

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, began at 5:30 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen's Conference Room.

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

Members Absent: None

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

## VISITATIONS

5:35 p.m. -Jhon Wielblad – Police Sergeant Interview

Mr. Gennette: We're going to do an opening, let you introduce yourself; we'll ask you some questions, let you make some closing comments, talk to the Chief and we'll go from there.

Mr. Wielblad: Thanks for having me again. I'm Jhon Wielblad. Born and raised in Ludlow. I currently reside in Ludlow with my family. I started my career with the police department in 2013 as an intern. From there I progressed to records, dispatch, special police, to my current role as an acting sergeant and I help manage the special police program. Before I became a full-time police officer I worked at the Sheriff's department in the Sheriff's academy and police academy. I got the physical fitness award. The police academy recognized me and put me in a leadership role as a squad leader. I try to excel at everything I do. In the Sheriff's department I discovered my passion for community relations. I brought that over to the police department as a full-time officer and getting involved as much as I could. I became a certified D.A.R.E instructor. I currently sit on the board for D.A.R.E Massachusetts where I helped develop the program with recruitment. When this position first became available I spoke to Chief about bringing back the bike patrol program and he gave me the tools and go-ahead to make that happen. Every year we built the program bigger with more officers certified, new equipment and that's something I want to continue to grow and develop. I also sit on the Ludlow CARES Coalition as the department liaison officer and I sit on the board. I think it's a very important group to be a part of and have a partnership with because of their impact on the community. I think the last time I was here I just wrapped up my master's degree and graduated with a 3.9 gpa. It was quite difficult because while getting that I was in the process of getting my EMT certificate. Both schools are not easy by any means. With the support of my family and good time management I was able to accomplish all of that. Most recently, I am part of the board for the Boys & Girls Club and I run the safety committee there. Lastly, for the past year I have been an acting sergeant for the overnight shift, which I'm very passionate about. I love my job. I love going into work and working with the patrolmen and helping them develop into the progression they want to go to with their careers. That's something I can see myself continuing doing.

Mr. Silva: We've discussed this several times, and you've been before us, what makes you believe that you would make a good fit for this new position you're looking at?

Mr. Wielblad: Growing up in Ludlow, being passionate about Ludlow, I think there's no better way you can give back to the community than being a police officer in the town you grew up in. Being in the role of sergeant or supervisor you have a much larger impact on the patrol and the functions of the department. My biggest enjoyment out of working is our relationships with the community. I think I can make that grow, along with working on the overnight shift. I'm obviously not going to have too many community relations working on that shift, but I like working with patrolmen and guiding them in the directions they want to take with their careers and answering any questions that need to be answered or facilitated. I think that's what makes me a good fit for this.

Mr. DeBarge: I was thinking about what question I was going to ask tonight and I just can't get the recent events out of my head, as we all can't. In light of recent events in our neighboring town and what happened to a brother officer, as a shift sergeant, had that incident been here, how would you approach the next shift with your officers?

Mr. Wielblad: That's a great question. The next day that I was on we sat in the sergeant's room and we had a lengthy conversation about what took place and what happened. It's kind of a

reminder that's one of the most common calls we go to. You never know which one is going to be out of the norm. Something to keep in the back of your mind. I think it's critical that it's brought up and we had that conversation. If that happened in Ludlow the next shift we want to have that conversation in starters but I also want to offer the officers resources that they can use for responding to an incident like that because that's going to have a huge impact on your mental health and wellbeing. The average person has 1-3 critical incidents throughout their entire life. Your average patrolman will see anywhere from 170-180 critical incidents throughout their career. I'm glad you asked that because it's important that we bring that up and more people start realizing that and we have more open conversations and get rid of that stigma of it's just another day on the job.

Mr. Rosenblum: It's good to see you again. We've seen the times you've been here that you're a go getter and that you're driven. What do you see your end game in your career? Your career goal?

Mr. Wielblad: I would like to continue to prosper in the department. I would like to stay in the sergeant's role longer but eventually move up in the department and keep developing relations with the community. Develop patrolmen and make the department a bit larger so we can do a little bit more outreach and positive interactions with the community. Continue to progress.

Mr. Rosenblum: Is this position for the overnight shift?

Chief Valadas: It will be assigned, there is a right of refusal, but the acting sergeant has been on the midnight shift and he would stay on that.

Mr. DeBarge: How long as an acting sergeant now?

Mr. Goncalves: December of last year. Thank you again for coming in. What do you see as the biggest challenge facing the police department today?

Mr. Wielblad: I kind of touch a little bit on it with, I think if you ask anyone in town it's going to be mental health which encompasses a whole slew of things including anxiety, suicidal ideations, addiction, and several other factors. I think as a department and community, we're doing a lot of things that are right and addressing those issues. I mentioned before, I'm part of CARES. The biggest objective the past year or so was to provide mental health training. And that's open to anyone that lives or works in town. It's taken off so well that it was utilized by the public schools as their personal development day. This helps people understand more someone who is going through crisis, signs that someone is going through a crisis and what they can do. There's a 5-step action plan they can put in place once they realize what's happening and what's going on. I think that's great from a community standpoint and another reason why we have a good relationship with CARES is they provide these assets. As a police department we have a clinician that comes out weekly now and does follow ups with residents in town which is crucial to mental health cases. I was anticipating that question and was going to end with from the officer's perspective too because of all the critical incidents that patrolmen will see throughout their career and I think that's the last piece of mental health that's not talked about as much. I'm glad as a department that we are, even though we're doing all this I still think it's one of the bigger issues that the town is currently facing.

Mr. Gennette: My question is about technology. I think the police department offers a wide variety of different technologies. How do you feel that the police department is dealing with that technology and wonder if you'll close on what your thoughts are on body cams and cruiser cams.

Mr. Wielblad: Technology, as you are well aware, is ever evolving. There is always something new coming out so it's important to stay on top of it. Utilize as much of it as we can to help us do our jobs more effectively. Sometimes it can be challenging because we have so much coming out. What's best going to be suited for Ludlow over another community. I think it's important that we stay on top of it. Body cams I 100% agree with you in getting them. I think there's several studies out where 98-99% of the time the cameras are for the officers just showing the subjects interactions. The statistic I'm not getting off the top of my head right now, but use of force has dropped and the reason for that is because the subject knows they are being recorded. It's not going to court saying officer vs a subject. Here's the footage. This is why this happened. I do agree with it but I know it's a massive undertaking for the logistics for the data collection. Implementing the

body cameras itself we can do that but maintaining the service to keep the data, that's the challenge we're going to face because we're not big like Springfield or Worcester.

Chief Valadas: I'll add that acting sergeant Wielblad has appeared in front of you twice before. There's 2 remaining candidates in the civil service promotion list. He has a master's degree, undergraduate from AIC and a graduate degree from Westfield State. As he alluded to, to complete both programs at the same time took quite a lot of effort. Jhon's reputation with us started a long time ago as a young student. At one point in time, we needed a clerk at night and he agreed to come in at night and help us do fingerprints for people coming in because we had such a deluge of people coming in for fingerprints. He was employed as a part-time clerk. I thought right away all the staff there felt that he was such a good-natured young man. Being bilingual also helped. He got along with everybody and he's very easy-going. What he didn't tell you is that we meet about 2-3 times a year for supervisor's meetings and attach responsibilities, he's also an MPTC certified instructor. That's not easy to do. You've got to get an over weeklong course to get certified by the state and you have to keep that up every 3 years. He's our community liaison officer. He's always been a person you can put in front of people. He volunteers. For instance, we have something like First Night coming up and I happen to see Jhon's name is already on it. He is very motivated. He's not challenged at all by speaking to someone or being in front of people and showing who he is. For a rather introverted, good-natured, quiet young man he speaks very well. He's our health and wellness instructor. A lot of young officers in our department are in great shape and they look up to this man. The bike patrol has been fantastic. He's been significantly improving our bike patrol program. The other day, him and Officer Smolinski got together and set up the bike rack. They did a fantastic job. He upgraded our bike fleet and I want to thank him for that. This would be a midnight shift patrol position. He's been sitting in for a little over 12 months already. He was made acting on December 11, 2022. He's been assuming all the duties as a shift sergeant, which means when he's on at night he's the eyes and ears and leadership of the Town of Ludlow. Him and the fire captain next door, if anything comes in and I'm not there or the lieutenants or anyone else, you are the conduit to get help when you need it if you had a critical incident like one that just happened. Jhon has shown the leadership. If there was an incident like that in Ludlow I would want the sergeant to do his utmost and be vocal and take charge and bring in the assets and help that is needed. I'm confident that Jhon will do that. He's a fine young man and I'm proud to have him. He could work anywhere.

Mr. Wielblad: I'll be quick. Thanks again for having me. I appreciate you giving me the time to do this. Hopefully I can continue being in my current role and developing and prosper with the department.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you for your continued interest in the department.

5:50 p.m. – Derek Smolinski – Police Sergeant Interview

Mr. Gennette: We're going to give you an opportunity to make an opening statement, we'll ask you a question, give the Chief a chance to say something, we'll let you close and then we'll be done.

Mr. Smolinski: My journey towards a career in law enforcement was inspired by my grandfather, Chester Hawkus, who served as a police officer in Ludlow. Although I didn't have the opportunity to know him well, the stories shared by former officers about his dedication deeply influenced my decision to pursue this profession. After graduating from Ludlow High School in 2000 I pursued a degree in criminal justice at Springfield Technical Community College. I later transferred to Westfield State University where I successfully earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Following an internship at the Ludlow police department during my senior year, I joined as a Ludlow police dispatcher. This period as a dispatcher allowed me to build meaningful relationships with police administrators and staff. Simultaneously I took on the role of Ludlow special police officer contributing over 150 hours a year of community service over 3 years. At that time, I became a certified Massachusetts EMT. In 2007, I was selected as a full-time police officer by former Chief McGowan. Despite facing challenges as a civilian without a military background, I felt pride in securing the position following 3 interviews with the Board of Selectmen. During my tenure I have served on the midnight shift for 7 years followed by 2 years on 2<sup>nd</sup> shift and currently I have been serving for 8 years as a day shift patrol officer. I hold badge L3 and I rank the 3<sup>rd</sup> senior officer on patrol. Having been a field training officer since the inception of the program in 2013 until 2022 I took pleasure in training new officers, fostering relationships and sharing the

skills I've acquired over the years. I've trained several current patrol officers, some who have risen to the rank of detective, sergeant and 1 lieutenant. In addition to my patrol duties, I manage the Ludlow police Facebook page for over a decade and manage the Ludlow Twitter page, subsequently handing over the Twitter page to Sergeant Wielblad. As the department's motor vehicle maintenance officer, I oversee the maintenance of the entire fleet, handle mobile data terminals, liaison with vendors, manage budgets, make appointments, assign vehicles, and sign contracts. My commitment to the community involvement extends to 7 years of volunteering with the Ludlow Safety Committee where my experience as a police officer led me to contribute ideas and knowledge of all aspects of safety. I am also undergoing training as a Ludlow police back up court officer with aspirations to assume the full-time court officer role in the future unless I get this position. Despite not attaining the role of divisional sergeant, I am confident that my 2 decades of experience at the Ludlow police department have adequately prepared me for this promotion. I have filled in over the years as the officer in charge position when needed. I have encountered a diverse range of situations on each shift from responding to minor incidents like barking dogs, to handling significant events such as delivering a baby at a house and stopping a home invasion. Over these 20 years I've acquired comprehensive knowledge of the police department handling responsibilities ranging from police dispatch, record handling, public announcements on social media, budget management, court issues, fleet management and technology trouble shooting. I am a lifelong resident of Ludlow and deeply rooted in this community with a loving wife and 2 sons. Receiving this promotion would mean returning to midnight shift from earning my spot and currently working comfortable on day shift. After putting in my time as a police officer in Ludlow for 20 years reflects my unwavering commitment and sacrifice for this department and community.

Mr. Goncalves: What do you perceive is the biggest challenge in the police department today?

Mr. Smolinski: I think the biggest challenge at the police department these days is retaining police officers. As you can tell it's very hard to get police officers to work as a police officer. There's been a trickle of officers leaving Ludlow for different reasons; state police and stuff like that, but I think one of the biggest would be retaining officers. The second would be mental health issues, like PTSD.

Mr. Rosenblum: Officer Smolinski, thank you for coming in again. Being here for 20 years and living in this town your whole life, where do you see your career goal or end game in your career?

Mr. Smolinski: To be honest with you, I don't see myself being chief of police. I would like to start with becoming a sergeant then lieutenant. My first step is right here and now to become a sergeant. Beyond that I would like to become a lieutenant.

Mr. DeBarge: It's good to see you again. You caught me in your opening, the part about being on days as long as you have and then going back to midnights. That is something I was not willing to do when I was on. So, I do commend you for that. It's tough to be on days for a while and badge 6... WOW.

Mr. Smolinski: I've had a lot of conversations with my wife over this. Having children, it's more difficult to have children when you're working second shift. That's why midnight is ideal. I talked to Chief Valadas and him and Lieutenant Metcalfe were on midnight for a long time because of that. It's something difficult to do but it's a calling for me that I have to do.

Mr. DeBarge: I want to talk a little bit about what happened in Wilbraham. In light of the incident that happened in Wilbraham and what happened to a brother officer, had that incident been here and you were a shift sergeant, how would you approach your next shift at work after this incident with your officers?

Mr. Smolinski: Ideally I would talk to the Chief and try to get some kind of mental health specialist down to the station. Beyond that, as a group I would speak with the officers and tell them what's happening, inform them of all aspects of what's going on. When officers are going into the station, they don't know the whole story. Obviously the Chief is going to go to the supervisor and tell him this is the whole situation of what's going on so I can relay that to the officers. The biggest thing I think is getting someone down that can speak with them as far as mental health. I had an incident 10 years ago with a tragic accident that occurred on West Ave. The only issue I had with that was I responded to a call where 3 children passed away. I was the 2<sup>nd</sup> officer on scene. The first officer was a Sheriff's department officer. Going through that and having to come back to the station and

not having the resources of someone coming up to you saying are you OK was horrible. Having to go on shift the next day and dealing with that again. It bothered me for a while, it stayed with me for years. The best thing that happened during that situation was that they brought in a team a week later with the big service dog, they brought in everybody including firefighters who were on the scene and it was a group setting and we all laid it out and spoke to each other. They had former officers, retired detectives from Springfield PD. I think that was the best thing that ever happened to me but I still think about that day. Hopefully that answered your question. Everything stays with you. Even the little calls, you have nightmares. It stays with you. There's no getting it out of your head. I love my wife to death because I tell her everything and it's great to get off your chest. I don't know if you're the same way with your wife, but it's wonderful to have a partner that every day you can say this is what went on.

Mr. Silva: Why do you believe that you will succeed in this position as a sergeant?

Mr. Smolinski: I think I'm a good mentor. I've been with the police department for 20 years. I've done everything. I think having that experience plays a huge role of being a supervisor, especially the midnight shift. You can mentor all the new guys and tell them what's going on. I've been to 12,000 incidents in my 16 years as a full-time officer. That's about 30 calls a week. I think I have the experience and knowledge to give to all officers. That's my plan being a supervisor. I want to teach them.

Mr. Gennette: Mine is about technology. There's a lot of things the police department needs to use for their resources. Can you give me your thoughts with technology with the police department and maybe close with how you feel about body cameras?

Mr. Smolinski: Facebook is the most wonderful thing in the world, because everyone is connected from the basic of a lost dog. Believe it or now, when we post on Facebook, our lost dogs has the most views. It helps with missing persons because usually we can find them pretty quickly. And it helps with identifying people, say a shoplifter. People call in right away. It's a great investigative tool to have. Another thing we do is when you guys posted about having the streets closed, I posted 10 minutes ago because of the snowstorm and parking issues. It's a great tool to put out regarding new and hot topics. The other day I posted a hot topic with google. This one instance was he searched Charter Spectrum. Selectmen DeBarge goes on google and goes I need to call Spectrum. You have the regular Spectrum website but on top it says sponsored. The individual called that phone number which ended up being a spam number so I immediately put in on Facebook saying be careful. You can get out stuff very quickly to the public. Same with Twitter. I'm all for body cams. I'm all for cameras in vehicles. I'm a huge supporter of body cams. I think it does wonders. Not to joke about it but I think the only issue with body cams is we have so much stuff on our body as far as equipment. It's another thing we have to put on our body and it's heavy. After you're done with an incident, you can go back and review it. If there's any kind of issue in regards to an officer you can review it. Sometimes it doesn't give the whole picture. It gives one view of a body cam but it's better than nothing. So, I'm a supporter of body cams and cameras in vehicles. I think our officers are willing to do it.

Chief Valadas: Officer Smolinski is a very senior officer. He's been one of our FTO's for quite a lot of years so he's trained a great portion of the police department. He mentioned some of his administrative duties. With his experience, officer Smolinski, recently we've used him as we needed an evidence officer and back-up court officer. You can never have a single point of failure so we need to have a backup and double back up. He's agreed to do that. A lot of officers wouldn't necessarily want to do that statistical type of tedious preparing complaints, preparing statistics, working on evidence, tracking evidence, and he's agreed to do that. I'm greatly appreciative of that. We each have duties in the police department, from the lowest patrolman all the way up. Fleet management: he's a one man show with that. He works with Lt. Brennan and officer Roach but he has really taken the reins on that. Officer Roach is on deployment and Lt. Brennan has many duties so he's a one man show and he does a great job with that. He started with us as a dispatcher so he had that type of experience. Going back to he was an intern so he grew up with the police department. I look at Derek and still see a young man. He provides a mentor role. He's very good natured. Officer Smolinski is one of the veteran guys. I will allude to that he has seen a lot over the course of his career but for some reason Officer Smolinski has been to some hairy, critical scenes and he's a rock and that's not easy. Your coping mechanisms are working. I'm glad you've got your head in the game. I'm proud to have you. You can work anywhere.

Mr. Smolinski: I appreciate that Chief. I want to thank the Board of Selectmen and Chief Valadas for providing me with this opportunity to interview one last time for this promotion. As a senior officer with 2 decades of dedicated service to this department, I believe the wealth of experience and wisdom I bring to this table should not be overlooked. Over the course of my 20-year tenure I've responded to over 13,000 calls contributing to the safety and wellness of our community. I've had the privilege of learning invaluable skills from many of the Ludlow officers who have since retired, including Officer Fernandes, Officer Witowski, Officer Winkler, Sgt. Tulik, Sgt. Mendes, Sgt. Gilrein and Lt. Metcalfe. I would like the opportunity to pass on these skills as a supervisor and I would like to thank you all for this opportunity. I appreciate it.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you. We'll let you know. Chief, do you have anything in closing you'd like to add?

Chief Valadas: No, gentlemen, I've said enough. Thank you very much.

Mr. Goncalves: I don't want to go out of order, but while we have the Chief here, was this resignation planned for Mr. Bedore?

Chief Valadas: No, it was not planned. Two officers resigned in December, one for another career and one for the FTO program. He was in remediation phase after a 3-phase failure and then remediated. The remediate program allows you to remediate again. As deficiencies were being brought forward it was manifesting into a failure to complete the program. In other words, he was not performing his duties and he was getting worse; therefore, when presented with that the officer resigned and ended his employment. I understand he's seeking employment somewhere else. We wish him the best.

Mr. Goncalves: They're both great guys. The experience that Derek brings, those 20 years and having seen everything he's seen. When I look at Jhon I think the night shift is a hairy place. He just seems to have a better grip on that part of it. Both have great education, both Ludlow guys, which is great. It's good to see everybody staying in town. I would give the edge to Jhon.

Mr. Rosenblum: Officer Smolinski has seen over 13,000 incidents. The experience is there. Acting Sgt. Wielblad: he's in that position now but in the same sense he's got his hands in everything. I know when we've gone through things like when we've hired Chief there are some things that are between having a master's or military, teaching, and things like that. I could go either way. I'm leaning towards acting Sgt. Wielblad.

Mr. DeBarge: These things are always so tough especially when you have good candidates across the board. I remember when I was doing these interviews. My first one I didn't get selected and my 2<sup>nd</sup> one 5 months later I did and one of the things that the Board of Selectmen wanted to know when I came back around is what did I do differently from the last time. I was actually getting my degree while in EMT school as well. I think you have 2 candidates here that are very good at what they do in the world that they're in. I think they're 2 different worlds. You have Jhon Wielblad who when we saw him last time was in the process of finishing his master's. He finished the master's and EMT. I know that I try to be at as many events as I can be throughout the year and when I'm at these events so is he. It doesn't take anything away from Derek or anything he does but these are the kinds of things the Board of Selectmen need to look at. I look at the answers to their questions. Both great answers to a myriad of questions. I was appreciative of hearing that both of their concerns are mental health whether within their job or the community. I think that Jhon has a much more extensive background maybe isn't the right word but I've known him in the mental health community with CARES Coalition and doing as much as he does there. Derek is definitely an asset to the department, there's no doubt about that. We need a shift supervisor on the midnight shift, which is actually at your discretion. For tonight, for 2 people, my choice is Jhon.

Mr. Silva: They are so tied. I did a number system and you guys came out tied. Without favoring anyone. In these things I look to the Chief's recommendations, which I know is rather difficult for him to do. It makes it easy on me when he does. He knows what's going on, we don't. I could flip a coin and be happy with either. That's where I am right now. Either way.

Mr. Gennette: To take nothing away from Mr. Smolinski, I've been a fan of Mr. Wielblad for a very long time. He's been coming along nicely and one of the biggest drawbacks I think I would

have had for Jhon is that he was so busy. He does so many things how is he going to manage if he picks more up. Now that he's cleared that master's degree out of the way I'm thinking that's probably freed up a lot of time. Again, Derek is a stellar officer and he brings a lot to the table and again nothing to take from him. At this time my vote is for Mr. Wielblad.

**Motion made by Mr. DeBarge** to appoint Jhon Wielblad as a permanent police sergeant in the Ludlow Police Department active midnight tonight.

Mr. Silva: Mr. Wielblad is the acting. He becomes permanent, so there's no other position that we need to act on?

Chief Valadas: No, I do not. This would fill the remaining permanent created by the retirement.

**Mr. Goncalves second. Motion passed 5-0.**

## CORRESPONDENCE

176. Kim Batista, Town Clerk – Informing the Board of the in-person early voting for the presidential primary on Saturday, February 24, 2024, and Monday February 26, 2024, through Friday, March 1, 2021 during normal working hours. Also, she is requesting the Board to approve a sufficient number of police officers but not less than one at the polling locations, at every location there in to preserve order and to protect the election officers and supervisors from any interference with their duties; to aid in enforcing the laws relating to elections as required by section 72 of Mass General Law, chapter 54, which was changed in section 13 of chapter 92 of the Acts of 2022 and to designate the Police Chief the authority to assigning specific police officers according to scheduling and availability.

Mr. Silva: I had a conversation with Kim and there's something coming up with these election things and it's going to be considerably a lot more work and more stuff we need to do. I don't know if this is part of it. She's going to come in with us to have a decision. I guess there's some local option we can do.

Mr. Rosenblum: Chief Valadas is here. Have you talked to the Clerk at all? You're ok with the coordination of everything?

Chief Valadas: The provisions the Attorney General's office and what they're looking for as far as far as designee and she'll get with me on election days like she did today and the number of officers assigned to each precinct for proper security, which I can determine but it's what we've been which is an officer at each post. She can ask for more and we can provide if there was a need.

Mr. Strange: I want to make sure you see in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last sentence says consider appointing the Police Chief the authority to assign specific police officers according to scheduling and availability. That might require a motion.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves** to approve a sufficient number of police officers but not less than one for each polling location and that every location have a minimum of one officer. Furthermore, I would designate the Chief be the authority to assign special police officers according to their schedule and availability. The Town Clerk will advise the police Chief the location and time of where they're needed. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Gennette: We have the ACO here. In unfinished business is the Board to vote on reclassification requests. We had a late request from Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Anderson: My request is that my pay be put on a scale which is not currently on a scale and to be set on a scale based on what my peers in the community are making. I did the research for Belchertown, Chicopee, Holyoke, and Westfield. They're all making at least \$63,000/year if not more. I'm making \$44,000/year. All of their positions are Monday-Friday 9-5 or 8-4. They don't work weekends or on-call. They also don't have kennel duties. I have all of those because it's just me. As far as kennel duties go, when I have an animal in the kennel I am the one in there trying not to get bit. I try not to keep animals in the kennel just for that reason. We can't generate a part-time person to do cleaning because the kennel is not set up for safety measures. I will not allow



somebody to go in with some of these animals and get bit, because they could. Most kennels have guillotine doors, ours doesn't so you have to manually handle the animals. It can get really dangerous at times so that is part of this whole thing.

Mr. Gennette: When you say our kennel, is this our combined kennel with Wilbraham?

Ms. Anderson: Yes, it's the only one I use and I'm grateful we have somewhere to put these animals because as of the end of December our calls were over 1,400. That's a lot of calls. For me it isn't so much the 1:00 a.m. calls, it's the 7:00 p.m. calls because if I'm here 40 hours/week, which I try to be, and I get home and the phone rings. Those are the calls that affect me more than 2:00 a.m. I was out here last night at 9:00 p.m. and somebody found a dog. I think the job has evolved so much in the last couple years. We went from a part-time on-call person to a full-time position and it just expands, which is the nature of the job. It's not necessarily a bad thing at all. I enjoy my job. I think I do a pretty decent job of it. If I compare myself to any of the other places they're making so much more than me. It's hard to work 2 jobs to try to pay my bills. I know a job shouldn't necessarily reflect on what it can do for me but somewhere along the line I have to stop and go OK.

Mr. Silva: I believe Carrie looked at this and she was also suggesting that we should put her on a scale.

Mr. Strange: Right now, Octavia is not on any scale. We have a non-union scale, which is the NU, which everybody who's not in a union is on except for Octavia. The proposal was to put Octavia on an NU-10 scale at step 4 effective July 1, 2024, and reduce the hours. Right now, Octavia is on a 40-hour schedule and reduce that to 35.

Ms. Anderson: Which isn't in all honesty possible. The job just doesn't call for that. I realize your system is set up for 35 hours. I don't work 35 hours at all. I've been speaking with Carrie for weeks and I don't know how to fix this.

Mr. Gennette: That's the conversation we're going to have. We're not going to be making a decision sitting here in front of you. We gave you an opportunity to speak and we'll go from there. Chief, do you have anything you'd like to add?

Chief Valadas: I'll add that I completed a letter in the budget proposals asking for a percentage raise but after speaking with Ms. Ribeiro and Mr. Strange there has to be a structure. I gave you a comparative in the letter and the comparative she mentioned is woefully underpaid for her level of skill and profession and level of experience. She's met all the certifications. She is a tremendous asset and resource for our town. I can't tell you the number of calls and if we lacked this we would have a very difficult time finding someone to do this work. It's a tough job and she does it phenomenally.

Mr. Goncalves: We're going from 40 to 35, and you're saying you don't work 35, what's happening is you could go a couple days not having any calls but you could be out Saturday and Sunday for 11-12 hours a day.

Ms. Anderson: I could have calls and still be out Saturday and Sunday.

Mr. Goncalves: You're saying you're never going to work 30 or 40 hours?

Ms. Anderson: It doesn't happen that way. What I do now is I try to compensate on some level. If I'm out at 8:00 p.m. I'll come in at 10:00 a.m. instead of 8:00 a.m. Sometimes I will do a whole week of normal 40 hour/week and then get hit on the weekends. I can't punch a time clock and I can't go away for the weekend without checking in with everybody, getting somebody to cover for me and I'm still on the phone half the time. It's the nature of the position. Unless we had a whole department, like Belchertown. They have 2 assistants and a kennel person. She can work 8-4 and the kennel people can work from 4-10 and the police take over after that. We can't do that because our kennel is in Wilbraham. We can't ask our officers to drive to Wilbraham if they find a dog in the middle of the night. For some reason in Ludlow, there's an awful lot of loose, stray dogs. You all see what we bring in.



Mr. Gennette: For numbers, without getting into a long, drawn-out thing, have you put in for a lot of OT?

Ms. Anderson: I don't get OT. That would be one way to rectify this on some level.

Mr. Gennette: I was looking for a justification. It would have been a lot easier. We could say this would actually save us money.

Mr. Goncalves: I think that's what she's saying, if she stayed under the old pay scale and she starts keeping track of her hours it's probably going to end up costing more than an adjustment we could make in her pay and we could leave things the way they are.

Ms. Anderson: I keep track of my hours. I can give you months of OT.

Mr. Gennette: We hear you. Thank you for coming in and giving us the info and we'll take it under serious consideration.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do we want to do the unfinished business about nuisance dogs while she's here?

Mr. Gennette: Absolutely.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Board to declare Kim Libiszewski's three dogs as "nuisance dogs" per the hearing held on January 9, 2024.

Ms. Anderson: Is that what we're doing now?

Mr. Gennette: That's what's in here as a topic of conversation.

Ms. Anderson: They are nuisance dogs. They do get loose all the time.

Mr. Gennette: We had the hearing and it wasn't a conversation to make them nuisance dogs. We did tell them in that meeting if they were declared nuisance dogs it would change dramatically. They should probably remedy it and we gave them steps to be able to remedy that situation. Are you prepared to make them nuisance dogs at this point?

Ms. Anderson: I would prefer to see what she does.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to table until we get to the timeline we set forth before and once we get to that timeline if you give us more information that we need to go this route then we do it and if we don't then we just let it go as it.

Mr. Gennette: If it comes back up again we can put it on a hearing.

Ms. Anderson: I would prefer to follow up to make sure she is actually doing what we requested and if she hasn't or won't do it then we need to take it to the next level.

Mr. Gennette: We don't need a motion to table.

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

177. Shawn Teece, Town Accountant – Informing the Board of the Federal mileage reimbursement increase to \$.67/mile.

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

Mr. Silva: Before we do that do we need to OK it?

Mr. Strange: No.

178. Brian Bylicki, Chair – Ludlow Incorporation Night – Inviting the Board to attend the 250<sup>th</sup> day of incorporation event on Wednesday, February 28, 2024, to be held at the Ludlow High School Auditorium beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Gennette: I will be there.

Mr. DeBarge: I have events that I can talk about later.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to file. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

179. Louis Gilli, EH&S Engineer MMWEC – Informing the Board that the Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company (MMWEC) will be conducting the 2024 1<sup>st</sup> quarter inspection of its natural gas pipeline between January 1, 2024 - March 31, 2024.

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

181. Karen Harvey, Licensing Manager Massachusetts State Lottery Commission – Informing the Board of a KENO monitor to be installed at the following location in your community: Chapin East Variety, 830 East Street, Ludlow, MA.

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

180. Chief Valadas, Ludlow Police Department – Informing the Board of Officer Brandon Bedore's resignation effective December 22, 2023.

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

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Board to vote on new positions and reclassification requests.

Mr. Gennette: We met with everybody a little while ago and we got information and we're going to go down a list. Does anybody have any statements they want to make about this before we get going?

Mr. Rosenblum: Pertaining to this but not necessarily pertaining to it, knowing that we're going to be in crunch and we've discussed it in passing in the past but I think something we need to look at is the percentage of insurance coverage in the Town. I know that doing some research we're pretty much the best percentage you're going to find anywhere in the area. I think it's something we need to look at only because we can have some substantial savings in our budget when it comes down the road towards when we look at something like this, approving positions or being able to have a decent levy instead of knowing that this year or next year we could be right up against it. That's a statement I want to make and I think we need to start looking into our percentage splits and health insurance in the Town.

Mr. Strange: Just for clarification, Bill, you're talking about the employee's contribution to health insurance. It's 78%.

Mr. Rosenblum: If I remember correctly, all of our unions except for the school department, the teacher's union, had agreed to 75/25 and the school union fought that 75/25 and they agreed on 78/22 and we brought all the other unions up into that 78/22 but I believe we can go back to the 75/25 if we want? Is that correct?

Mr. Silva: It's re-negotiations.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm saying we need to look at our employer/employee contribution percentages. A lot of them are 70/30, 68/22 and those are the basic HMO. Not the PPO's. I think it's something we need to look at if not this budget season, next budget season.

Mr. DeBarge: A couple weeks ago when we were going through this, knowing we were far over the levy in budget 1 and we know that we are all about the levy. I thought about my experience as a Selectman and being around the departments and listening to Carrie and Marc and department heads, what do I see as the most need because now it's not about wants it's about needs. What specific departments have a specific need. There was a few to speak of that I was more than willing to look at. That was the Senior Center, Veterans Center, and the library. Last week when I saw our Governor and Lt. Governor ask the citizens of this state to take in illegal immigrants to a private room or a room in their house and then ask the municipalities if they have empty buildings and space, step up was the word from the Lt. Governor and offer this space to the migrants that we're being inundated with in the eastern part of the state, if you have enough, insert noun here, to ask the citizens of Massachusetts to take in people into their homes when inflation is the way that it is, when everything it seems like is closing in on us financially, I can't in good conscious not knowing. The Governor also announced the 1-billion-dollar tax shortfall, which means the trickle-down effect is going to come down to the municipality. If anybody doesn't think it won't, it already has. We lost some money on the mills project. Some of it got cut. Others are going to get cut. If it's a billion-dollar tax shortfall after we were given, a couple years ago Governor Baker gave us money individually. A terrible idea and this is what's paying for it now. We're going to get cut. This is the part of my job that I can't stand because I do see the need at the Senior Center, I do see the need at the Veteran's Center. I'm told about the need at the library. And I can't in good conscious agree to anything right now not knowing the future with this ridiculous request from our Governor to do this. To take on a problem that is put on by that party. It's disgusting to me and it makes me make a decision that I don't want to make, which is not voting for anything this year until we figure out where we're going to be. That's where I am unfortunately, and I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Silva: As you well know, I'm absolutely agreeing with Mr. DeBarge and you know why. I know people that cannot buy groceries right now. They can't have a car. It's getting absolutely ridiculous and we keep budgeting right to the levy limit. I work in other communities and it's not happening that they're taxing to the levy limit. They're having a little surplus. Having a surplus doesn't go away. Next year if we have a surplus this year we can use it if we get into a problem.

Mr. DeBarge: Do those towns that have less under the levy, do they have the free cash and stabilization that we do?

Mr. Silva: I don't look at that. I'm sure they have some but not all. At least it's there. Right now, we're at the levy. If next year we can't stay under the levy that's a problem. There's a lot of things that are going to come into play. We can't keep going this way. We can't keep taxing. Then we're also raising fees. They want to raise a 5% surcharge on excise. More money for anybody that wants a car is going to have to pay. She wants to raise the sales tax on hotel/motel. That's great for where they are. Look at the tax rates where there's a lot of hotels and resorts. The tax rate is low because they get it on that end. Doing that to us isn't going to benefit them as much. I think we're in a crucial time based on the economy. Gas prices and oil prices luckily they came down a little bit but I think they're starting to slide up again. There just isn't funds.

Mr. Rosenblum: To Mr. DeBarge's point, I was away at an event for the weekend and it was a hockey tournament and we had someone come up to the coach and say did you pay your bill? She said they were short \$48,000. That's right. They're putting \$48,000/month in 2 whole floors of a hotel that we were at. I don't know if this is right or not but I know that most municipalities even on the state side are tax exempt so you're not going to be paying any tax for that also. The buck is getting passed somewhere with a lot of stuff and I've said before I took the spreadsheet that was given to us and I said yes, no, maybe but I've also said we're in a position that we've added a lot of positions over the last year and a half or so in town hall. I'm at a point where it almost needs to be a freeze. I can see some of the ones where it's \$8,000 or \$2,000 to get them in the right position but I have a hard time with an \$80,000 position with \$25,000 worth of benefits. This number in positions here is \$730,000.

Mr. Silva: I'm all for keeping our personnel taken care of the people we have. As we can see they're asking for further help. We probably do need them but we also need to take care of the people in the positions we do have now. Where I come from the doors are in and out. If people don't have the right pay they're just moving on. If we don't keep our people we're in double trouble. I'm all for keeping them in their right pay scales. I'm all for giving them what they're due. As far as adding positions, it's a tough time.

Mr. Goncalves: You guys have said everything except I wasn't going to go that deep politically. For me there's too many variables for us to be acting on this right now. We don't know where we're at with health insurance. We've still got 3 months and I think we've got to put this on hold to see what our fixed costs are going to be. I've got a funny feeling we're going to be really tight with contractual obligations alone. As far as the reclassifications I don't see a problem with those, including Octavia's. She's 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. It's not a big ask for her.

Mr. Silva: Marc, where are we with our contracts? I was here for most of them but they're staggered.

Mr. Strange: Upcoming, we have this year to negotiate for fiscal 25 is Fire, DPW, Dispatch and Library.

Mr. Silva: Do you know where the teacher contracts are?

Mr. Strange: Teachers have another year.

Mr. Silva: We've got to look at that too. We're going to need some kind of revenue to negotiate in good faith.

Mr. DeBarge: We're going to have to have some difficult discussions, whether it be talking about regional dispatch again, trash changes. This whole thing over the next couple years. Having one of the contracts come up is DPW and this entire board has talked about the need to bump up the salary of our DPW so we can add positions so we can provide the services the community deserves. I'm with you on this Manny and it looks like we may have to go into contract negotiations with this is it. Take it or leave it. We can't do anything else. It's unfortunate because we've been making a lot of progress in the last 2 years. I'm not trying to be a Debbie downer saying everything is bad. I hope we can come out of this without it being as bad as it is but if you don't prepare you don't want to get caught having no recourse but to be over the limit because of an oversight by us. If the Board is inclined and Carrie and Marc say the classification changes have been requested are something we can do, I agree with that. I don't think it's a big expense anyway. New positions, No.

Mr. Rosenblum: That was basically where I was going to go. I don't have a problem with reclassifications and maybe 1 or 2 of the other ones because Assistant Town Clerk is only an increase of \$1,276. My only one that is a possible yes is the part time youth services assistant at the library. If you take those, both of those positions are non-benefited, the original request across the board on the sheet is \$730,777. By saying yes to the reclassifications and those 2 positions, it's \$40,763. The spreadsheet doesn't lie Tony.

Mr. Goncalves: \$19,770 & \$19,687.

Mr. Rosenblum: \$1,276 & \$19,687 is \$20,963. Then all the reclassifications are \$19,800 so it comes out to \$40,763.

Mr. Gennette: I'm in the same boat. I don't think we have the money to do any new positions. I'm all for talking about reclassifications and if departments can find the money to be able to pay for these positions I'm obviously willing to talk about it under those circumstances. I think there are some solutions on the horizon. The assessed rate for the properties, we keep holding them back because the market has exploded over the past 5 years. If we just let the assessed rate go it would be insane. What did we go up on the assessed rate? 1%? I wasn't at that meeting to vote for it.

Mr. Rosenblum: The median home value? \$274,000.

Mr. Gennette: I think there's going to be some other things coming up. I've been in conversations with Marc and Waste Management and it looks like there's opportunities to be able to make improvements with trash so that's good. There's a couple things that could possibly happen but until that stuff pans out we can't make a move. The community has been getting drilled too hard and we've got to scale it back, so I'm in the same boat.

Mr. Goncalves: I think the general idea is to put this on hold and take this up at a different meeting.

Mr. Rosenblum: I don't have a problem saying yes to the reclassifications and holding everything up above it. That's \$19,800 right now that we can say yes to and there's 1 or 2 that I said maybe up on the top. These are bigger dollar amounts up top and 90% of them are benefits as well and say let's hold on what's up top. I don't have a problem. I can make the motion to say yes to the reclassifications because it equals \$19,800.

Mr. Gennette: Am I wrong in seeing the cost for the Assistant Town Clerk is \$1,276 and there aren't any additional benefits?

Mr. Strange: Correct.

Mr. Gennette: Why wouldn't we not do that?

Mr. Rosenblum: That's what I was saying, and possibly the part time youth services at the library because there's no benefits associated with that. In their presentation they were saying if we don't get this can we get this.

Mr. Gennette: What about the council on aging assistant director that looks like it would be \$30,110? The only reason I bring that up is because Jodi usually comes in here funding most of the items she asks for. She asked for a \$125,000 van from Capital and she paid  $\frac{3}{4}$  of it. She saves us a ton of money. She's looking for a little bit of assistance here and I think this might be worth it.

Mr. Strange: I wanted to ask Carrie and see if she knows about this. The assistant director is already an existing employee. Is she not benefited? Heather.

Ms. Ribeiro: She's benefited.

Mr. Rosenblum: We would take the \$25,000 off leaving \$5,110.

Ms. Ribeiro: I sent an updated one today.

Mr. Gennette: That's even better. Are there any other positions other than that that aren't going to have benefits?

Mr. DeBarge: The part-time youth services assistant at the library is \$19,687 without benefits.

Mr. Strange: I think everything else is right.

Ms. Ribeiro: Her request at the library, they couldn't get a full-time youth services assistant with the benefits up top, the additional \$20,375, \$25,000 with benefits, there's a notation: if the full-time position doesn't get approved they would be willing to take an additional part-time position 19 and under in order to not pay the benefits. Saving \$25,000. That's why it's on there twice.

Mr. Rosenblum: If we're looking at council on aging assistant director \$5,110, town clerk \$1,276, library part time youth services assistant \$19,687 that's \$26,073 with the reclassifications makes it \$45,873. The formulas are in the spreadsheet I made.

Mr. Silva: Do we have anything that has come through the insurance what the increase is going to be?

Mr. Strange: At the conference this past weekend, we know what the average increase is going to be for health benefits and it's 6.6%. We have 10% budgeted. We could be above or below it. Last year our loss runs are low, for some reason this year our loss runs are higher than average so we're still waiting for our MIIA rep to let us know exactly what the increase is going to be hoping it's no more than 8%. Every point represents \$100,000.

Mr. Silva: One year we budgeted a little low and it came in at 10% and we got hit pretty good. That's something you have to keep an eye on.

Mr. Gennette: We're pretty much looking at \$660,000.

Mr. Strange: We have 10% so that would be a savings of \$340,000.

Mr. Rosenblum: If it comes in at 8 that puts us at \$150,000.

Mr. Strange: Correct.

Mr. Gennette: Looking at this list, if we didn't accept any of these new full-time positions, are there any of those that you need in your staff.

Mr. Strange: My thought is every single one of those positions the Town can use but right now as we sit here we just can't afford it. In terms of directions from the Board I'd like to get the level 2 budgets out to the Board and FinCom by the end of this week because we're a couple weeks behind. If the direction is add in these reclassifications including the ones Bill mentioned and back out the new full-time positions I can do that and come up with a number that would be helpful. We're also going to go and level fund every line item for general expenses and ask the departments to justify any contractual increases that we are obligated to that would increase a line item and then see where we are at that point. I still think we're going to be over capacity. I don't think there's any way we get there without increasing fees in some capacity. Also at the conference, the Governor announced a 3% UGA, which is unrestricted general government aid in her budget, which is good. For us that represents about \$550,000 in addition over fiscal 24. That's not a pure number because there's also offsets that kind of decrease that number. Between backing out the new position requests and level funding as many line items as we possibly can we're getting closer. I hope to have a number for you by Friday. It will not be under capacity. You'll get a number that is not a balanced budget. You all and the FinCom are going to have to make difficult decisions about increasing fees and cutting. We'll get that to you as soon as possible, I'm hoping by Friday. If I at least know we can plug in the numbers for the reclassifications.

Mr. Gennette: I think that's safe. I don't think any of us want to add any full-time positions. I think we all said the same thing. We don't have to finalize it completely but we can at least make sure the classification ones are in.

Mr. Strange: Then you'll have an idea where we are at level 2 knowing all these requests are out there.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to approve the council on aging assistant director position for \$5,110, assistant town clerk for \$1,276 and the part time youth services assistant for \$19,687 for a total of \$26,073 and to also approve the reclassifications of the fire clerk LATOSS III to LATOSS IV for \$2,786, council on aging clerk LATOSS II to LATOSS III and Dispatcher LATOSS II to LATOSS III totaling \$4,937, HR specialist from MI step 6 to M2 step 2 for an additional \$3,803 and animal control officer into a requested grade of non-union 10 step 4 with an increase of \$8,274 for a grand total of \$45,873. **Mr. Silva second. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Rosenblum: From having the animal control officer in here before and how her position is run, I don't know if there's anything we can look into like solidifying it more how the hours are working. I think it opens up a can of worms that I work more than I am. When unions hear something like that maybe it's something we look into the future, only because I know.

Mr. Strange: I'm happy to share some thoughts on that. Octavia does an amazing job. She's always available. Anybody that has an animal in town loves her. She cares about the animals and she's not getting paid enough. She certainly deserves an increase. Right now, Octavia is always on call and I don't think that has to be the case. My experience in other towns is you have an animal control officer who is on for certain hours of the day. Anything after hours there's a back up person that goes and takes care of it. Right now, the entire burden is on Octavia. She's part of the police department but she doesn't have a direct supervisor for good reason. It's a unique role. I think we can work with her on helping so she's not on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. She certainly deserves more money. She does a great job.

Mr. DeBarge: I probably should have done this when the Chief was here. I have a real big problem with this. If you were given a job for 35 hours, you work 35 hours. You don't tell us that you're not going to work 35 hours. If you're on call at night, cancel the on-call at night. When I was in the police department and someone found a dog after hours we brought it to the police station and kept it in the cage there. If that changed, that's why I wish I asked the Chief that. I have a problem

with this is your position, this is what we hired you for, this is the job you're supposed to do. If you want to work 8-4, 35 hours, then you don't go out after that. We don't pay overtime.

Mr. Goncalves: She's self-regulating that.

Mr. DeBarge: I don't like to hear from somebody that I can't work 35 hours. Well, that's what you're supposed to do.

Mr. Goncalves: I think she was saying there's no way she could do her job in 35 hours.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think that's where she was going with it. She can't work 35 because the job demands more.

Mr. DeBarge: Carrie, does your job demand more hours than the hours that you work?

Ms. Ribeiro: Every day.

Mr. DeBarge: Does yours Marc?

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: Does yours Bill?

Mr. Rosenblum: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: Ok, so I'm sorry, you're 35 hours. I still don't understand why everyone is saying it should be more. If that's your position, that's what you work. If you're granted overtime for something or you have an on call, I know it's a new position and I know that things need to be worked out but it's not she can do whatever she wants or a position can do whatever they want because it's odd hours. I can't agree with that.

Mr. Gennette: I agree with you but this is a self-managed position and she has to self-manage. She has to be able to take care of what she needs to do in the amount of time allotted. We don't have the money to pay her more. She's working for free.

Mr. Goncalves: She made it clear and said if I go out on a call one night I come in the next morning at 10. She's doing her own comp on hours that are past a normal shift.

Mr. DeBarge: I get all that but she said she's not going to work 35 hours. That's my point.

Mr. Rosenblum: She did say she had months of overtime she's logged. To the Town Administrator's point, maybe down the line is getting that 19-hour position that we always talk about. Someone that is part time that fills in the gap on call on those other hours.

Mr. Gennette: I thought this was a joint position between Wilbraham and Ludlow.

Mr. Goncalves: We just share the kennel.

Mr. Gennette: Maybe that's an avenue to look at a group kind of thing. If I wanted to go on vacation or I had something I had to do and I'm the only dog officer in town I would probably call another town and say can you spare 5 hours for me while I go to this wake.

Mr. DeBarge: There's always ways around it.

Mr. Strange: In terms of the overtime, as an hourly employee you can't just work 20 hours over and then ask for overtime. It's got to be employer imposed. If there's nobody that's managing her...she's doing it of her own good heart because she wants to do a good job but that shouldn't obligate the town to pay overtime. It also shouldn't obligate her to work however many hours she's working in a week. I think the missing piece is some kind of oversight.

Mr. Gennette: It sounds like there's some work that needs to be done.



Mr. Rosenblum: That's my point. Massaging it to the right area that makes sense.

Board to open the warrant for the May 13, 2024, Annual Town Meeting and will close the warrant at the March 5, 2024, meeting. (Date Correction for ATM)

Mr. Strange: At the last meeting you all opened the warrant but the stated date for the annual town meeting was May 6 when it's actually May 13.

**Motion made by Mr. Silva** to rescind the previous meeting vote for opening the town meeting warrant from May 6, 2024. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

**Motion made by Mr. Silva** to open the warrant for the May 13, 2024, annual town meeting and require all articles to be submitted by March 5, 2024 meeting.

Mr. Silva: I don't recall putting in it closing on March. Usually, we leave it open until sometimes later on in the date.

Mr. Strange: That's a good catch. That is not the closing of the articles. That is when the warrant articles are due. The warrant will not be closed until April 16.

**Motion made by Mr. Silva** to open the warrant for the May 13, 2024, annual town meeting and require all articles to be submitted by March 5, 2024 meeting. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of December 19, 2023.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves** to approve and sign selectmen meeting minutes of December 19, 2023, with all members present. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the Executive Session Meeting Minutes of January 9, 2024.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves** to approve and sign selectmen meeting minutes of January 9, 2024, with all members present except Mr. DeBarge. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and Chairman to sign Change Orders #26 & #27 for Marcus Communications for the radio project.

Mr. Strange: These are the final change orders for the radio communications. Chief Pease and other representatives from the committee are coming in February 6<sup>th</sup> to give you a report on the closeout so the project has been completed and under budget. Chief Pease has done an amazing job of staying on top of this during my tenure here. He deserves a lot of credit for bringing it to the finish line and again under budget. We will be able to use some of those funds for other projects.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm looking at one of them being a credit of \$29,000 and the other one is an actual invoice of \$11,150.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves** to approve and the chairman to sign the credit notification of \$29,099.21 in favor of the town of Ludlow and approve the additional change order for \$11,150.55. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

## NEW BUSINESS

Board to acknowledge and approve the Certificate of Recognition for the 10<sup>th</sup> birthday of Stephanie Gay.

Mr. Goncalves: Town of Ludlow Certificate of Recognition, We, the Board of Selectmen, are proud to present this Certificate of Recognition to Stephanie Gay. The Board of Selectmen would like to wish you a special day that honors your 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and everything you've done to make the world a better place for the last 10 decades. You have experienced many milestones and have witnessed extraordinary changes in the world over the last 100 years. May your

memories continue to provide your family and friends with the insight and wisdom that age and experience imparts.

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to acknowledge and approve the certificate of recognition for the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Stephanie Gay. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

#### **BOARD UPDATES/MISC**

Mr. Rosenblum: The Charter Committee met last Thursday and we interviewed 2 mayors. An ex-mayor from Gardner and the recently retired mayor from Agawam, Bill Sapelli. It was some good insight. It's helping the committee decide between Town Manager/Council or mayoral form of government with a town/city council. Based on their populations their recommendations when it comes to the councils and the size of the councils, their duties as a mayor. A lot of them are the same as a town manager but there are some caveats. It helps the committee to get to the point and I believe in February we're looking to make a decision as to which form the committee would like to approve and at which point the committee would like to go out to the community and get some information out there. We're kind of putting the star at the top of the tree and the waterfall out and we can build it any way we really want. It's a la carte. In some instances where mayors sit as the chair of the school committee it's not to say we can't do that with a town manager. Once we set it, we've had a lot of information from past town managers. The Collins Center does a great job of giving us information. 52 pages on all the different things that go between both forms. It was a good meeting. We meet every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. in this room. People are more than welcome to come in or email questions and we will address them during the open comment portion of the meeting. There is a Facebook page and we're going to be looking to get out into the community with different events to let the people talk to us and tell them where we're at. Not necessarily to say this is what we're doing. It's to listen and inform.

Mr. Gennette: The only update I have, and I don't have final numbers, but I want to let everybody know that Marc and I and Jamie Tomas and Jim Goodreau met with Waste Management and we started conversations about getting automated with our trash. It was very positive and everything looks good so far and we hope to have something for you guys in the future. Hopefully we can make something good happen.

Chairman to approve and sign all bills, warrants and abatements. A record of all warrants is in the Selectmen's office for perusal until provided to the Town Accountant's office.

#### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Mr. Goncalves: I'd just like to acknowledge and recognize the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee. They're like the energizer bunny. I made a comment to one of them this week that I've been involved in a lot of different committees over the years and I've never seen a committee fire on all cylinders the way these people do right now. Events consistently coming up. Next year is the big year. We've got these celebrations coming up and people should mark their calendars. We're going to have a cabin fever dinner dance March 9<sup>th</sup> at Gremio Lusitano. There's going to be food and dancing. Celebrate First Night celebration, which is the big one because that's the actual day the Town became incorporated, February 28, 1774. It's going to be at the high school all day long. Woodcarving, vendors, arts, crafts, train rides, ice sculptors, food items served by local civic groups. Cash only. Ludlow police & fire departments will be there. The Sheriff's department. A visit from Disney's characters Elsa and Anna. Meet and greet and take pictures, kids crafting corner, performance by Alegria dance studio, face painting and fun photo opportunities. There's a football pool that the 250<sup>th</sup> is doing. It's a small donation for the squares. Reach out to the committee if that's something you like to do. I think it's \$20/square.

Mr. Silva: I agree with Mr. Goncalves that the celebration committee is doing wonderful. I would like to extend the invitation for the dinner dance. Stay warm.

Mr. DeBarge: To the Wilbraham PD and the police officer who was shot and is recovering who we are all thinking about you, we are all pulling for you and hoping for a speedy recovery and return home. What you don't know is that our police department was the first one there to support, specifically our police chief and 4 officers initially responded and not only rendered care but also perimeter security around the house which led to this idiot being arrested. This is our neighbor. If anybody thinks it's not going to happen around here you heard about it and saw it.

Mr. Silva: A lot of residents don't realize; they think nothing happens in Ludlow. They don't realize that we're involved in other communities. I thought I heard recently the fire department went somewhere pretty far, 30 miles away.

Mr. DeBarge: We have mutual aid agreements with all surrounding.

Mr. Silva: People need to realize that this is significant in what we do.

Mr. Rosenblum: Again, 250<sup>th</sup>, if you're looking for any information from the 250<sup>th</sup> you can go to fb.com/ma250. They have things popping up every day so you can get a lot of information there.

Mr. DeBarge: One last thing, those officers from our department that went to Wilbraham, we are planning on having them here in one of our meetings to recognize them.

Mr. Gennette: I want to follow up on aggregate electric. People have been asking me what's happening, when's it coming and I said it was going to take a long time to get it done with the new Governor and her staff had changed a lot of the requirements. Peregrine energy, our 3<sup>rd</sup> party consultation services where we're handing a lot of the logistics and legalities of it have had to re-do all of their stuff and resubmit. The state is the state and we're kind of working our way through it so just hang tight and we're doing what we can to get to you.

Mr. Silva: I was asked a couple times. The broadband that we're doing, how's that going?

Mr. Gennette: GoNetSpeed?

Mr. Goncalves: They're ahead of schedule.

Mr. Silva: What's the timeline?


Mr. Strange: They're supposed to be sending out a press release. I think they're looking at the first quarter of 24.

Mr. Silva: As soon as that's out, people can actually sign up?

Mr. Strange: They're going to roll it out in phases.

Mr. DeBarge: They're going to start in the most populated area and they need to get 70% of that population to join in order to expand is what I was told.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the regular session at 7:28 p.m. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

  
Chairman  
