

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

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

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

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CORRESPONDENCE

204. Hajer Brak – Petition for Zone Change for 191 West Street from Agricultural to Business A in order to open opportunities for him and his family by opening an auto repair/dealership at this address.

Mr. Silva: Planning Board; however, somebody should notify and I don't know if the Planning Board did or if he put it in his application, but that is not an allowable usage for what he's looking for. I don't understand but it is the Planning Board that is ultimately going to have to decide if they send it back or if we put it on the Town Meeting.

Mr. Gennette: What is the zone?

Mr. Goncalves: Industrial.

Mr. Silva: They switched that some years ago and who knows the reason for that, commercial and retail. Should be in commercial zoning but it's not, it's industrial which to me doesn't make any sense but whatever.

Mr. Goncalves: They put the construction companies and auto related stuff into industrial zone. I'm sure they're going to pick it up when they see it.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to send it off to the Planning Board for their consideration and scheduling. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

205. Melissa Graf – Letter requesting to be appointed to the vacant Safety Committee position.

Motion made by Mr. Silva if there is a vacancy on the Safety Committee to appoint Melissa Graf to the Safety Committee. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

206. Brian Shameklis, Chairman Safety Committee – Recommending to the Board to install an electronic speed sign at 665 Center Street facing the southbound lane of travel.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to take the Safety Committee's recommendation and install the electric speed sign at 665 Center Street facing the southbound lane of travel. Also, subject to discussion. Should they want to move this or get another one for somewhere, I don't understand why it comes to us and they have to wait. I don't know why the Safety Committee along with the police department doesn't have the authority to get this and move this as they see fit rather than come to us for approval.

Mr. Goncalves: Could it be temporary signs, like a banner at the bridge, and they're treating it the same way?

Mr. DeBarge: I would think that waiting for us to say yes is a waste of time.

Mr. Silva: We can take a look at it and have some research because it is a traffic type thing. Sometimes they come from higher ups. There might be a state ordinance.

Mr. Goncalves: This is route 21 by the way. This is in front of Meadowe Crest Condominium. Right past Randall's.

Mr. DeBarge: Route 21 is the state so it would be DOT. I just don't understand why we wait for it to come to us.

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

VISITATIONS

5:35 p.m. Liquor License transfer from Tahir Humayun dba E-Z Shop Convenience to USAVE Food Store, LLC (Awais Kamran) – PUBLIC HEARING

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to open the liquor license transfer hearing @ 5:35 p.m. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Kamran: My name is Awais. I'm a resident at 6 Warwick Drive, Ludlow. I moved here 2 years ago. I lived in Quincy, MA. I just bought a business here.

Mr. Gennette: Which business did you buy?

Mr. Kamran: E-Z Shop.

Mr. Goncalves: Across from TD Bank, in with Palermo's Pizza.

Mr. Kamran: I worked for 5 years in Rockland and this is my first business.

Mr. Gennette: As far as the liquor license transfer from E-Z Shop Convenience to USAVE. Do you want to give us background for why you're transitioning the license from E-Z Shop to USAVE?

Mr. Kamran: I bought the business. Tahir, who is the license holder, and her wife who is going to be with me and we're going to work together there. She is in the hospital right now so she told me if she needs to she can call on facetime.

Mr. Silva: You want the license in your name and you are not an American citizen. That's an impossibility. The law states that a license holder has to be a citizen of the United States. The only way for you to do that would be to come in and have a manager and the manager put it in their name. It cannot go in yours. We can issue it and it would go to the ABCC and they would send it back.

Mr. Kamran: She is going to be manager, Tahir.

Mr. Silva: Is the application in her name? Has she signed off on it?

Mr. Kamran: Is that a fact?

Mr. Goncalves: I see her name here as a corporate officer.

Mr. Silva: She's a citizen of the United States?

Mr. Kamran: Yes.

Mr. Goncalves: Congratulations and good luck to you. You've gone through TIPS training? Alcohol awareness serving?

Mr. Kamran: No. I have a training from where I worked before and they gave me a card. I worked for 5 years at the same place in Rockland.

Mr. Strange: A couple notes from Sharon because this has been an arduous process. There's been multiple calls back and forth with the ABCC predominately for the issue Manny brought up. It doesn't sound like the manager, Tahir, has had her CORI check and we need the certification that the abutters were notified.

Mr. Silva: I was just going to ask for the abutters. Did you mail to the abutters the certified letters so they could come in?

Mr. Kamran: Which letters?

Mr. Silva: I'm sure you got the list. Did you mail the letters or sign offs from the post office?

Mr. Kamran: Yes I already sent them.

Mr. Silva: Did you get the notices back?

Mr. Goncalves: They sign for them and you have proof that you sent them.

Mr. Silva: You probably didn't send them certified.

Mr. Kamran: I sent by post office.

Mr. Silva: They have to be certified and you get them to sign off on it and the post office gives you a receipt back and we have to see those. The signature from every abutter. Whether we give you the license or not if there's one abutter that comes in and says they did not get notified, we never signed a receipt that means the hearing is not valid. When did you send them?

Mr. Kamran: Almost 2 weeks.

Mr. Silva: I was one and I didn't get a notice. As far as the mailing it didn't get done. Unfortunately, I think we're going to have to continue the meeting until you get the certified letters out and the notices back.

Mr. Rosenblum: So you need the certified letters for abutters, a CORI check for the manager and you also have to put the liquor license in the managers name.

Mr. Goncalves: Are you familiar with a CORI check? A criminal record.

Mr. Kamran: Yes, already applied but waiting for that.

Mr. Goncalves: We're going to need that and you to send those letters to everybody with a card on the back return receipt. They have to sign for it. It's from the post office. The post office will explain, just tell them the green card.

Mr. Silva: Tell the post office you need it certified.

Mr. Gennette: A certified letter requires them to sign it and that's proof that it was sent. We need it so we know that you notified the abutters. If they haven't responded at least you've done your due diligence in letting them know what's going on.

Mr. Goncalves: Rather than have to go through this again, we're going to continue this.

Mr. Silva: We should probably check with him and see how much time he's going to need with the CORI and to get these letters sent out.

Mr. Gennette: Do you want to accomplish this and get back to us and we'll schedule a meeting then?

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to continue this to a further date upon notification of the petitioner that he's complied with everything. **Mr. DeBarge second.**

Mr. Silva: Can we leave it open or do we need a date to schedule?

Mr. Strange: No.

All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Gennette: So, go ahead and get that information and we'll see you again.

Mr. Kamran: Where can I get the letter back?

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Mr. Rosenblum: You get the certified at the post office and ask for certified mail. Once you find out the number of abutters you're going to have to put in the address for each abutter and bring it to the post office and they'll help you take care of the rest.

5:50 p.m. – Judy Breault – Pond Committee – Update on Pond Committee progress.

Ms. Breault: I came to give you an update of where we are and what's happening and a little ask. Alden Pond, the last time we met in September we talked about getting the permit for Alden Pond and that is in process. We're going to the Conservation Commission tomorrow night for a notice of intent to get that going. I don't see any issues with it. We should get that and be able to move forward. That will allow us to get the permit in time to start the spring treatment, which we've been planning on. On Minechoag, the last time we talked we had given you the whole scenario about these protected plants that were in the national heritage endangered species database.

Mr. Gennette: That's the one on the golf course, right?

Ms. Breault: Correct. The last time we talked about Minechoag there was a lot of discussion about these protected plants, when did they identify them and what they were. We got a consultant we've been working with for our permitting process and had done some estimates. We came in with an estimate of \$50,000+ to do this survey. My friend Bill was not hearing of it. We did a lot of digging and got in touch with the Department of Environmental Protection, we had some long conversations with Goddard Consulting and after reviewing a lot of what was in that database, the consultant got some clarification about what that study needed to be. Fortunately, they came back and said they don't think we need to do as much as we thought we needed to do. We can do some at the same time. They've come back and given us an estimate of \$23,000. It's a \$27,000 savings to do this plant survey in order for us to get the permit to be able to do the treatment. That's our ultimate goal to get that permit. There's no guarantee that if we do this survey that we can do the permit. The one thing that Goddard Consulting has told us is because of climate change, or whatever we want to call it, the water level in all of our ponds has receded so the chances of any treatment that we would do in Minechoag reaching any protected plants they may or may not find is probably slim because the water level has receded and it's probably not where they think these plants are. We won't know that until we do the survey. If we do nothing, that pond will ultimately just overgrow and become a swamp.

Mr. Goncalves: The surface is really nice right now. I went for a ride up to the country club and it's like glass.

Ms. Breault: I put a slide in here that indicates all of the work that this survey would do. It's the study and design approval, bathymetry, which is the outside perimeter of the pond, the actual rare plant surveys that they would do throughout the summer of 2024 and then provide the report and working with the national heritage endangered species program through their process. I can't say for sure or not but there is a potential that even if we could find these rare plants they may give us the permit that says you can't treat the pond within 5' of the edge of the pond. With any treatment we do that may or may not impact that protected plant. They would want to keep that as far away from the plant as they can. Again, we don't even know what these plants are, we don't know when they were identified, we don't even know if they're still there. That is what the survey is all about. It's a big chunk of money. I'm going to jump to our budget page. When we look at what we've included in this year's budget we added that estimated \$23,000. Last year we removed \$50,000 because we said there's no way we're going to spend \$50,000 on this. We had a bit of a surplus on this last year because we removed doing Murphy Pond for the time being because of the priority of Minechoag. We had leftover money from the money we had gotten approved for last March. We came in September and asked for an additional \$45,000 to do all the treatments for Harris, Haviland and Alden, including the Alden permit. That \$45,000 still covers all of that. We are fully covered, we will do 2 treatments on Harris, we will do a treatment on Haviland and we will do the permit and treatment on Alden assuming we get the permit. Those 3 ponds are still covered. Where we are falling short is an additional \$11-\$12,000 to cover that \$23,000 for the Minechoag study. We're asking for an additional \$15,000 to cover that plant survey. It's a total flat \$15,000. Although I say it's \$12,000, I gave us a little buffer of \$15,000 because if the plant survey is more or less. Also, I think where we are in this process now, we're beginning the treatments, we've got the permits for the majority of the ponds and hopefully we'll get the permit for Minechoag after the survey, we really need to shift into education gear and notification to the community. We've got the committee doing a lot of work with thoughts and ideas. One of them is we'll be attending

the 250th picnic and some of those events and really start doing some education and starting to get the community to understand the impact of what we're doing to our waterways. I put that little buffer in there of \$15,000. That's our ask. If we were to not do this we could come back and try to do it next year. The situation with the plant survey is you have to start it in the May timeframe so you get the full growing season. That's why it's imperative. If we were to do it we would want to do it this year.

Mr. Strange: All of our 40R funds currently are committed or allocated. We have \$50,000 for the signs; I don't know if we're going to be using all of that. There's a couple other allocations that we're not quite sure. We could take a look at that and I'm not sure exactly when those projects are completed. We are getting another deposit of 40R funds once the Mill 8 project is certified. Doug sent in that application today. Those funds should be available sometime in late summer of the fall. I can take a look at a couple other funds we have. There's a little bit of money left over from the jail. I forgot why the jail gave the town money but we were going to use that money to do the carpeting in town hall. If it wasn't for the timing I would say wait for the new 40R funds. It's going to be close to \$300,000. The money will be there at some point it just won't be there by May.

Mr. Goncalves: Is the casino money going anywhere in particular?

Mr. Strange: We use it for the operating budget.

Mr. Silva: We keep talking plants, how about the fish, turtles? Minechoag Pond used to have some serious bass in there. I've seen pictures. It was well fished. Have we seen anything that it was depleted?

Ms. Breault: When we did the original surveys in the fall of 2022 and we hired the department of wetland management to do the surveys of all the different ponds they did oxygen levels and all the different things to tell us what these plants and growth were in the different ponds and what the recommended treatments were. At the time, Harris and Minechoag were one of the worst ponds for oxygen levels. In August it wasn't at a point where it was killing wildlife, but for sure it will. We talked a few meetings back in 2023 that there was dead fish on the shore of Minechoag here is and there will continue to be more impact to wildlife if we don't do something.

Mr. Silva: It would be great to bring these ponds back up to fishable and for recreation purposes it's a great thing to have. My other question is as far as the \$15,000, when do you pay? You're going to contract to have it done, you put in a deposit and the report will come in and you'll have to pay. We're looking at different timing. Will we need the full funding of the \$15,000 when?

Ms. Breault: It's a great question. As you were talking about the timing, we do 2 treatments to Harris Pond, one is in April one is in August. We could shift the money we have allocated for Harris August treatment to this. We probably won't have to pay the full amount of this study until the end of the summer. We may be able to negotiate with Goddard Consulting. We'll give them a deposit and once we get the final report we'll pay you the remaining money and we can shift money from our current budget to cover those funds. If we are sure we'll get the 40R funds...

Mr. Strange: I used to work with John in Agawam so if he wants to talk with me directly I can explain where we are.

Mr. Goncalves: Minechoag is the biggest pond of all the ones you're doing work on, right?

Ms. Breault: Havigland, Harris, Minechoag.

Ms. Goncalves: Minechoag requires the most amount of work.

Ms. Breault: Yes. The sad part about this is once we understand if we can do the treatment we have been told that Minechoag is basically a one and done treatment. Obviously that doesn't mean forever because it will just go right back but it's one and done that we could sustain for 2-3 years. It will clean that pond up for 1 treatment. The treatment itself of Minechoag is not the issue, it's the protected plants.

Mr. Goncalves: I'll speak for me; I'd love to see this happen. Those are some great resources and we have a great committee that's run with it. I'd hate to disappoint all the people that are counting on you guys.

Mr. Simons: The pond has gotten progressively worse. Last year I wasn't able to get my kayak into the pond. That's how bad it is. I have a video of a poor goose who got a fishing line and he was there for a whole day. We finally cut him loose. It smells bad. The kids don't want to go near the pond anymore. It's a shame because it used to be beautiful. There was a deer trying to swim and he couldn't. It's so thick and bad it's not navigable anymore. There's some spots where the water's a little deeper and if you can get out there you're ok. The other thing Steve has brought up to me, if the pond continues to deteriorate it's endangering the endangered species of plants. It's 2 different things happening at the same time. Do you want to save the pond and the endangered species, if there are any because we don't know if there are or where they are. For some reason you don't have access to that information. Somebody said at some point in time there's an endangered plant there.

Mr. Goncalves: Are there any grants coming down the road?

Ms. Breault: I have not been able to find any.

Ms. Hodgman: We've been looking and they're far and few between.

Ms. Breault: A lot of them are for State Department of the state-run waterways. I've been talking to people in the Town of Southwick and a lot of it has to be state and a lot of these are private ponds, not publicly accessible. Haviland is the only one. That's part of it.

Ms. Hodgman: The state's open space grants are starting to come out so we're digging into those a little bit.

Mr. Rosenblum: Could we make a motion contingent on the next round of 40R funding? Obviously if we have the communication in most instances you're not going to make your final payment on anything until the finished project is done. If that's at the end of the summer we should be coming into that money. Like you're saying to reallocate that money. I have no problem making that motion to contingent on 40R the next round that we fund the \$15,000.

Mr. Gennette: At the end of the summer, do you figure that these numbers are going to change at all? If we made any kind of motion today for a specific number that you're going to come back and say we kind of didn't see this number coming up, we need another \$30?

Ms. Breault: I don't. For the amounts that I've estimated for the treatments of the ponds we already planned for, the company water and wetlands management that we are currently working with, they merged with another company so I went back to my contact and asked to confirm these estimates because I want to make sure our 2024 budget is correct. And he confirmed these were still the correct numbers. If it goes over, I'm going to be fighting with him, I'm not coming back here to ask.

Mr. Rosenblum: Can you get contracts?

Ms. Breault: Yes. That's what my next step will be because we're now coming into the treatment year. I won't say I have a contract but I have in writing from him these are what you quoted me are these still the appropriate quotes.

Mr. DeBarge: Can anybody tell me what the permit fees pay for? Haviland permit fee \$4,400, Minechoag permit and survey totaling \$25,000. It goes on and the permits are the same amount of money as the treatments. I understand the treatments being expensive, the permitting is ridiculous bordering on criminal that we're paying this much when we could be treating all of our waterways with a \$500 or \$1,000 permit. Where does this money go? Who do they pay off?

Mr. Goncalves: It goes into the fund so they can do grants for the other side of the state.

Ms. Breault: Some of it is paying Goddard Consulting to do the enormous amount of paperwork and you have to know what you're doing. It's going to the state to do the actual permit research they have to do for instance like these protected plants, and some of it is for postage and mailings

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of the abutters because before you can do anything you have to notify all the abutters. The good news, we will not have to pay another permit fee for Haviland, Harris, Alden even Minechoag if we do get that permit, as long as we continue to do work. They're usually granted 3-5 years. Once they're granted you can keep extending without paying more money. The initial up-front cost, the permit is different for each pond because it depends on how many abutters, how big the pond is.

Mr. DeBarge: My point is, you wonder why in a municipal budget all these ponds are getting choked out because we don't have the money to be throwing \$85,000/year at all of these. I'd like to say it's positive to hear you only have to do a one-time permit but that means we have to continue to treat. I'm all for this. I think it's the responsibility of the municipal government to take care of it. It's roadways, waterways. I'm not going to stay quiet about the permitting.

Ms. Breault: The other good thing I will tell you is the 2 biggest ponds that are expensive right now are Harris and Haviland. Haviland, this one-time treatment which is based on the size of Haviland, which is the \$25,000 estimate, we won't have to pay \$25,000 annually, we might have to do a spot check here and there. Same with Harris. This is going to be our 2nd year that we attack that water chestnut. I've already been talking with somebody from the local Boy Scouts, if the amount of water chestnut in that pond is manageable after the 2nd treatment, we can do hand pulling with the Boy Scouts and it will cost us nothing. We're going to do a lot of those things. I do feel like this is going to be an expensive year and after this it will be more maintenance.

Ms. Hodgman: We'd like to see Haviland open up and be used by the community.

Ms. Breault: It will be. They're going to treat the grassy pond weed.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve funding for an additional \$15,000 to cover a plant survey at Minechoag to go to the Pond Committee contingent on the next round of 40R funding. **Mr. Goncalves second.**

Mr. Gennette: I went down and visited Bill, not just for the overgrown portion of this year but to keep mosquitos down, the stink coming off the pond, it wasn't a great situation when I went down there. My only question would be, the MVP is that more related to sewer? Is there any way MVP money can be used?

Mr. Strange: Potentially. It was part of the workshop and discussions so I think it's in our plan. I know we are still trying to finalize our existing MVP grant. I'm not sure it's going to be closed out in time for us to apply for the next round but we can certainly keep that in mind.

Mr. Gennette: It would be interesting to see if we could send some money from the MVP grant that way.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm going to withdraw my second. Bill, maybe you can modify your motion. 40R and other sources of grant.

Motion withdrawn by Mr. Rosenblum. New motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve the funding for an additional \$15,000 to cover the plant survey at Minechoag for the Pond Committee contingent on funding. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Silva: Check with Tony Vital. He has a picture of a trout that he got out of Haviland Pond and you can promote what you're doing is great.

Ms. Breault: Do they still stock that?

Mr. Silva: Yes.

Mr. Gennette: You guys are doing an amazing job. We love seeing it.

6:15 p.m. – Sean McDonnell – WestMass – EPA Grant Opportunity.

Mr. McDonnell: This is a brand-new grant opportunity. It's the last big slug of the inflation act funding that EPA is trying to manage and get out the door before the next election in November this year. It's up to 10-20 million is the range they're looking for a very small number of eligible

census block groups. It's about 1.4 billion in competitive grants, no match required. A non-profit needs to be a lead on the grant and they would need to partner with either another non-profit or local government. It could fund a wide range of different things, including infrastructure, energy efficiency within buildings, climate change modifications, solar installation on buildings. What we are thinking about in terms of the Ludlow Mills and some of the surrounding area is going after this funding. Again, no match required to do windows in Mill 11, which is the big 5-story off of State Street, the deconstruction of the 8-story building, the 300's which we've been talking with the Historical Commission for local approval and we're going through that process right now with the state and National Park Service, as well as site improvements, green infrastructure and parking all along to the east side of Mill 11 to the riverwalk park and doing some recreation improvements and green infrastructure there as well. It's potentially free money. The applications are on a rolling basis and they're hoping to expend all the funds by November but we would like to get an application in as soon as possible. The expectation is that funding is going to draw down to zero. One of the requirements for the application is to have a partnership agreement between the 2 entities. I provided a draft partnership agreement to Marc last week so we'd be looking to get your authorization to enter into that partnership agreement with WestMass as the lead applicant.

Mr. Strange: Great opportunity.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to support WestMass in their request for the EPA grant opportunity in any way that we can. **Mr. Rosenblum second.**

Mr. Silva: Should you have in there that we enter into a partnership?

Mr. DeBarge: We've done this before. It's written in the letter that we're in a partnership with WestMass.

Mr. Strange: We sent the draft partnership agreement to Brian Winner asking him to review it. I know WestMass's attorney had a couple tweaks, so we're just working out the language. If you want we can bring in the agreement for you guys to review and sign.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to enter into a partnership with WestMass in order to apply for an EPA grant opportunity. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

CORRESPONDENCE

207. Kevin Lavigne – Petition for a Zone Change for 8-10 Wedgewood Drive from Agricultural to Residential A to make the complete parcel Residential A instead of Agricultural and Residential A.

Mr. Silva: This is a Planning Board item that's got to go to them for their approval and then Town Meeting.

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

208. Debby Conrad, MBLC Board Chair – Informing the Library Community and Partners to read through the FY2025 Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners Legislative Agenda attached.

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

209. Shawn Giroux, Transmission Arborist, Eversource – Informing the Board of the helicopter work that will be taking place in Ludlow.

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

210. Mary Cassidy, Executive Director, Community Survival Center – Requesting permission from the Board to use the parking lot at Town Hall on Saturday, May 11, 2024, as a drop off point for the National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to allow the Community Survival Center to use the parking lot at Town Hall on Saturday, May 11, 2024, as a drop off point for the National Association of Letter Carriers Food Drive. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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Board to discuss FY25 budget status and options.

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Mr. Strange: I do have an update but wanted to give you a chance to debrief about the meeting we had with the school committee. I don't know as a Board that we had a chance to chat about it. I open that up to you if you want to talk about it. If not, I'm happy to tell you what else we've been doing to try to bridge that gap.

Mr. Rosenblum: Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend. I did watch on cable TV. The thing that worries me is the fact that years ago when Kim Collins was here that ESSR fund was at 4.8-4.9 million dollars. I'm not saying this is on the current School Department, I think somewhere in the changeover prior Superintendent to interim to here I don't know where the money went but there should still be another 1.5. Not to say that it can help with the shortfall in their budget but if they find that money there's also \$835,000 worth of Capital improvements approved that they money can go towards, which gives free cash back to the Town if we need to use a little bit of it somewhere. The other thing is we were talking 7-9% of a budget shortfall to be level funding and now we're down to 3.92-4.3. There was \$300,000 given back last year. I know there's more to be found. It's got to be there somewhere. Hopefully they do because I did see the School Department is going to go back to try to find where that ESSR funding is in the business department. I hope they do find it because otherwise we have a problem that there's 1.5 million dollars missing that needs to be spent by September of this year. To have that go by the wayside would be a problem. Lastly, I didn't catch it or not, but is there any ESSR positions being funded by their budget that we know of? If there's one ESSR position being funded in this budget that the Town is giving money to I would say to them that if they find that money you're going to pull those positions from this budget and fund it with your ESSR money. I'm dead set against funding any permanent positions with ESSR funding so that the Town has to give you another \$50-\$70,000 plus \$25,000 in benefits. I'm not saying it's this School Department, there's been a 3-year cycle here that somewhere in there that money is gone and unfortunately, Dr. Tiano walked into that's the number he had less the 1.4. It helps tremendously. It also can take some free cash off the books.

Mr. Goncalves: It's nice and productive that we're able to get together with this committee. We've gotten together with them more than we have since I've been here. It's good to be on the same page not throwing stuff, trying to get to the same place together. I was surprised at how much their Board didn't know what was going on or where a lot of that money had gone. Hopefully that was an eye opener for them. When I did ask about how much ESSR money was gone I was surprised that nobody could tell me. It's a pretty important number and it's got to figure into the budget. Even if that's the number it's not going to be exactly \$400,000. Here we don't leave \$10, \$25, \$50, \$100 on the table. To say it's \$400,000, it could be \$389 or \$411, all that money makes a big difference right now. Hopefully that got them thinking they need to settle up. We did ask for those numbers recently and they're still not available to us, exactly how much ESSR money is left. I'm hoping there is some money there, more than what they thought because that short \$300,000 could easily be taken care of with additional ESSR money if they have it. I think they've got till September to spend it. I'm still hoping some of that comes around and takes them off the hook. If there was enough money there and somehow we could get them to lower their budget a little bit and take care of some of our deficits. I like the communication. Dr. Tiano has been great to deal with vs previous administration. They're going in the right direction.

Mr. Rosenblum: Yes, the communication has been the best it's been in 5 years for me. I understand it might not be common practice for School Department's to do these things but when they have their School Committee meetings there should be a permanent agenda item that says line-item transfers to at least say this is where money is going. I understand it moves quickly in the School Department. Having watched it on the recording they said we just moved \$70,000 as we speak. In general, having an update as to where the money is moving to and for what. Every year when we come to this time of year when departments come to us, every other department comes to us with a breakdown of where the money is going. This year we kind of got some of that. Knowing where the money is going. You tell me you need 4.3% for level funding but what's it funding. Chief Pease will come in here every time and say this is what I need, this is what it costs, this is where I

can get the money in my current budget and this is how I need the funding in the next budget. Then he'll tell you what he needs 3 years down the road. I'm already getting that. If the government changes and we have a new charter I would say there's a good chance there's going to be a city councilor being the chairperson sitting on that committee so there's going to be more eyes on it.

Mr. Silva: I thought it was well done. I said it at the meeting that I was grateful that they came down considerably from where we were last time.

Mr. DeBarge: I think the dialogue between our Boards is necessary along with Finance. The budgetary process is an important thing and we need to be able to understand each other's sides. I would like to see the School Committee a little more involved in it as well. I think as far as decision making goes and policy, I haven't seen too many School Committees that were strong, in my opinion and when it comes to the type of comments they're getting it should be eye opening for us or for anybody to see them at their meeting, the comments first and no dialogue with any of the concerned people at the meetings. It's cautioning to me and the School Committee needs to remain the School Committee and they need to be strong. I would like to see more of that. As far as the budget goes, we're moving along. It's a little optimistic. I hope it continues that way.

Mr. Gennette: I agree. We've had these chairman meetings; we've had some great conversations. If we could have had the whole Boards together I think more information is shared, more opinions are shared, and I think the Boards really debated some good topics in this last one. I'm going to disagree a little bit and say I think the School Board now is starting to dig in a little bit. We saw one member say what was the \$70,000 for medical. I think they are digging into it a little bit and to go from where we were in 2022-2023 budget to 2025 budget they were coming in with astronomical numbers. 7%. To be short \$357,000, when you're talking 80 million dollars \$357,000 is a little more digestible. It's a lot of money but I like the direction they're headed, the clarity. The only issue I have is on the back side of a budgeted year. I know that one of the members was really concerned about us cutting their requests and saying it was cutting their budget, whereas one year they were asking for an absorbent amount of money, we gave them a lot less and at the end of the budget year they ended up coming in under budget. That's how a budget system works. I think we're missing that last piece. What was it that you were really short? If you're giving back \$300,000 I think we're not having the full conversation and in the future I'd like to go there as to what it is. We gave them 4.31% last year, we saved a lot of money on the town side. We're talking 1.8 short. This year after that they are only short \$357,000. We are coming to the table; we are working together. It's difficult to come to these numbers and figure out what it is. We obviously want a successful school system. We invest in our younger families, that's where we invest our money, and we're hoping for a return on these families staying in the community and retiring here and being a part of what's going on. We always invest in the schools. The school gets money every year. They may not get their request but we try to do everything we can to get them the money we have and they have to live within their budget, just like any other department.

Mr. Rosenblum: What's funny is the State when you look at those numbers they put up there over the course of 3-4 years the State has increased their money total by about \$800,000. Each year the Town is expected to give almost a million every year. The formula they just updated a couple years ago. If the State gives them some more money we all know the taxes are coming back to us anyway. The idea is that if being left on us, the Town, every year because the State is staying in that 14-15 million dollar range every year. So, everybody knows, their budget doesn't mean they spent 35 million, they spent over 40. There is other alternate funding that's there.

Mr. Gennette: There is additional expenses. We talked about things like the interest rate on the bond for the administration building is over a million dollars. The health insurance for their entire staff is over 7 million. We're slated to give them 1.2 million out of capital. There's other things that are in play here other than the school's operating budget and I don't think people are aware of that either.

Mr. Rosenblum: Which leads me to one other thing, we were being told for the last 2 years that the administration building is on different funding. It was going to have \$200,000 left in it and we had a meeting last year or the year before and they said the money is all gone. We talked to someone else and they said the money is there. Mr. DeBarge, you were on the school building committee, that hasn't closed out yet, has it?

Mr. DeBarge: No.

Mr. Rosenblum: We were told from prior School Committee members that they're saving money, they're under budget and now it's gone. Was there a change order or something?

Mr. DeBarge: There's still a large amount of money in contingency. It's all semantics whether you're under budget or not. If it's a 60-million-dollar project you end up having 6 million left in contingency does it mean it goes back to the taxpayer, no. There are contingencies left.

Mr. Rosenblum: The School Department building can be repurposed though. I think it was different from the actual school building.

Mr. Goncalves: What school department building?

Mr. Rosenblum: Where the Superintendent's office is. The funding can be repurposed.

Mr. Goncalves: It has to go to Town Meeting.

Mr. Rosenblum: Right, but if we were to pay something off or pay something down, I don't think the Town's going to say no.

Mr. Goncalves: It's got to stay 5 years.

Mr. DeBarge: We talked about this trying to use that money to demo Vet's Park and we couldn't do that.

Mr. Goncalves: If we've got the contingency in place where if there's 2-3 million sitting there and we need some of it, maybe have a certification done that we don't need to leave all that money in there for the full period of time and be able to draw down on that.

Mr. Gennette: That's the other thing we need to look at. Primary and coal we're still trying to deal with, we still have to do something with the demo'd Vet's Park. We're still working with the track & field. There's a lot of other funds that have gone to the School Department outside of their operating budget. I know that's what they need to operate but there's a lot of money floating around.

Mr. Rosenblum: The best comment that was made is that they don't want to lose any more teachers. We're all trying to do the best we can to make sure that doesn't happen.

Mr. Strange: After the joint meeting, we met with Dowd who does the health insurance for the City of Holyoke. Lori Belanger has a relationship with members of Dowd. She set up a meeting with them and they're going to do a review of our health insurance. It's going to be a 45-day review. We told them what plans we have for our employees and made it very clear that we want our employees to be able to keep their plans, keep their doctors and if there's any way we can do that for fiscal 25 and save some money that would be fantastic. Our health insurance is a little over 10 million dollars, which is about 12% of our total operating budget. We're hoping there's enough cost savings there to bridge that \$450,000 deficit. There's a pragmatic consideration that we have for our employees. We want to make sure it's not too disruptive and burdensome on them to switch plans. We'll report back once we hear from Dowd and let you guys know what we're looking at for fiscal 25. That should be sometime in April.

Board to approve and sign the agreement between the Town and Sodi, Inc., for a permanent easement on Santina Drive for all purposes for which a public way may be used. As well as a permanent easement to drain stormwater from Santina Drive.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm really confused on why this is happening. I don't remember any other subdivision having to do this. The street hasn't been approved yet, hasn't gone to Town Meeting to be approved. Is DPW or somebody trying to expand services through that street to get somewhere else?

Mr. Strange: I'm not sure what the context is. This came over from Doug and the Planning Board. We sent it to our Town Counsel and they signed off on it in terms of the semantics and practical piece of it.

Mr. Goncalves: Does anybody remember signing one of these?

Mr. DeBarge: No.

Mr. Silva: I do remember signing easements for certain things. If this has got something other than the street approval, which we wouldn't need an easement once we take over the street. If this is outside the street acceptance then maybe we do need an easement. I know we need an easement if sewers go through people's yards.

Mr. Goncalves: There's easements coming off the street to the individual homes, the problem is we don't own that street yet. It's still a private way. How can we give an easement on something we don't own?

Mr. Strange: I can go back to the Planning Board and Doug and ask them for a written explanation.

Mr. Goncalves: This is different.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to table pending further information. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to sign Fire Chief's contract.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to sign Fire Chief's contract. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to sign the corrected Class III license for Ludlow Motor Sales.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to sign the corrected Class III license for Ludlow Motor Sales. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to approve and sign the Selectmen Minutes of February 6, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the Selectmen Minutes of February 6, 2024, with all members present. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to approve and sign the Executive Session Minutes of February 13, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the Executive Session Minutes of February 13, 2024, with all members present. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to declare a state of emergency for the Department of Public Works Snow and Ice Removal budget which has been over expended as of February 8, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to declare a state of emergency for the Department of Public Works Snow and Ice Removal budget which has been over expended as of February 8, 2024. We normally do this every year. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS

Board to accept FY24 Local Cultural Council Allocation Grant for the Ludlow Cultural Council in the amount of \$19,300.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to accept FY24 Local Cultural Council Allocation Grant for the Ludlow Cultural Council in the amount of \$19,300. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to discuss and possibly vote to authorize \$2,047.51 from the Building Infrastructure Fund for work in the Treasurer's office.

Mr. Strange: In the Collector's office there was a panic button underneath the front desk and they want to change it over to the current Treasurer/Collector's office. It's electric and you have to rewire it.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to authorize \$2,047.51 from the Building Infrastructure Fund for work in the Treasurer's office. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

BOARD UPDATES/MISC

Mr. Rosenblum: No updates on Charter Committee. The next meeting is this Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the Selectmen's room, 3rd floor of Town Hall. Anyone is welcome to come in. There is an open comment portion of the meeting. You may also email the committee with any questions or comments. There is a Facebook page. Anything we go over in that meeting isn't set in stone, it's mostly just recommendations at this point. To get a little more input with some open meetings. As we make decisions they're not etched in stone.

Mr. Gennette: We had a meeting today over the Ludlow Power Choice. We met with the Department of Public Safety, Department of Public Utility and got some marching orders. Everything looked pretty good. I thought it was a good meeting. Very positive. We're moving forward. We're working with the state and we have to follow their guidelines so it's going to be a long process.

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

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Goncalves: The 250th Committee, I can't believe the energy that those people have. If we put them and the Pond Committee they could run the whole show. It's incredible all the stuff they've got on the books planned to go. Everything they've done. That was a nice evening with the reading of the proclamation and Jake getting dressed up added a little extra to it. Thank you to the committee. The banquet coming up this Saturday. Tickets are still available. It's a dinner/dance at 7:00 served by Tony & Penny's but it's at the Gremio Lusitano. \$50/person. There will be music, dancing, good food. If you want to go reach out to the committee or Outside the Box Gift Shop on Sewall Street. Thank you to that committee. Townspeople we're very lucky to have this going on. It's a great group so take advantage of it and support them.

Mr. Rosenblum: EnergySwitchMA.com. I just got my Eversource bill. My supplier rate was at .1597 or \$.15. I went into EnergSwitchMA.com put in the zip code and was able to drop it to .1057, which if I applied it to this bill would have saved me \$65 for the month. In the meantime, I know we have this coming up, it's also another thing people can compare against down the road. It's a way to save money on your bill. Every dollar counts. I made that switch today. What's great about it is you can go in and shop it. I did and 8-month, I can cancel at any time if the rate dropped \$.03 I can go back in and change it with no fee. It's pretty cool. We've been doing it for a few years now. It expired and it went to the going rate so I went in and dropped it down. 8 months of saving 5-6 cents on your supplier.

Mr. Silva: It bothers me with all this energy, why should the consumer have to keep doing all this stuff. It used to be you had your electric bill and now he's done this and it's great but if it changes he can go in and change it. Most of the consumers aren't going to be knowledgeable enough to do this and actually go do it.

Mr. Rosenblum: Go on your cable bill too. There's a thing called entertainment view. How many cable boxes do you have in your box. I used to have 7, now I have 5. I'm getting rid of them. You get Roku and you can stream your cable on every tv with only 1 box. The Roku to have the Spectrum app. You can still have NESN. There's a way to pirate all that.

Mr. Goncalves: There's a Spectrum app you download it to the Roku and you don't even need a box.

Mr. Rosenblum: You have to have 1.

Mr. Goncalves: I can't have just internet from them?

Mr. Rosenblum: You can buy just internet but you don't have the cable.

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Mr. Silva: Even for local tv, for the 6 people to watch us.

Mr. Rosenblum: When you're talking about the internet it says Spectrum internet, which is supposed to be \$49.99 and mine is \$89. I'm paying \$89.99 on my internet where I can get 1 gig for \$79.99 and I'm getting 300. It's the little things you can find in your bills to save money. I'm trying to chip off a couple hundred bucks a month.


Mr. DeBarge: For the 250th, I went to the meeting last night and told all the committee members no matter what anybody's expectations were for that day they were exceeded. We had people come from all over the place. We've gotten a lot of thank you's from that. The wood carving is out front. Each committee member did a great job to sacrifice a lot of their time to do these great events. If you're going to the cabin fever dinner dance, have a good time. I'll see you there. Golf tournament coming up in May.


Mr. Gennette: I have to apologize to Mr. Silva because he mentioned to me can we have a night off. Do we have to have a Board of Selectmen meeting every week? We do not have a Board of Selectmen meeting next week.

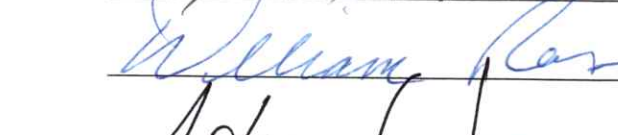
Mr. Strange: No meeting next week, meeting on the 19th then you're not meeting the following week.


Mr. Gennette: What you mentioned about other people aren't going to do what Bill does and shop his electric rate. That's part of the reason aggregate electric is so good because you're going to automatically be in it and if for some reason you don't like it, there's no fee for you to opt out or go somewhere else or do whatever else you want to do. If Bill wants to continue to keep shopping his rate he can do that. The idea is we have a group buying power. So, Bill is taking care of his household but as part of an entire community we have much more buying power and we can negotiate the price. For March 19th we have Jamie Tomas Director of the DPW coming in to provide updates. I asked him to give us a winter review of how everything went and what we're looking at coming into spring and we are also having Marlane Patton coming in to talk about Ludlow Aggregate Electric Program with her presentation. More about the electric coming up as part of our public outreach. We're in phase 2 of that. On Saturday we have the dance at Gremio Lusitano.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the meeting at 6:55 p.m. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.









Chairman

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