

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, May 28, 2024, began at 6:00 p.m. at Harris Brook Elementary School Library.

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

Members Absent: None

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

**Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to open the Board of Selectmen meeting at 6:02 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Ms. Bowler: We are going to start our meeting with public comment. We have 6.33 a 15-minute time slot and I'm inclined to do all 6 of them.

**Motion made by Mr. Laing** to extend public comment to include the 6 participants at 3-minutes a piece. **All in favor.**

Ms. Babin: Ludlow Selectmen and School Committee members, as a resident of Ludlow, please accept this letter as recommendation for selection to strongly consider Isabel Soares for the vacant position of the Ludlow School Committee. Isabel Soares had an impressive 1,253 votes in the past town election on March 25, 2024. It is evident that the citizens of Ludlow have spoken out during this election and it would be a good judgement that Ms. Soares is selected and appointed to this vacant position. Ms. Soares is a life-long resident of Ludlow and mother of a 15-year-old daughter. She actively attends school meetings and I feel that she would actively support parental rights and be a voice for all parents of Ludlow. Her open and comprehensive dialogue and dedication is what is needed in our school system. Her beliefs in getting parents more involved in their children's education will help mitigate bullying and create a safer environment for all Ludlow school-aged children. Ms. Soares is a person of high integrity and has always taken the point of view of what's best for the students of Ludlow. In conclusion, I highly recommend Isabel Soares for the position of School Committee member for the Ludlow Public Schools. Sincerely, Kimberly Babin. Thank you.

Ms. Fontaine: Good evening Chairman DeBarge and members of the committee. My name is Patricia Fontaine and this is my husband Brian Fontaine. We have a daughter entering the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of the Ludlow Schools and receives services as well. As the news of an open School Committee seat has recently come to our attention, we wanted to express our concern that there be fair representation for all families in Ludlow. Our family would like you to take into consideration allowing this seat to be filled by Isabel Soares. Isabel has shown her commitment outside of the other candidates. Her commitment to Ludlow by putting her time and energy into running in the actual election. We feel that she is the right person for the job and would represent many of the morals, values and concerns that many parents have and be a voice for much needed change as well as any future concerns. We ask that you respectfully consider this request and thank you for taking the time. Sincerely, Patricia and Brian Fontaine.

Ms. Kapinos: I'm Kelly Kapinos. I've been a Ludlow resident for over 40 years. I have 5 kids, who all attended Ludlow Public Schools and have 6 grandkids currently attending Kindergarten through high school. I definitely have a vested interest in all of our schools. You have a very important job here tonight. To choose someone to fill the open seat on the School Committee. First, I want to say that Ludlow Public Schools are good. Do we have our problems? Sure. Just like all the other districts. Being an Army brat, I attended schools all over the country and in Europe. I graduated from South Hadley High and I would choose Ludlow over anywhere I attended again and again for my family. The community here is something special and this school district is a large part of that community. Whoever you choose will have that seat for less than 10 months until the next election. Then the Town will decide as they did at the most recent election, which was a 2-1 vote. We know who's sitting here as the Chairwoman and we know who's not. I'm happy to see that we had the highest voter turnout in a long time. The voters care and I believe they will continue to show up. Please choose someone that will get the work done that the committee is tasked with that doesn't have an agenda that excludes some and won't risk State or Federal funding by pushing their own agenda. From the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "state law School Committee shall choose educational goals and policies for the

schools in the district consistent with the requirements by law and the state-wide goals and standards established by the Board of Education, General Laws Chapter 71 Section 37". That's the job. For anyone concerned with parental rights, which has been a catch phrase, I can tell you in my own experience and those with my grandkids currently in the district that the teachers, counselors and administrators are all more than willing to meet with parents and all of them have the students' best interest at heart. Please choose someone that will work on this committee in the best interests of the school district and all of the students. Thank you to all of those that stepped up to volunteer for this position and thank you for your time.

Mr. Riopel: My name is Sean Riopel. I'm a long-time resident of Ludlow. No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. The trick is in admitting them and learning from them. The key is to prevent making them in the first place is speaking with those who hold beliefs different from your own. It is very easy to convince yourself you're always right. That is one of the main reasons our government was designed with 3 branches and a system of checks and balances. Parents, teachers and this community are all necessary for our students to thrive. Everyone is here because we all want the same thing, to see these children grow into happy, healthy adults. We only differ on the best approach. Isabella has become one of my closest friends over this past year. Not because we agree on everything but because she fights for what she believes. We disagree constantly but we are able to debate things with an open mind even if we never end up agreeing. Most importantly, she's the only other person besides Sarah that bothered to run for School Committee. She may have lost the election but she did receive 1,253 votes. Clearly, she has a lot of support from the community. To choose anyone else I believe would be undemocratic. I urge everyone with a vote to listen to the community, which has already spoken, and choose Bella Soares for the open seat. Thank you.

Mr. Oliveira: Rich Oliveira. Ludlow High School teacher. Bella Soares was voted down by 2,500 votes. The town does not want her as a representative. She home schools her kid. She doesn't believe in public education. I have a little bone to pick with Mr. Saloio. You get on my son's case for not attending Ron-Fest, that's what I'm calling the bicycle thing. Do you know what my son's schedule is like?

Mr. DeBarge: This isn't germane to the subject. You know that. Stay on the subject, Mr. Oliveira. You know that's not germane to the subject.

Mr. Laing: People say whatever they want in public comment. That's how it is in our district.

Mr. Oliveira: It is germane.

Mr. Laing: We've listened to it for years. People say whatever they want.

Mr. Oliveira: He comes down on my son's case for not attending this thing

Mr. Saloio: When did I say that?

Mr. Oliveira: I saw it on your website.

Mr. Saloio: Can you show that to me? Do you have evidence on that? I never said anything about it.

Ms. Bowler: This is public comment.

Mr. Oliveira: Also, I'm thin skinned according to my son. My son will brush this off. My son got \$50,000 for this town for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. How much was pulled in for the bike run?

Mr. Robar: I want to address the Chairperson and 4 Selectmen mainly because I know how the School Committee members are going to vote, so the vote tonight comes down to you 5. I sent these facts in a letter. I know you all read my letter. I'm class of '79 so I may be the oldest one here. In 2021, Ms. Bowler got 878 votes in her first run and she won. She was elected. In 2022 Mr. Stratton received 1,247, Mr. Saloio received 1,188 votes. In 2023 Mr. Dias received 868 and Mr. Laing received 830. In 2024, congratulations to Ms. Bowler, she was over 2,000 votes and Bella Soares was at 1,253. Bella received more votes than the people who were elected in 2021, 2022 and 2023. There's 5 people there and she received more votes. My argument as I stated to

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE  
2024 JUN 20 P 1:13  
TOWN OF LUDLOW

you 5 gentlemen in a letter is simply there certainly was good support for Bella in the election a couple months ago and to me she should be appointed. As you're well aware, and I hope whoever has the authority to crack this will, we should not be going through this. You all know that. I think everybody agrees. Like Springfield has, we should have 2<sup>nd</sup> runner up. The runner up gets the position if someone resigns or dies. This is a clown show. Bella has been coming to these meetings for a long time. She worked hard to campaign. You have the right to agree or disagree with her but she got 1,253 votes. She had more signs out there than anybody I've ever seen so we know there was a lot of support for her in town. I'm asking that you do the right thing and appoint her. As the good gentleman said, she will be forced to run again in March 2025 and the town can decide whether they want to continue to have her serve on the School Committee or not. Thank you.

## VISITATIONS

School Committee Interviews:

6:15 p.m. – Amanda Coddling

Ms. Bowler: There are only going to be 2 of us asking questions and if there are follow up questions from the committees they will be asking you. Is there a particular issue that motivated you to serve on the School Committee?

Ms. Coddling: I wouldn't say that there's one particular issue. I've been waiting to run and when this opportunity came up, I was waiting to run until I had enough years. I am in the field of education. I'm an instructional specialist in Springfield at Putnam Vocational Technical. Education needs a lot of hands, a lot of brainwork, a lot of people with experience. Two of my children, one stepchild and one of my own, are graduating this year from Ludlow High School, so I see a lot of what's going on in all school districts and there are a lot of complex issues. Whether we're talking about equity, curriculum, parental involvement, and making sure that everyone has a say in what's going on in the schools and that we're being equitable to all students. Finding that balance between everything. I'm here because I think I can offer that experience. I've been in a lot of different types of schools; magnet, charter, vocational, public, the Boys & Girls Club here in my younger days. Education is super important to me. My nieces and nephews go to school here so even though my 2 are graduating I've got to see their educational experience throughout. I figured it was a great time to come. I was planning on running at the next election anyway.

Mr. DeBarge: I appreciate your interest in the position. What is your understanding of the role of School Committee member and what's your particular experience that can serve the role? You've already explained your experience so let's go with the understanding of the role of School Committee member.

Ms. Coddling: My understanding is that we're setting goals and that high leverage, that umbrella. Working with the Superintendent where he's at ground level with the teachers so setting higher level goals with objectives, working with the budget. I have some experience doing that with a variety of roles over lots of different positions where we had to work with the data and numbers. While that's not my initial job to work with stats, I do work with a lot of money and stats and making sure everything is balanced. I think the main purpose of a member is to set those high-level goals and objectives for the district and making sure they're following through in a circular checks and balances.

Ms. Bowler: What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Ms. Coddling: My vision for education is having that 21<sup>st</sup> century learner who is tech savvy but also worldly. Someone who is going to do well in the world and workforce. Making sure the kids have real life skills. Continuing the CTEC program. I've seen that be really effective for many students. The AP program. Having kids be able to talk to each other and have respectful conversations with each other and discourse is really important, even down to the grade level. Having techs in the classroom, having teachers trained in that tech so the students are preparing for these jobs. You may have heard that they're preparing jobs they don't even know what they look like yet. A lot of people are leery of teaching kids those skills but you have to be up on that. Real world applications. Having a finance course so kids know how to put money in a stock market. I know that our high school is doing a good job. My son has taken a class like that. Being

prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And being able to have conversations with each other in a respectful way even if your opinions differ. And how do we do that and be kind and courteous to one another.

Mr. DeBarge: Final question. How would you determine your budget priorities when working on the budget?

Ms. Coddington: I'd really have to look. I'd have to see what the per student expenditure is. I'd have to really look and see what we're given. We need tech that works so our students can be successful in every classroom. We have this beautiful school. There are many other schools that are in need of improvements. If we pay the teachers well so they stay and have the retention because that's a big issue across the country and in Western Mass. Really balancing it out where everybody wins, which I know can be kind of tough. Seeing what we're given and working with that. It all depends on the year but I think those are top priorities.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think you touched on it but I just wanted to ask, if selected your future intentions would be to run for the position again?

Ms. Coddington: Yes.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you.

Ms. Coddington: Thank you.

6:20 p.m. – Chad Mullin

Ms. Bowler: Is there a particular issue that motivated you to serve on the School Committee?

Mr. Mullin: For the record, my name is Chad Mullin. I'm a 27-year resident of Ludlow. I was a School Committee member for 12 years. Two of those years I was Chairperson. This evening I'm here before you because I'm very much interested in helping the district to move along and apply my knowledge and skills that I have in serving in the past as School Committee member to just get the School Committee to the next election cycle and allow for the public to choose their next permanent School Committee member. Did that answer your question?

Ms. Bowler: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: You've been on the Board for 12 years; we were Chairs together so we worked together well. I'm not going to ask you these questions that we already know the answers to. I'm going to jump to the 3<sup>rd</sup> one. What is your vision for education in Ludlow? Are you going to run in March?

Mr. Mullin: No. My purpose is to help the district to get to that next election cycle and then let the residents choose.

Mr. DeBarge: For the next few months, what's your vision of education in Ludlow.

Mr. Mullin: My vision for education in Ludlow will certainly start with the vision and direction set forth by the Superintendent working alongside his administrative team and finding areas and opportunities where the School Committee can support the plan that the administrative team wants to execute on. Does that answer you Mr. DeBarge?

Mr. DeBarge: Yes.

Ms. Bowler: How would you determine your budget priorities?

Mr. Mullin: Speaking from the past, when I was on the School Committee I was a member of the budget subcommittee and the budget is a process. That process starts early and in collaboration in particular with the Board of Selectmen. There was one thing that we did work on quite a bit with the Selectmen but there's always opportunities to do more. For me, my priority as part of the budget subcommittee was to hear the needs that the Superintendent and administrative team laid out and then work toward prioritizing the resources in order to meet those goals and objectives that the administrative team has. We start with the goals and objectives and work from there.

Mr. DeBarge: Can you explain what you believe the role of the School Committee member is?

Mr. Mullin: There are 3 very specific responsibilities for the School Committee members across Massachusetts. The first one is the hiring and ongoing evaluation of the Superintendent. I have had experience on the School Committee in hiring Superintendents as well as following the guidelines set forth for evaluations. Second is around policy and educational goal setting for the district. As a member of the School Committee, I did serve on the policy subcommittee. We would take direction from whether it was a number of entities in terms of shaping policy, whether it was DESE or the Mass Association of School Superintendents or the Mass Association of School Committees we would take suggested policy language changes and work toward those. The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing is setting and the review of the budget. As part of the budget subcommittee there was the work there and on an ongoing basis on the School Committee we would review on a monthly basis the actual budget for the School Department. Those are the 3 priorities and ultimately the roles and job of the School Committee members.

6:25 p.m. – Jenny Wright

Ms. Bowler: Chairman DeBarge and I are going to go back & forth with our questions and if there's any follow up questions they will ask you. Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the School Committee?

Ms. Wright: The thing I'm most concerned with is Special Education. I have a daughter in Special Education. I was born and raised in Ludlow and I needed accommodations for my own schooling and my background professionally has also happened to lead to more Special Ed. I have an eye for that. Being a mental health counselor it's important hearing all parents' concerns and inclusion and acceptance of all children. That's what's most important to me.

Mr. DeBarge: I appreciate your interest in the position. What is your understanding of the role of School Committee member?

Ms. Wright: I'm learning more about it. I have not attended meetings religiously. I own that because I've worked late every Tuesday night for the entirety of my career. That happened to be my late night. But I think this is a good time to make a change so I'm learning more about it. I know it involves assisting and advising the Superintendent on the needs of the schools and children. Hearing parents' concerns. Something I looked into more was reading online the handbook and I wondered about staff and personnel and I'm understanding that is not something that is within the scope of the School Committee. Overseeing the budget and helping to make decisions on where we should be spending our money and developing and maintaining policy.

Ms. Bowler: What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Ms. Wright: My vision would be inclusivity for all. I think that's the most important thing. That we're spending our money appropriately in the schools and where it's needed and to be honest I wouldn't want cuts to Special Education. My daughter is not the most severe need, which as a parent I've heard along the way, but I also know that when a child has a documented disability they are entitled to the services they need. That little bit of support is what makes my kid so successful. When I think if she didn't have that and it was pulled back I think she would struggle more. I come from that perspective.

Mr. DeBarge: How would you determine your budget priorities?

Ms. Wright: I think I need to sit and spend more time looking at the budget. I'd like to hear from other committee members what the focus has been as a whole. I know some of it is transportation, budgeting for salaries, LPVEC is really important, art, music. I don't know exactly what I would say yet. I would want to know what the group as a whole feels about that and voice my opinion where I see it.

Mr. Rosenblum: If you were selected this evening would you be running next time?

Ms. Wright: Yes. To be honest I'd want to see how this goes and feels. When I've come to meetings or watched the meetings each week sometimes the environment feels a little hostile and I worry

about what that might be like so I'd like to see if this is a good fit or if our goals are aligned. If it goes well I could see myself wanting to stay on.

6:30 p.m. – Michael Engel

Ms. Bowler: Thank you for being here. Myself and Chairman DeBarge are going to be asking you questions back and forth followed up by any of the others. Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the School Committee?

Mr. Engel: I've lived in many places. I've always wanted to contribute to the community in some way. Sometimes I've been successful, sometimes not. I've lived in Ludlow for 10 years. For various reasons I haven't been able to do that. When this opportunity opened up I thought here's somewhere I can be constructive and positive. I can use my experience and learning and my concern about public education in a constructive way to help clear out some of the negativity that's been surrounding School Committees over the last months. If I have a concern about issues, there are 2 that affect all schools. One is finding enough money to give the kids what they deserve and that's tough particularly in Massachusetts because prop 2 ½. Chapter 78 you never know from one month to the other what it's going to be. Because of the competition from charter schools, school choice that sets the districts against each other, all of those things make it hard for the School Committee to make a useful, independent choice but we have to do the best we can. I was sort of unhappy when they said the best they were able to do, besides building this beautiful school, was not to fire anybody. That's a worthwhile achievement but it seems sad. The other issue is it's hard to be a teacher these days. It's very difficult. I was reading about Chicopee teachers were afraid of assault. I heard from one of my former colleagues at Westfield State, a brilliant teacher, completely dissatisfied with the attitude of students, they don't want to learn, he's had such trouble grading, it's like they don't want to learn. Teaching is hard, and I think the School Committee has to deal, can't change that necessarily, but has to deal with the effects of that. Those are some of the issues and there are particular issues that come up all the time. Those are 2 that have been on my mind for some time.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you for your interest. What is your understanding of the role of School Committee member and what particular experiences or skills might you have for the role.

Mr. Engel: You've read my letter of interest and resume. One thing I would have to do, since I don't have a whole lot of familiarity with the Ludlow School system I was thinking if I was appointed the first 2 weeks I would set up appointments with Sarah, Dr. Tiano, and the 4 principals and ask them what's on their mind, what are the things you think need to be done, what are your opinions. These would all be confidential but that would be a way of educating myself about the Ludlow School system, which I don't have a personal familiarity. It's what I've said before, to be a constructive, positive person, and since I said I don't want to run again, it's to set an example for whoever, hopefully younger, takes on after me so they can follow along in that spirit.

Ms. Bowler: What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Mr. Engel: I think we have to do the best we can for the kids. A lot of it has to do with money and resources. I've always been a fan of critical thinking. When I taught in Westfield they didn't like this. They mostly wanted multiple choice exams but I always tried to get them to express opinions and my classes were a free speech zone. Conservative vs liberal and I presented these things to them. I gave them essays where they had to write these things. They also didn't like that very much either. I made them work. That was 20 years ago, I can't imagine what it is now. Critical thinking, getting kids to think for themselves, to be able to express themselves. I'm very big on citizenship. We need to teach kids civics, teach them how to be active, democratic citizens. I don't mean any particular ideology or opinion. I mean assuming their responsibilities as citizens of the United States of America. That means teaching history, social sciences, and civics. I think in general the schools in the country don't do a very good job of that. There's my vision. School Committee doesn't have that much control over that but that would be where I would go.

Mr. DeBarge: Finally, the budget. How would you determine your budget priorities?

Mr. Engel: There's a limited field to do that. I was looking at the figures. Our per pupil expenditure is somewhere right in the middle. Priorities are limited by collective bargaining. I want teachers to be paid well. I would like money to go to programs, for example I think I have to learn more about

that. That would be one of the questions I would have of the principals and Superintendent and Sarah. Where do you want to see the schools go? Where do you think we're neglecting? Where do you think the funding priorities should be? I don't know enough yet to be able to determine that but I think that by talking to them over 2 weeks I would have some ideas.

Mr. Rosenblum: My follow up has been answered, which is you would not be running for election.

Mr. Engel: Right.

6:35 p.m. – Emma Sawtelle

Ms. Bowler: I'm Sarah Bowler, Chairwoman. Derek DeBarge, Chairman of the Select Board, and I are going to ask you questions back and forth and if anybody has any follow up questions we'll ask you those as well. Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on our School Committee?

Ms. Sawtelle: Personally, I find that there are a lot of barriers created from what I've seen in online forums. I think this is not only specific to Ludlow but in general that the idea of having respectful conversations and opposing ideas, which is always going to happen but being able to communicate effectively is hindering progress. That is one of the main reasons I would love to be on the School Committee. To hopefully be able to promote effective communication to make progress.

Mr. DeBarge: I appreciate your interest in the position. What is your understanding of the role of a School Committee member and what particular experience or skills do you have that could help you serve in that role?

Ms. Sawtelle: From my research, I've never been part of a School Committee, but I think of it as big ideas. Implementing and developing policies, budget review and working directly with the Superintendent. I just graduated from Elms this month and I interned with Senator Oliveira and I currently work as a legislative aid for Representative Carey. Through that experience I've learned so much. Mostly, the importance of constituents and in this case residents, teachers and students of the community and the importance of hearing them out. Having to reiterate that communication and in turn how policy development and transparency can do the trickledown effect across the district, teachers, students and residents.

Ms. Bowler: What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Ms. Sawtelle: First and foremost, I would like to see a learning environment where students feel safe and included. That's why we're all here. We want to see our students succeed. How are we going to do that? I don't have the immediate answer. I see a safe environment and aside from the students rebuilding a sense of confidence between students, teachers, parents, district and the School Committee.

Mr. DeBarge: How would you determine your budget priorities as a School Committee member?

Ms. Sawtelle: I think it is hard to bring your own personal bias into these situations. Where you would personally want to see direct funding and you always have to check your own personal bias. I would go off of what is being advocated for by the Superintendent, by the teachers, by the community. That's how I would try to shape my vote and policies for budget.

Mr. Rosenblum: In the event that you are selected this evening, would you consider running for this position or any other open position on the School Committee.

Ms. Sawtelle: I absolutely would. On a personal note, I know we have limited time but I was born and raised in a really small town in Maine so when I moved to Massachusetts I was in culture shock. I moved to Ludlow a little over 5 years ago around the beginning of the pandemic. The first thing I noticed was the lawns of the residents. People take great care of their lawns. I realized it wasn't just people because they were at home, it's the pride that Ludlow has and the fact that I've been able to rebuild a second home here. A big reason I want to be a part of the School Committee is I want to establish my family here. So, to answer your question, absolutely. Thank you.

6:40 p.m. – Isabel Soares

Ms. Bowler: Myself and Chairman DeBarge are going to be asking you questions back and forth and when we're done if any of the other members have questions they'll be following up. Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the School Committee?

Ms. Soares: I'm here to support the students, children and parents of this town.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you for your interest in the position. What is your understanding in the role of the School Committee member? What particular experiences and skills do you have to serve in that role?

Ms. Soares: I know the role is we vote on policies and budget. I'm looking for more transparency. I think we lack a huge transparency that's going on lately. I've been a town resident for 42 years. I know the ins and outs of Ludlow. I was a preschool teacher so I worked with kids quite a bit. I was a preschool teacher for 4 years and I taught soccer in the Ludlow Youth Soccer Association for 7 years. I've been around children. I've seen their ups and downs many times. I always look for solutions to the problem. That's my goal. I like to get to the root of the problem and try to figure out how we can come together and fix the root of the problem. The biggest problem we have going on lately is bullying. I've seen a lot of parents come forward about bullying, teachers are getting bullied left and right and I think we need to come together and figure out a way to stop this. To me, it's not right. That bothers me a lot and why I've been coming to these meetings for 4 years. I've attended multiple meetings. I spoke at many meetings. We need to come together and figure out what the root of the problem is and figure out a solution for it.

Ms. Bowler: What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Ms. Soares: We need to bring our enrollment up. Our enrollment has decreased a lot. That's another solution we need to figure out the root of the problem. Why has our enrollment dropped? A lot of students have left. There's teachers that are leaving. I think we need to figure out what is happening here. Why are people leaving? What's the issue going on? We need to get to the root of the problem and bring our enrollment back up. I went to school in the 90's and I keep seeing a drop every single year. We need to figure out why it's dropping. Why are kids leaving? Where are they going?

Mr. DeBarge: What would you determine as your budget priorities?

Ms. Soares: Definitely not cut teachers. We'd have to figure out how to move money around and keep our teachers intact. I hate seeing teachers go because we need our teachers. Without our teachers there is no education.

Mr. Rosenblum: If you're selected this evening would you be running for this open position or any other open position on the School Committee in March?

Ms. Soares: I would absolutely re-run.

6:45 p.m. -- James Elliott

Ms. Bowler: I'm Sarah Bowler, Chairwoman of the School Committee, and Derek DeBarge, Chairman of the Select Board and the 2 of us are going to be asking you questions back and forth and when we're done if any of our members have any questions they'll follow up with those. Is there a particular issue that motivates you to serve on the School Committee?

Mr. Elliott: I'm interested in what level the School Committee can get involved with in budgeting. The second is safety for students and staff. The 2 things I'd like to work on for public policies if I get on.

Mr. DeBarge: I appreciate your interest.

Mr. Elliott: I was going to add I think at one point I saw Mr. Rosenblum at one of the Board of Selectmen meetings and people trying to figure out how the money was found. I'm interested in that and I think some folks were like you all wanted to figure out how do we make this transparent and that was what spurred me to say me to say maybe this was something I could do.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you for your interest in the seat. What is your understanding of the role of a School Committee member and your particular experience that will help you in that role?

Mr. Elliott: School Committee is supposed to set policy for the schools. There's laws to follow. I've looked at some of them. I'm not a lawyer so I don't have them all memorized. Basically, the School Committee is setting policy, setting the goals and hiring a CEO basically, Mr. Tiano or whoever the Superintendent is and saying please reach these goals for us. That's what I see the School Committee doing. I've been a teacher for 25 years in Amherst. I moved here 19 years ago with my daughter and wife when my daughter was 1 and my son. I've worked on a lot of committees. I have done negotiations from the teacher's side and it's interesting to see it from the other side. My wife does work in the district so I know that if there are contract things I wouldn't be able to vote on those. She's a para-professional at East Street.

Ms. Bowler: Thank you for the disclosure. What is your vision for education in Ludlow?

Mr. Elliott: That students can reach whatever potential they have and find a place for themselves. I believe teachers will be able to help guide students to go to college if they want, go to trade school if they want, go to military if they want. I think living in Ludlow, going to school in Massachusetts kids have access to a world class education and I think we need to tout that with them. You don't need to go to college, you can do what you want when you leave here. Hopefully you're a productive member of society after you graduate high school. I think that's what high school education should prepare students to do. Make choices where they want to go.

Mr. DeBarge: You mentioned the budget when you first came in. The final question is about how you would determine your budget priorities.

Mr. Elliott: I think student facing positions are the positions that need to be held on to the most. Anybody that's working directly with students. Teachers, clerical folks in the buildings, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals. You have to pay attention to the facilities so you can't lose those fixed costs you have to look at. I think we should compare ourselves to neighboring districts and figure out how much they're spending and see if we are spending similar amounts on administrative costs vs other things. I know there's a lot of things happening in the State right now where administrators, especially at building levels, are getting pulled in different directions, with reporting and having to deal with all the different comments that come into schools. There's State requirements if a comment comes in. They just opened up PSR, it used to be mainly for special ed students to talk about things they see that's not working for their kids in school. The State opened it up last year to anybody and it used to be a formal letter you would write. Now it's a drop-down menu on a website. If you go to the State they're really proud of the fact they're clearing 4% more of these but it's taking most of the energy away from building administrators to be able to observe and direct teachers to deal with all these problems from the outside. I don't think we can cut them but I think the primary thing is to make sure there are adults that deal with students.

Mr. Rosenblum: If selected, would you be considering running for this open position or any other open position on the School Committee in March.

Mr. Elliott: I thought about it. I thought about running the last time and I've thought about running in the future but I'm not sure. I'd have to see how it goes. I'm not ruling it out but it isn't a primary goal right now. That's why when I wrote my letter of interest this was a time for me to try it out and see if I want to run. I've been a political person my whole life, that's what I teach. Now that my kids are grown up I should probably do some of this. I've been loud at some meetings and contributed to things so if I'm going to do that I should be there and let people talk to me the same way.

Mr. Laing: Thank you to all the candidates. They did an excellent job. It was impressive. Some of the answers have been impressive. I can see that they've been following along and they have taken the time to get to know the things that go on in Ludlow. I'm happy we have these candidates. I think that the candidates should be running during the next election. We are thankful to have Mr. Mullin apply. He would be an excellent stock gap until that next election. I've heard many comments about 1,200 votes. For those 1,200 votes, many people had to wake up and come out of their homes to get to over 2,100 votes for Sarah. I wouldn't want anyone on these committees to put somebody on the School Committee where the public would get that upset. I think it would be beneficial to let...this was a great springboard for the candidates to run and I will hold signs for

you. I would put them in my yard and stand out and wave at cars but until that next election my vote is for Chad Mullin.

Mr. Stratton: Thank you to everybody who came and applied. It was amazing to see 7 candidates interested in this position so that was wonderful. It's a rather difficult decision. I liked the response from Amanda about technology and teachers and life skills. Chad Mullin would bring a lot of experience to the committee and we're a committee that is fairly young so some experience on the committee would be useful as well. I like what Emma had to say about inclusive vision for the schools and I like your statement about confidence between the teachers and students and parents. Isabel your comments on enrollment are prescient as well. We have been seeing declines. That would be nice, especially from a budgeting perspective, to get more students in would be great. Jim I was interested that you have negotiating experience and that would be a very beneficial thing to be part of the whole negotiation process. I haven't gone through it myself. There might be a complication in the fact that I also have a wife in the schools.

Ms. Bowler: You'd only have to sit out on the teachers and he'd only have to sit out on the paras.

Mr. Stratton: Thank you for clarifying that. Jenny I liked that you also were focused on inclusivity and that you have that intensive experience with special education. I think that would be really useful too. Michael I liked your big picture view of doing the best we can for the kids and I think your idea of civically active kids is also very good. This is a hard decision for me. In all in the near term I think we would benefit from having Chad on the committee to lend some experience and I think that would be very useful but I would be really excited if everybody else ran in March and it would be an interesting election and it would be a hard decision. That's what I'm thinking.

Mr. Saloio: I thank everybody for coming in. My views are similar with Mr. Robar who spoke. This is an elected position. Joao Dias got a lot of votes. Our town is pretty conservative when you look at the demographic of our town. For whatever reason, Mr. Dias left his spot but leaving that spot is leaving a lot of voices unheard on the conservative side. In talking about votes, Bella did get 1,200 votes. She campaigned. She's been coming to School Committee meetings for over 4 years with concerns. She did the work. She campaigned and 1,100 of those votes were absentee ballots that got Sarah elected. We have a committee. There's no point in having a committee where everybody has the exact same views. The reason we have a committee is so we have opposing views and come to an agreement in the middle. I believe the only valid option in this situation is Bella. That would be the fair choice. She did the work and it would also fill the spot that Joan took and for whatever reason abandoned and be a voice for those people.

Mr. Laing: I have a question for Mr. Saloio. Are you saying that the election was not fair or rigged because of those absentee ballots?

Mr. Saloio: No, but I would question when in town we have ever had 1,100 absentee ballots in an election.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you to all the candidates. It was good to see that many people interested. I think the 3 people that decided that they wanted this until March and wouldn't seek re-election I'm not interested in that. I think somebody needs to hit the pavement and go and continue right through and get re-elected and have these 9-10 months of experience going through. There's a lot of great ideas. I get a good sense of the other applicants, where they're going, what their priorities are, etc. Amanda Coddington stood out to me. The real-life skills, the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner and didn't seem to be on any side of the fence. Just concerned about the kids and what the future is, not what we've gone through. Fighting battles from last month, last week, last year, or picking sides. No preconceived notions. My support would be for Amanda.

Mr. Silva: I take a lot of stock in elections. I ran for elections in this town 6-7 times in various positions and it's not an easy thing. It's difficult to put your neck out there and hit the pavement and try to do things you see would be of benefit to Ludlow. Everyone has opinions and ideas and that's what democracy is all about. Bringing in ideas, hash it out and take a vote and see what is best for all. I believe that everyone that comes here and wants this position should be looking at running in the next election. It's an important position. By coming in and in 5-6 months I don't think you can get much done. You'll be learning a lot of the rules and regulations. I love that Chad came back but I'm upset that he left. For him to not run again I don't know if that's a good idea. I have to go with Bella. She works so hard and she's very devoted and wants things done. Whether

they're good things she wants done that's going to be for the committee to decide and you're going to be able to vote and decide what is best. I would vote for Bella.

Mr. Rosenblum: The biggest thing for me is the question I followed up on is if they're anticipating running again. I think that by saying yes this is a good opportunity for someone to learn on the back side of the budget and get your feet wet and understand the position a little more as you get towards running for re-election. Anyone that is running again, I don't want it to be something you're doing as a holdover. I'd like to see continuity. The biggest thing for me, it's always been this way and the way I went through the education system when teachers taught. Am I the biggest fan of teaching to the test? No. I want children to be able to express themselves. Mr. Engel and Ms. Coddling both had the same words. Real life skills. Being able to have an opinion. Personally, I'm hoping for someone in the middle to bring the committee together. Through social media, we know where people stand. I look for someone to be in the middle and be that person to maybe vote this way, maybe vote this way. I think we need a little bit more of that. Bella made a valid point on enrollment. I follow a lot of the numbers through DESE, per pupil spending and salaries. Our enrollment is dropping. We do need to find a solution to that. As I said, if you're not running again it's a no for me. My selection right now would be Amanda Coddling. I like her background. She's had time in several school districts. She's seen different sides, between charter, public, parochial. She has the time, budgeting experience, not that it's something she's going to need to get into at this point. I see in her the opportunity. Again, the School Committee drafts policy but I like the idea of someone we can let teachers teach.

Mr. Gennette: There's a lot of great candidates here. I'm going to attest to Mr. Robar and say this is a pretty unorthodox situation for us to be in to have to do this. This is something the community should be deciding, not something we should be deciding here. I agree with most of the Selectmen that are here in saying that if you're not going to run again in the Spring you lost my vote. If Emma Sawtelle wasn't as young as she was would have been a stellar add. Amanda Coddling has a lot of experience. I thought Isabel came up and did a wonderful job as well. This is pretty tough. My vote is for Bella.

Mr. DeBarge: This is pretty easy for me in the fact that a few years ago we had a situation with the Board of Public Works. They had 2 candidates on the ballot that needed Special Municipal Employee status in order to get on the Board. I personally didn't agree with them being on the Board and having that status for the positions that they were in and the situation it was however, when the town election came they overwhelmingly won and we as a Board of Selectmen had to decide whether to vote to make them Special Municipal Employees to put them on the Board of Public Works. I didn't want to do it because I didn't see it working. Regrettably I listened to the voters and I put them on that board because that's my job. My job is to answer to the voters. The voters in the past election put Isabel Soares, they gave her 1,200 votes. The voters need to answer in March who they want for the next seat. It's that simple. I agree with Mr. Robar and James. I'm very uncomfortable with this because it's an elected position. I'm uncomfortable interviewing people for an elected position because it's for the people to decide because she put money in, she has been coming to the meetings, she's putting the time in. If the people of Ludlow don't want a certain person in a seat they're going to do that in March. That is where we need to be. Everybody says a democracy and that is my position. My vote is for Isabel Soares.

Ms. Bowler: It doesn't matter what I say. I think you are right about it being an elected position and I wouldn't be looking at someone who's not running again. Chad did run 3-4 times and was elected into this seat those times. He was never unelected to this seat; he chose to step down. That would have been the best opportunity for him to sit in this seat again while the town had the opportunity to come back to the polls and to vote someone else into this seat. If you guys don't like having to do this process, these are our bylaws. This is what the Town of Ludlow has created for our bylaws. We can't change that. Maybe the charter change. This isn't comfortable for us either. This is what is within our bylaws. We had no choice but to do this.

Mr. DeBarge: I agree, I thought you had the authority to appoint before this started.

Ms. Bowler: And when you had to do this you chose not to. You chose to go to the next election cycle, from what you told me, which is not something we have the option to do. If we had the option I would have said we can go with a board of 4 until the next election cycle. Apparently that is not legal. I look at it differently than how you guys look at it. We could have gone with someone who has been elected to this board multiple times, who knows it and doesn't need to be taught,

who doesn't need to get his feet wet and the town could have voted again. That is a different view because it's someone who's sitting in the seat looking at it a different way. It is what it is. I'd be voting for Chad because I think that's the best because it's someone who knows the position. Amanda did an amazing job. Emma did an amazing job. There is a high school senior who just got appointed to his town School Committee which I met at the day on the hill the other day. There are so many amazing people and I would say come run and join the board because I think you would be an addition to this board. Jim, everyone did great.

**Motion made by Mr. Gennette** to appoint Bella Soares to the School Committee based on the conversation and vote that we had here. **Mr. Silva second.**

Ms. Bowler: Does it go by majority or I'm just asking.

Mr. DeBarge: 4-3-2.

Mr. Laing: I think we should find out exactly what it is prior to making any motions.

Mr. DeBarge: How can it not be a majority vote?

Mr. Goncalves: He's saying if the majority of the 9 or majority of the vote. You could have more votes for 1 person than the other without a majority of the 9. If you go 4-3-2, that's 9, 4 is still more votes but it's not a majority of the 9.

Mr. DeBarge: Out of the 7 candidates 1 person got more votes.

Mr. Gennette: There's a motion on the table and a 2<sup>nd</sup>. We should make a vote. If it doesn't pass then we have to figure another process out. There's a motion and 2<sup>nd</sup> on the floor. That has to be dealt with one way or the other.

**Roll call. Mr. Gennette yes, Mr. Silva yes, Mr. Rosenblum no, Mr. DeBarge yes, Mr. Goncalves no, Mr. Saloio yes, Mr. Stratton no, Mr. Laing no, Ms. Bowler no. That's 4 yes, 5 no.**

Mr. DeBarge: It's an interview.

Ms. Bowler: For elections to fill a vacancy a candidate must receive a majority of the votes of the office entitled to vote. That's the 9 of us. The person so elected will fill the seat on the committee until the next town election.

Mr. Strange: I always assumed the majority was 5.

**Motion made to appoint Chad Mullin** as the appointed School Committee member until the next election. **Mr. Stratton second. Roll call. Mr. Gennette no, Mr. Silva no, Mr. Rosenblum no, Mr. DeBarge no, Mr. Goncalves no, Mr. Saloio no, Mr. Stratton yes, Mr. Laing yes, Ms. Bowler yes.**

Ms. Bowler: We're at a crossroads.

**Motion made by Mr. Laing** to appoint Amanda Coddington. **Mr. Goncalves second. Roll call. Mr. Silva no, Mr. Rosenblum yes, Mr. DeBarge no, Mr. Goncalves yes, Mr. Saloio no, Mr. Stratton yes, Mr. Laing yes, Ms. Bowler yes, Mr. Gennette no.**

Ms. Bowler: Congratulations Amanda, you're our newest School Committee member.

Mr. Goncalves: The first vote stands if it had been a valid vote, 4-3-2, for Bella. If that's the way it works then that vote will have stood and Bella would be the candidate. If it's got to be the 5 then it would be Amanda. That was an official vote taken.

Mr. Strange: We have to see if a majority is a majority of the candidates or majority of the votes.

Ms. Bowler: We have to talk to Kim Batista.

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE  
2024 JUN 3 D 1:14  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

Mr. Goncalves: It could be either one of the 2. Town Counsel.

Mr. Rosenblum: This will get done swiftly.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm really excited that it ended up this way. I thought it was going to be one vote really quick one way so it's kind of exciting that we bounced around as much as we did. Democracy at its finest.

Mr. Robar: No matter how you did it, right or wrong, in fairness to everybody you should have known how this worked coming in.

Mr. Gennette: We're where we are now. We have to get legal advice for that.

Mr. Robar: When will you have that?

Mr. Goncalves: The person that got voted in tonight...

Mr. Gennette: Tuesday night.

Mr. Robar: When will you have that?

Mr. Goncalves: Prior to the next School Committee meeting. They need to be sworn in by the Town Clerk so nothing would happen until then anyhow.

Mr. Strange: Are we asking Town Counsel or the school counsel or both?

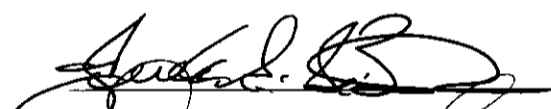
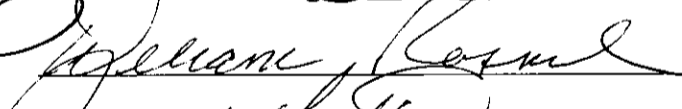
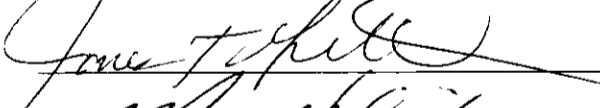
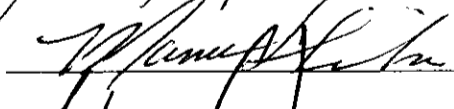
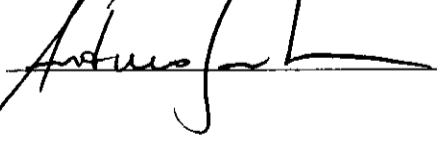
Mr. Goncalves: Why don't we get 2 opinions? They're free.

Ms. Bowler: It's a Mass law.

Mr. Rosenblum: We're probably better off getting it from your counsel anyway.

Mr. DeBarge: Let's get it from both.

**Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the Selectmen's meeting. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson

RECEIVED  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE  
2024 JUN 20 P 1:14  
TOWN OF LUDLOW