up with a plan of what you would do. That meeting on February 26<sup>th</sup> is going to be very important. It should be completely open so everybody understands where we are and why we are in this position. We're in this position because of this Board. I hope everybody goes. We give the Town Administrator marching orders. We approve contracts and salaries and expenditures. I hope some of this board comes up with some kind of plan or idea.

Mr. Silva: That brings me to something else. Several years ago, we had a sub budget committee and I was on it. What happened to that? I don't recall it getting dissolved.

Mr. Strange: Now that it's been so many years, there were so many islands it was important to try to centralize and consolidate. Now that we've been doing it for a few years, I see value in rekindling that. We're still fighting this battle. I think we've changed the culture and centralized operations.

Mr. Rosenblum: In this meeting we're showing insurance splits, surrounding communities, the different things we've talked about with the trash, department increases in general. When we take on all the requests we have here, last year we cut out \$770,000 worth of requests and everyone didn't get anything. Taking a quick look at this, we're not increasing much on the Town end. It's under \$100,000.

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Mr. Strange: It's about 2 ½ %.

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Mr. Rosenblum: The thing with the insurance being at 14.8, we need to get ahead of this and we need to show people what's happening and see it on paper so they can see it instead of thinking we're trying to do something behind the scenes that we don't know what we're doing.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Board to appoint Anita Goncalves as the interim Treasurer/Collector.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to appoint Anita Goncalves as the interim Treasurer/Collector.

Mr. Rosenblum: She has been bouncing from office to office over the last 3-6 months helping out in that capacity.

Mr. Silva: How did this come about?

Mr. Strange: Going back to Brenda, it wasn't a good fit so we moved on. We brought in Mass Munifin, who is arguably the premier consultant in the State for Treasurer/Collector support. We posted it and got applications, not many that had municipal experience. We got an application from the assistant auditor in Holyoke, who has municipal experience and knows Munis. She interviewed with us and you and was offered the position. She was supposed to start yesterday but last week she decided to stay in Holyoke for probably a couple reasons.

Mr. DeBarge: She accepted the position then declined.

Mr. Strange: Correct. It's not just Ludlow, but a lot of communities in Western Mass that there are not many qualified candidates. We know Anita. She started in the Treasurer/Collector office. Whenever we ask her to step up, she steps up. She's very smart. She was a physical therapist for 20 years. She has high integrity. She has a very good work ethic. She picks things up quickly. We know what we're going to get with Anita. Our thought was, we have consultants in place, experts that can train her now, and instead of putting it back out and getting 1-2 potentially qualified candidates to take a risk on and 6 months down the road being in a position where it didn't work out, elevating Anita. We know she can do it. It's a big job and my biggest concern was making sure she was comfortable. She's as good a candidate we're going to get.

Mr. Silva: Were other people in the office interested in doing this?

Mr. Strange: I don't think that's the right question to be asking.

Mr. DeBarge: There were no other applications. No one from the office applied for the position.

Mr. Strange: We didn't solicit any applications and there was a reason for that.

Mr. DeBarge: We have in the past.

Mr. Goncalves: This is an interim position pending her ability to handle it.

Mr. Rosenblum: This is a perfect example of promoting from within if people deserve it and have shown the effort. I know Anita and her family. Our kids grew up together. She's going to do a great job. It's from within. That's where we should be going with a lot of our positions. We're showing we can't really find what we need on the outside. For anyone listening and that works in Town Hall and is a municipal employee, if you're qualified and you're going to do the work and you want it, go right ahead.

Mr. DeBarge: She is truly valuable and I love this move, it's a great decision and I think it's going to work out well.

**Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to open the Special Town Meeting Warrant for May 12, 2025, within the Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign Executive Session Meeting Minutes of January 21, 2025.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign Executive Session Meeting Minutes of January 21, 2025, with all members present. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the Beer & Wine License for Barburrito, Inc.

Board to approve and sign the Beer & Wine License for TCO Party Occasions, LLC.

Mr. Strange: TCO does not have a CO yet. You all received letters from the Fire Chief and Building Commissioner to hold off on approving that.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to table TCO Party Occasions, LLC. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the Alcoholic Beverages License for Keshavah Corporation dba Pop-N-Kork.

Mr. Goncalves: That's all set.

Request from Town Administrator, Marc Strange, to carry over 2 weeks of vacation for 90 days after anniversary date.

Mr. Goncalves: Given the circumstances and we were able to look at the numbers closer.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to allow the Town Administrator to carry over 2 weeks of vacation for 90 days after anniversary date. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. DeBarge: Town Hall will be closed for President's Day. Next meeting we'll be honoring a young man who ran into a house that was on fire and helped save a woman, Zach Nicoll.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Mr. Gennette: To Ms. Barros, I'm very sorry for her loss and again to remember Doug Stefancik. I would like to say to the people living on Hubbard, I will get those telephone poles fixed. I'm fighting for you. I'm sick of seeing them. I will not be around the first week of March.

Mr. Rosenblum: On February 26<sup>th</sup>, putting everything out in front of people and they can ask questions. This goes along with the fact that what we're doing would have been in the new charter. We're getting it to where people can see things and understand where we're going in a public forum instead of Town Meeting members getting it 2 weeks before they have to approve the budget. If you have some questions and you want to understand better what's going on and the reason why we're where we're at. Versus surrounding towns, I know that we're in a better place than a lot of other town because of what we've done in the past couple years. This is what we do. We want to hear from you and we want to make sure this Board is transparent. You need to know and understand why you're paying what you're paying.

Mr. Goncalves: Some of the things that happened here this evening, I hope people are taking note. The election officers and wardens are positions that people can be coming into Town Hall and asking if there's any room for them. Precinct members, which we're going to be short on. There's


a lot of positions here. Some are voluntary, some may pay a stipend. I'd love to see more people getting involved rather than complaining. Be safe on Sunday night for Super Bowl.


Mr. Silva: I'm all set. I have no comments tonight.

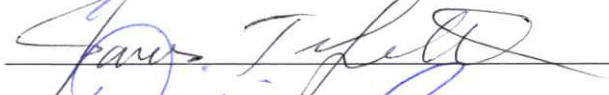
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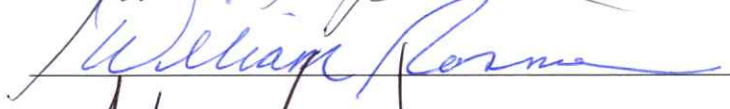
Mr. DeBarge: For those of you that see the forums and social media, I don't usually have too many good things to say but I do tonight. I heard about a missing dog and saw it on Facebook. I'm an avid animal lover. This dog got out of her property and was scared and wouldn't go home and she's scared of people. Once the word started getting around that Rosie was still in the area I have not seen a group of people come out for something like that since I've been here. People were coming out from everywhere searching. Dave Sady and other people came out with drones. One day we had 3 drones up. She stayed outside for 4 nights in the coldest snap we had and survived and was found. Great job by our Animal Control Officer, Octavia. With her skills, she knew how to trap Rosie. It was a nice thing to see the community come together and help a family out.

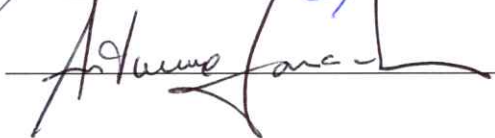
**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to close regular session at 7:07 p.m. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

  
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Chairperson

  
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Mr. Rosenblum

  
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Mr. Gennette

  
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William Korman

  
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Arthur Lane