

The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024, began at 5:30 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen's Conference Room at the Town Hall.

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

Members Absent:

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

CORRESPONDENCE

340. Chief Valadas – Board to appoint the list of Special Police Officers with the Ludlow Police Department as of January 1, 2025.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to appoint the following special police officers. David Belanger, Quashawn Branch, Joseph Fontaine, James Harrington, Edward Hiney, Alan Kipetz, Joseph Metcalfe, David Powers, Nelson Ramos, Steve Ramos, Fernando Ribeiro, Juan Rivera, Cory Rodrigues, Nelson Rodrigues, Troy Rubner, Armando Saraiva, Kyle Sorenson, Melissa Stokowski and Alberty Witkowski. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

341. Letter from Bill Rosenblum – Resigning from the Mobile Home Rent Control Board.

Mr. Rosenblum: Having been nominated and then selected for the Mobile Home Rent Control Board and after considering there could be a possible conflict I decided I should resign. I sent a letter into Marc stating that.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to accept Mr. Rosenblum's resignation and thank him for the time he served. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

342. Chief Pease – Request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for injuries sustained by three firefighter/paramedics as a result of an incident that occurred on December 2, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve the request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for injuries sustained by three firefighter/paramedics as a result of an incident that occurred on December 2, 2024. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

343. Letter from Joseph Queiroga, Planning Board member – Resigning from the Planning Board effective December 31, 2024.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm really sad that Joe has to retire. He's been on the Planning Board since 2007 and a real serious member of that Planning Board. He took a lot of his own personal time.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to accept his resignation and sincere thanks for the time. I wish him well. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Silva: Because he's resigning and we are so close to the elections are we going to have to appoint somebody for that term or can somebody be elected for the remaining 2 years?

Mr. Strange: The process is the same as you did for the School Committee and Rec Commission. Is there an associate member of the Planning Board?

Mr. Goncalves: There should be one.

Mr. Strange: I don't know if their bylaws play into that at all but I can take a look at it.

Mr. Goncalves: If they have the commitment from the 4 they have they may not want to go through until somebody gets on the ballot in March.

Mr. Rosenblum: We did that with this board when someone resigned in my first term. We were within a few months of an election so we left the spot open.

Mr. DeBarge: It was June. We carried 4 from June to March

Mr. Silva: Were they due the very next election? He's not due.

Mr. Strange: He just got reelected.

Mr. Goncalves: We don't know if anybody is going to run for the position. We could find ourselves having to appoint 2 people.

Mr. Silva: I agree. I'm just wondering.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think it would be up to what their bylaws are. I would think if they have an alternate then the alternate would step in. You'd have to have 1 person run for that and 1 for an alternate position.

Mr. Goncalves: Maybe that's something Marc can talk to Doug about.

Mr. Strange: Kim Batista might know. I think it's an appointment like Amanda Coddington.

Mr. DeBarge: Until the election.

Mr. Silva: There was something several years ago about a special election and an election is expensive so hopefully we don't have to do that.

Mr. Rosenblum: That was a possible recount on the state election.

344. Chief Valadas – Request to charge of medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for injuries sustained by a police officer as a result of an incident that occurred on December 7, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve request to charge of medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for injuries sustained by a police officer as a result of an incident that occurred on December 7, 2024. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

VISITATIONS

5:35 p.m. – Fire Department Captain Interview – Robert Dooley

Mr. DeBarge: Lt. Dooley, welcome. It's always nice to see the same faces for multiple interviews, which is common for your shop. We start this as we do all the others. You have your time to give us an opening statement. We'll get into a couple questions, comments and concerns by the board, we'll have you close out and then we'll move on.

Lt. Dooley: Thank you all for allowing me this opportunity to sit before you once again. My name is Bob Dooley. I'm honored to be sitting here in front of you as a lieutenant with the Ludlow Fire Department. Also, as a proud father, son, husband, coach and business owner. Nearly 2 years ago you all entrusted me with the rank and role of lieutenant, something that I've embraced with dedication and hard work for this town and our community. I want to make it clear. Tonight, luck had no factor in me being here. Hard work, dedication and a deep passion and love for this community and this profession. Being chosen as the rank of lieutenant was one of the greatest privileges of my career. I now know that I must make the next evolutionary step from lieutenant to captain. That position offers me a greater opportunity to do more at a greater level and to ensure that Ludlow Fire Department grows and thrives. Again, hard work, dedication and commitment brought me here tonight and I hope that I show you tonight what all that means and that we continue to grow and thrive and to prove that the Town of Ludlow Fire Department is committed to excellence and performing the best duties possible.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you again. It's good to see you. People are still interested and want to be here for a long time. If you were appointed, what do you see as your biggest challenge in your new role?

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Lt. Dooley: The biggest challenge in my new role, as you know is Captain. It's also in fire prevention office. That is a role that not many people hold. It's usually 1 person. The challenge would be for me to start understanding the intricacies of that position. It's more of a political position. There's a lot of appointments, meetings, planning board, stuff like that would be the most challenging aspect; however, since becoming lieutenant and knowing this position would eventually occur I went ahead and spent time, money and dedicated to learning. I already went through the fire academy and got my fire prevention officer level 1 basic and my 148A ticketing class. Hopefully on day one I'm ready to go other than for those small intricacies that I don't know yet. That is something I look forward to if chosen to work with the current fire prevention officer.

Mr. Silva: Welcome again. Your endeavor here is really exemplary. Without getting specific, can you give me something that's happened in the Fire Department that's really wow'd you.

Lt. Dooley: This is a great question. Since being named lieutenant I've strived on my crew for 2 things. Teamwork and communication. It means a lot. As a junior officer, under the guise of my captain I'm allowed to do that. I always say the captain points the way but the lieutenant keeps the boat going. Teamwork. What really wow'd me the other day was I was in charge and I asked my crew what they want to train on today. Normally it's training, showing some of the new guy's part of the apparatus he hasn't seen before, but they said it's time for us to train you. They asked me questions to prepare me for this. That proved that teamwork and things I've tried to teach them, they now had to teach me. That just happened 2 weeks ago. That made a difference.

Mr. Gennette: Lt. Dooley, pleasure to meet you. I don't think I've ever met you before. If the town was in a budget deficit and required the Chief to cut the Fire Department budget, besides cutting labor what advice would you offer the Chief?

Lt. Dooley: Another good question. Cutting budgets is the toughest thing I'd imagine an administrator has to go through. In this inflation driven economy, it's happening. You can't escape it. As a junior officer, since becoming lieutenant, the Chief entrusted me with implementing our computer program called First Due. It has many facets. It's Human Resources, calls, dispatch, everything. I was the sole proprietor and administrator with that. I still am today and I take pride in that. What I can offer, since I know so many intricacies of this program, is data collection. I would ask for his support and your support to allow me to gather more data, more logical analytics to determine how we're spending our money. We can say we can save here and there but we don't know that. We need to know where we're budgeted. Allowing me to perform these surveys, these lists would allow me to have better answers when those questions come. We can say this is where we're spending our money. Can we be more efficient here or there? Cuts are tough, but can we say we can budget our money better, can we be more efficient with our money? I think that is something I can offer as a junior officer.

Mr. Rosenblum: Lt. Dooley, welcome. Congratulations on making it into the room again. What do you consider the most critical qualities of a Fire Captain and how do you embody these characteristics in your leadership style?

Lt. Dooley: One of the biggest things I've harped on it before with my crew, is communication. As a leader, if you cannot communicate to the people you work with, physical, email, text, on the fire ground tent as a leader, what good is that? Everyone needs to know what's expected of you. How you do that is by communicating. We have to strive to always be better communicators. Every war, argument and fight was always based off poor communication. As a leader, if we can communicate better everything else falls in line. If I want to be the first to the door, I'm communicating. If I'm making sure everyone is out, I'm making sure everyone is out. It encompasses everything. Communication is huge. Just like we're communicating right now. Communicating as a leader is the most valuable asset I have as a leader.

Mr. DeBarge: You've always been impressive, when I worked with you and in all your interviews, and you don't disappoint now. I really like cover letters in these interviews. You really get to know somebody by what they write in their cover letter. The sentence where you said I'm ready to lead,

inspire with progressive solutions that will enhance the safety and well-being for our community, that's a great sentence. How do you do that?

Lt. Dooley: By using the biggest asset we have in the Ludlow Fire Department. That's our people. Putting all our efforts into getting better people and once we have them make sure everyone grows at a greater level so we don't just plateau, that our leaders step up and show examples of how we should be as a fire department to service excellence. Whether or not we're in our teams or writing grants, we are proving that we, Ludlow Fire Department personnel, are the greatest asset. When you think of the fire department, people think of the big red trucks and ambulances, but who's driving those? Who's actually coming to your door? It's the great people of the Ludlow Fire Department. That comes from great hiring processes, great screening, our programs with paramedic ride time that we're doing and hopefully a bigger, more robust explorer program. We can potentially grow. That's one of the biggest challenges we also face. Finding the right candidate. We have to keep the track that we just not hire to hire. That we hire the right candidate. And we've striven to always do that. That's something I'm very passionate about.

Mr. DeBarge: Do you have any closing comments?

Lt. Dooley: Thank you for letting me be here again. It's been an honor and privilege. Being named lieutenant has been one of the greatest privilege of my life. I've enjoyed every second of it and continue it with passion and love for this department. Again, luck did not bring me here. If you choose me you choose the path of hard work, you choose the path of commitment and dedication to this department, this town and our community. Thank you all. I appreciate your time, love the sweaters and hope you have a wonderful holiday.

Mr. DeBarge: Chief, do you have anything?

Chief Pease: We've already interviewed the candidates and I'm going to withhold any comments until after all the interviews.

6:05 p.m. – Fire Department Interview – Zachary Ellison

Mr. DeBarge: Acting captain and lieutenant Zack Ellison is with us now. As you know, you've been here before, we start off our interviews where you lead us off with an opening statement, we'll get into some questions and comments from our board, you can close with something if you want and we'll move on.

Lt. Ellison: Thank you everybody for staying a little later. Thank you for the festive atmosphere. It's kind of comforting. I'm always excited to come to these and deal with the board. It's always a very fair, good process. I think we have the comfortable dialogue. I'd like to thank all of you for making that a thing.

Mr. Rosenblum: Acting captain, lieutenant Ellison, welcome and congratulations on coming back into the room. What do you consider some of the most critical qualities of a fire captain and how do you embody these characteristics in your leadership style?

Lt. Ellison: I think the important qualities for a fire captain and any leadership or management position for that matter, to name a few, you have to be respectful of the people you work with and for. In public service that also include the public because that is who we work for. You have to be able to deal with unique situations every single day. No situation is going to be the same. You can't handle any situation the same. Especially with the public you have to approach those situations with a degree of respect, and I don't care to use the term all the time but subordinates. Being in a leadership positions means there will be people underneath you in rank. That certainly doesn't mean they work for you. You also work for them. It's a give and take and you have to have that mutual respect. Respect is going to build trust. How are you going to build trust? Consistency. Consistency is another term I use. You have to be consistent in your delivery of an unpopular order or something that's not looked upon favorably. You have to be consistent and fair and maybe put a little more effort into some things and explaining them. Conversely the consistency coming the other way with your feedback. You have to be fair and receive feedback consistently and I think that's what's going to build trust, especially with the people you work with and people you serve. You have to really like your job too.

Mr. Gennette: Lt. Ellison, it's a pleasure to see you. If the Town was in a budget deficit and required the Chief to cut the Fire Department budget, besides cutting labor what advice would you give the Chief?

Lt. Ellison: It's certainly not a position any of us would like to find ourselves in but times are tough in a Captain's position you do have to work with management and we're entering a new era and there's going to be those uncomfortable moments. The best thing I would do is rely on some of my experience with the union and dealing with budgets stuff. I'm used to looking at numbers and where we could trim or certain areas where we could cut back. We look at our turnaround times on the ambulance at the hospital and maybe work with the hospital on how we can get our personnel back to the community so we're not calling in extra people and rely on mutual aid there. We want to be careful when it comes to things like training and apparatus and equipment. We don't want to go too far into that category because that's what's going to make us ultimately better at our jobs and better for the Town. If there's something that can be touched on in the overtime area or honestly I've been a part of some equipment shopping, if you will. On certain types of equipment, you can get a couple different prices and see who's willing to do what. They're out there. There's a lot of people selling stuff. Sometimes you're a little handcuffed on what you need, but try to look into those areas first where we could trim just a little bit to something that's going to bring an overall deficit towards our common goal.

Mr. Silva: Congratulations. Without getting too specific, can you relay an event or something that happened at the Fire Department that's wow'd you?

Lt. Ellison: If I may touch upon a variety of instances. Not one instance but something I've learned is I've had the opportunity for over 3,400 hours of a supervisor experience as an acting Captain and acting Lieutenant as well. Every single one of those hours and shifts has taught me that the people I work with will bring out the best in themselves and better in me if I let them. I've always been more of a hands-on kind of person. I like to have my hands in there doing something. If it needs to be done I'll try to find a way to do it or we'll all put our heads together. Being in that supervisor role and having the opportunity to do that taught me to take a step back and let the people I'm working with let them work for you. Trust what they're going to do and trust their training. While I can't pinpoint one specific instance of that I have noticed several instances in that supervisor role where it's allowed me to take a step back and absorb what that leadership position might be as opposed to being the one who wants to be in the trench. It's given me a unique opportunity to step back and see everybody work.

Mr. Goncalves: What's the biggest challenge you foresee in the new role if you were appointed?

Lt. Ellison: While there will be a host of challenges, we do notice a few things in fire service in general. How do we keep ourselves healthy, how do we keep the people we deal with healthy? That's what we're there for. When it pertains to our own health, physically and mentally, we have to make sure we're in as close to tip top shape as we can be and that includes keeping our mind sharp. In the resources I know, we work with the PFFM and a few other entities, there's a push in the fire service for mental health and awareness. That may have been something that's been overlooked for a long time. It's made great strides. Society has and fire services is catching up and it's nice to see. Those are some tough conversations to have. We need to make ourselves available for each other when it comes to mental health. One more thing that really sticks out to me as a challenge but the changing in generations. When I started and when I was younger it was do this because that was that. The newer generation of fire service wants to know why. They don't want to say no but they want to know why. That may have been difficult for people to address for people in a leadership position. Because that's what we do can't always be an acceptable answer. There's room for traditions and best practice well-being but you can't be afraid to engage with the younger generation. You can't be afraid to engage. Be transparent, be fair, allow for a little bit of dialogue back and forth if that opportunity presents itself. There's going to be some opportunities where that's not going to be an option. As a leader, if you're not willing to explain the why then how can you expect anybody to follow you?

Mr. DeBarge: Zack, another great cover letter. I love reading cover letters. In yours you said you added 1,000 hours as a shift supervisor since becoming acting Captain 7 years ago and you say you're well versed in requirements for Captain positions and competently skilled in knowledge you've gained over your time at Ludlow Fire. How do you prioritize and delegate tasks during emergency situations to ensure safety of the crew and the public?

Lt Ellison: With that time, as we addressed in an earlier question, it has given me an opportunity to see, some of the folks I've worked with in the past everyone has told me you take a little bit of whoever you worked with, good and bad, a little bit from everybody and you try to meld yourself into something. I don't know what kind of cookie I make at this point but you kind of meld yourself into something. You take the good with the bad. There's a hierarchy of need. I've been very fortunate with those shifts and the individuals I work with seem to recognize the hierarchy of need. First and foremost, it's keeping each other safe and members of the public safe. When we're in emergency situations those things can become relatively obvious but there are other things that need to happen first. Being a supervisor and being in charge at an emergency scene it's not just about the moth to a flame mentality. You have to step back and take the whole picture. Experience will get you closer. I don't know that anyone is going to have that mastered. We as firefighters basically live by life safety, that's always first, property conservation and things like that. Prioritizing things in an emergency seems to get a little easy when it's obvious. Sometimes when it's not obvious if the call warrants it. I've had some experience with the State Hazmat Team where it's a slowdown, we need to think. We need to put our brains together. Working with law enforcement in some of these scenes as they get a little more chaotic, things in the world are not what they seem. Through taking a step back, prioritizing our safety and the public safety first, handle the emergency as it develops but also be prepared to maybe go a different direction, especially if it is more chaotic. Something I learned from a gentleman I worked with a long time ago is don't be afraid after the emergency to come back, sit around the table and get a good hot wash. What do people think of that? Just because you were wearing the different color helmet does not mean you're the only brain there. It's important to get that feedback.

Mr. DeBarge: Chief is going to reserve any comments until the end so if you have anything you want to close with, please.

Lt. Ellison: Again, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out. It was a very nice interview actually with some good questions. As I come to these, I don't get sick of it. I like to see this sort of thing. I enjoy participating in it. You have some great candidates for this position today. I wish you luck in your decision. I believe being a Ludlow townie that we have a wonderful community. Either way, I always look forward to coming to these, seeing all of you and to serve the town however I'm needed.

6:35 p.m. – Fire Department Captain Interview – David Nally

Mr. DeBarge: Welcome to the interview room. This is like the others. We'll start with an opening statement, if you have one, then we'll have a question or comment, you'll have a chance to make any closing comments if you like, and we'll move on. Welcome.

Mr. Nally: My name is Dave Nally. I've been with the Ludlow Fire Department going on 20 years in April. I'm a townie. I grew up in Town. I met my wife and graduated from Ludlow High School. I've raised both of my children who are both serving our community. My son is a corrections officer and my daughter is going to be a nurse pretty soon. Like I said, I've been with Ludlow 20 years but before that I've amassed a pretty significant experience. I started off at 17 in the Army right out of high school. I became a combat medic and did that for just under 12 years. The first half of that was with a combat support hospital. Think of Baystate Medical Center made out of tents and boxes put together in days and run just like a full hospital. After that I transitioned with an infantry unit and I got to work with a recon platoon. I did that for 4 ½ - 5 years before I got out. I got to work with some fantastic leadership there. I learned really caring about the people that you work with and for and really caring about what the mission is. Along with that, I went through a program via the Army to do civilian training at Springfield College. They picked 5 of us from Western Mass and put us through civilian EMT and paramedic school which culminated in a week internship in New York City, New York City EMS and is now FDNY. I worked out of Jacobi Hospital and gained years worth of experience. I've essentially worked in public service since I was 17. With the military and a short time with Mr. DeBarge on the Police Department, in EMS and fire. I come with a diverse background with my jobs in general. With the population. I worked about 12 years in Metropolitan EMS in Springfield and Holyoke. High pace, high volume, high calls. When I came to the department I had a pretty good resume of experience. Since then, I've continued on with my training. I've been an advocate for training in the department. I have certifications in fire officer 1 and 2, fire instructor 1 and safety officer. I have certifications outside the academy. I was the CPR instructor for a while. We're working on getting a program like that back into the department. I'm also the car seat inspection installation technician for the Town and

I have certifications in adolescent mental health. I'm just under 2,700 hours of acting Captain time and just under 400 hours of acting lieutenant time. I've gotten to work with 3 fantastic Chiefs that have given me good Captains to mentor along the way. Our previous Deputy Chief Crowley was a big helper for me and mentored me along the way and helped me get these certification classes started. With the help I've gotten from the department and the department has given me over the years, as a leader I think I can give back to the department. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. Silva: Welcome back. Without going into specifics, can you tell me something that's wow'd you at the fire stations? Something that you've appreciated.

Mr. Nally: I can think of quite a few things. We've come with the advances in the medical technology and fire technology that we have in leaps and bounds. In almost 20 years things are so vastly different from the way we do our run reports to the tools we use to cut somebody out of a vehicle. Those have been impressive. One of the coolest things I've gotten to see, in all the time I worked in EMS I've gotten the opportunity to deliver or help deliver 3 children. The 3rd one was with one of our guys that interviewed with you this evening, the first time he and another firefighter got to deliver a child. It's a scary moment for everybody but to see them do that work as such a functioning unit knowing they were scared to death. That's probably a big wow moment.

Mr. Gennette: Lt. Nally, nice to see you. If you had a budget deficit and required the Chief to cut the fire department's budget, besides cutting labor what advice would you offer the Chief?

Mr. Nally: I would prefer to not get to there. The Chief is more versed than me but he looks down the road in a magic globe to figure out the budget. I have no idea how. I prefer not to get there. There's steps to avoid that altogether. Being vigilant with preventative maintenance on our vehicles because that's probably our biggest expense. They get used hard when they need to but the preventative maintenance is a great team that takes the brunt of that. That is one step. Another is grants and ways to make yourself eligible for grants. We're trying to get that CPR program started. What that would entail is us being able to not only train at a much cheaper level, but town employees, coaches, nurses, firefighters, police, you could also move that into the community at a cheaper rate so you can get a vast majority of people from your town. We're already a heart safe community. Stack that on top of it having a senior class graduate where every student and teacher graduates and they get CPR certified. That's evidence in a bag when you're going to put in a packet for a grant. The training we do at the academy's doesn't combine to a lot. The more training we get we can document that Town firefighters have done the better your ISO rating looks, the better you are for grants. I'd rather not get to the point where you have to take any cuts.

Mr. Rosenblum: Welcome and congratulations on making it into this point. What do you consider the most critical qualities of a fire Captain and how do you embody these characteristics in your leadership style?

Mr. Nally: I've had some fantastic leaders over the years in all aspects of my career. You need to be humble. Just because they give you some bugles on your collar you're not the know all be all. You have a team that you work with. The team has different aspects that each member is fantastic at. You have to know how to utilize that team in a cohesive unit. Humility is a big thing. You have to be pretty decisive in your decision making. Knowing and taking to heart that your decision making can risk lives. To do that decisively you need to train yourself. You need to push yourself with your education and trade craft so you can have decisive decision-making protocol. Being an open-door policy type of person. An officer can just give orders. An officer can say you gotta do what you gotta do because I said so. That's not how the real world works. In an open-door policy your people should be just as comfortable telling you a gripe as they do telling you something great. It goes both ways. You need to be just as open to them.

Mr. Goncalves: If you were appointed to this new position, what do you think the biggest challenge would be for you?

Mr. Nally: The way I understand it, this position is going to be for the fire prevention officer. I don't see it as a challenge as much as an opportunity. The education aspect of it has quite a few classes that are pretty intensive that you have to catch up on. Aside from learning right side drive with the officer there now training you. There's a lot of academy classes and certifications that you need to step up to. I don't see it as a challenge. I've done so many classes at the academy that I'm extremely comfortable. I like doing the classes there. I'm a big advocate of training. That

probably comes from my military background. Training is the way you're going to play. If you don't train hard you're going to play lousy. I don't see it as much of a challenge but I see it as a small obstacle to overcome.

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Mr. DeBarge: You mentioned it in your comments and in your cover letter, 10+ years acting Captain, 2 acting lieutenant, that's a lot of hours. You've been doing it a while. How do you prioritize and delegate tasks during emergency situations to ensure safety of your crew and the public?

Mr. Nally: First and foremost, we go off of our policies and procedures. They're written specifically. This is how we do things. This is why we do things. There's some leeway in there. At the very forefront all of our policies, procedures and actions are safety oriented. Safety of the firefighters I'm with is the first and foremost. These trainings teach you how to do things to protect firefighters. It teaches you how to read how smoke is in a building. How building construction is going to work in a fire. How the environment, wind, rain, humidity is going to affect things there. Training on the tools we use inside these buildings. We use a thermal imager to look inside the smoke because you can't see anything otherwise. It's not just a tool you can hand anybody and say here you go, you're safe to go in there. You train everybody. Everybody should know their job and the job above them. As a firefighter, it's my job to know my job and the lieutenant's job and because I've been honored to have the opportunity to be acting Captain it's my job to know that job as well and vice versa.

Mr. DeBarge: Chief is going to hold comment until we're done with everything. Any closing comments?

Mr. Nally: I'd like to thank you, first and foremost. It's been a long process for you guys. It's been appreciated and it's not gone unnoticed. I'm honored to be able to be in the room and thank the Chief for all the opportunities he's given me over the years and I hope it goes my way. I wish you guys a happy holidays and I love your outfits.

Mr. Goncalves: Can you explain to me why we have some acting lieutenants.

Chief Pease: Last year you interviewed 9 candidates for the position of lieutenant. We never had that position before in the Ludlow Fire Department. Before that we had an acting Captain. We had a process for an acting Captain. To become an acting Captain, you had to pass a written department test, an oral interview and a fire problem in front of our command staff. Not everybody always passed that. To achieve that role years ago we implemented that. There was a certain group that passed back then and they were ok to be an acting Captain which would mean in the absence of a Captain typically it was the most senior guy that would fulfil that role. It's not always the most senior guy that's most qualified to fill that role so we had a process in place to determine who would be able to fill that role. A group of people passed that and became successful acting Captains at that particular time. As time went on in the span of control we're up to 8 sometimes 9 on a shift, a need for another rank under the Captain was there for safety reasons. You can't have 1 guy supervising 8 people. So, we have another who's deemed an officer on scene and there's no questions acting. We still have acting Lieutenants because when a Captain is out a Lieutenant moves up to Captain. The Captain in Ludlow is similar to a Deputy Chief in a lot of other municipalities. In the absence of the Deputy Chief and me who mostly work Monday – Friday, until we get there afterhours, they are in charge of the Town. In most other larger municipalities that's a Deputy Chief position. Our Captain position has a great responsibility, especially nights and weekends when there's not another Chief in the building. A year and a half ago the Lieutenants were appointed in June of last year. When it comes to civil service, when you open up a rank to promotion we only had 2 people who were willing to take that test to promote. Two of them were happy where they were. Only having 2 candidates for 1 position enables you to open it up to the lower rank because you get a bigger pool of candidates. In the past it was always firefighter to Captain. This is all relatively new. Let's say we promoted to the Chief's position, it opened up to the Deputy Chief and all the Captains because you didn't have a large selection to fill that position. I went from Captain to Chief. It's just the way it works. Lt. Dooley is the only official Lieutenant here. He's been in that position for a year and a half and he's been doing a wonderful job. Before that both firefighters Nally and Ellison were acting Captains for a long period of time. Firefighter Nally has 2,670 hours of acting Captain. If you look at what we work in a year, we work 2,100 a year so he has over a year's time in that acting Captain. Lt. Dooley did not have a lot of hours as acting Captain before he promoted to Lieutenant. He was around 413 hours. Firefighter Ellison

had around 3,400 hours of acting Captain time before we went through all that. All 3 of them interviewed for the Lieutenant's position. How civil service goes if you're going to pass somebody to get somebody further down on the list you have to have a good reason for that. Everybody that interviewed the last time was capable of doing the job and there was no reason to skip any of them so we went with the top 4 candidates. Firefighter Nally was tied with one of the top 4 candidates. A long explanation but going through this process you'll get to where they ranked. Before I get into that I just want to say I couldn't be more proud of the candidates that were brought before you folks and the Town today. Secondly, I couldn't be more proud of the department that this Town has that I have the privilege of representing. All the way from our newest firefighter to our most senior officer we truly have a great department and I am blessed to represent them and I think our Town is blessed to have such a service represent them. I want to say thank you to them. I know most of them are watching and I don't usually get that opportunity to say thank you to all of them at one time. I'm very proud of everybody, especially these candidates that we have brought before you today. Not one of them was here by any luck or happenstance. They have all worked very long. All of them are 10+ year veterans of our department who have always served the department well. They continue to go above and beyond to serve our department. Dooley has mentioned he's been instrumental in helping us implement our software, active shooter programs, he helps in the kitchen. Firefighter Nally with the child safety seats, CPR instruction. All of them help with training. Not to mention Dave's military experience, which he deserves a lot of credit for. Firefighter Ellison has been involved in our Safe Program and public education, which is a very worthwhile program for elementary schools. State Hazmat Team is a big undertaking that he's been part of. The union that goes without saying that's a thankless job. You get to learn both sides of the coin at that point. I could go on and on but they're all great, qualified candidates. Unfortunately, you can't give all of them a job today. After the last promotions it was tough for me for a while because you have so many great people and not everybody got a job. What intrigues me the most is what people do when they don't get the job. You've seen 2 guys here that didn't get the job the last time. It did not kill any of their ambition, it didn't kill any of their dedication to the department. I think it inspired them more. We've seen it in the past where people want to take their ball and go home and each of them who didn't get the position last time tried harder and fought their way back into the room and continued to do all the extracurricular activities and all the extra things they are good at to help the department and our town be a better place. I hope that whoever doesn't get the job today can show that kind of fortitude and character. The civil service process was Ellison #1, followed by Dooley, followed by Nally. Four of our Captains, Deputy Chief and I, Lisa, Carrie interviewed all 3 of the candidates in this room. I believe it was 7 questions to be answered. We all scored them, ranked them and talked about it. It's the first time Lisa participated in this kind of interview and I thank her for that. The rankings after that came out unanimous. It was close; however, there has to be a number 1 candidate. This is not a unilateral decision by just me. This is a decision that all of our officers who have had the ability and have been there for the length for almost all of their careers. What I do normally say to everybody that is seeking a promotion, your interview for that promotion begins at day 1 at the fire department and ends when you're in this room. A lot of us had a chance to interview these great candidates for the length of their career. Based on that we found Zack Ellison #1 followed by Dooley and Nally. It would be my recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to promote Zack Ellison to the position of firefighter Captain effective upon the retirement of Captain Doyle. This is not an easy decision. Promotions are not something I look forward to because there's always folks that are going to be upset. Hopefully everybody else you've seen here today will be in this room another night. They're all great people who serve our department very well.

Mr. Gennette: I really did like all these guys. These really were 3 stellar candidates. I think Mr. Dooley was pretty nervous when he sat down. He seemed to be the most nervous but it didn't take anything away from him. I really liked the military record of Mr. Nally. My question as far as what would they do to offer some advice as far as the budget goes, Mr. Ellison offered 2, 3, 4 different ideas that could possibly happen, whether or not they're viable doesn't matter. Mr. Dooley offered things that cost money to save money so it's kind of hard to do that in a budget situation. I think Lt. Ellison had better off the cuff responses to that like he actually thought about it before. I think all 3 candidates came in prepared for me to ask a technical question so I think they were surprised when I hit them with a budget question. I scored it with Lt. Ellison first, Lt. Nally 2nd and Lt. Dooley 3rd mostly because the amount of time they've shared as an acting Captain previously. I didn't see that time with Lt. Dooley elevated. It's civil service so my vote is Lt. Ellison.

Chief Pease: For the record, Lt. Dooley is the only Lieutenant in grade, the other 2 are at the rank of firefighter.

Mr. Gennette: I appreciate that. I don't think that changes my position. Civil service is what it is and my primary candidate is firefighter Ellison anyway so everything lines up for me.

Mr. Rosenblum: We've always said between Police and Fire that your process is much more thorough than we can offer on this Board. We always take the recommendations of our Chiefs and their interview committees very seriously. Obviously your recommendation carries a ton of weight with me and how the civil service lines up. Most importantly for me when it comes to firefighter Ellison is that I think I always ask the question where do you see yourself 5-10 years down the road and I think the person who is most prepared to be in your chair someday would be firefighter Ellison. As a union head he's dealing with everyone in that house every day when it has to do with money and benefits and your style of life in that aspect also. I also think that I look at officers as someone that can have budget experience. Being with the union I think that his budget experience and his answers with the union in relation to budget holds a lot of weight with me. I'm a budget guy. Also, we're always stewards of the community and he made mention of that. Being respectful to the public. For all of us in here, the Town of Ludlow are our employers. My vote would be for firefighter Ellison.

Mr. Silva: I'm pretty much in the same boat as what they're saying. For me to sit here and I know we've spoken to them several times, for me to know what it is exactly what they do out there, who better than the Fire Chief or the committee. I would probably never and I have not usually gone away from something like this. It's cut and dry for me.

Mr. Goncalves: I think we're really lucky to have 3 great guys. Lt. Dooley has some great experience. He's the only Fire Prevention Officer of the 3, right?

Chief Pease: Yes. He took the class.

Mr. Goncalves: Nally's idea of getting everybody CPR trained, I thought that was great. Make it a class mandatory to graduate. Firefighter Ellison is just a little bit quicker on his feet. A quicker thinker in times of emergencies. He's looking at the big picture. He's an out of the box type of guy and he's quick. I think he'd be able to communicate with everybody a little bit better than the other guys and probably more on point. From a standpoint of my own rating, Zack was first and the other guys were virtually the same. I would stay with the civil service recommendation.

Mr. DeBarge: Going off interviews alone are very difficult as a member of the Board of Selectmen, as we get to see on a motion or what we see on a paper and in the interview. I've worked with all 3 of these candidates and I can say to anybody watching with every bit of confidence, each one of them could be a Captain in the Fire Department and do a very good job at it. This was a fun interview for me, as I enjoyed the answers to questions from each and every one of them. I think Lt. Dooley is very well spoken and very driven. Since the first day I met him when he got onto the Fire Department he was driven and moving, like most all of them. He has that niche with a lot of stuff that you can tell he's very passionate about and I appreciate that. I've known Dave Nally the longest out of all of them. We did reserve Police Academy together a long time ago. A veteran law enforcement firefighter trainer, Dave has got it all. He's always there. He's very well liked. I'm very glad you're providing us with a recommendation from your interviews. I thought Zack's answers were probably, I rated him higher in answers from critical thinking, his hierarchy of comment caught me. I like that. Zack Ellison is a union president and does a lot more things there. I appreciate your recommendation because this one was tough for me. I definitely would go with yours as well.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to appoint firefighter Zack Ellison to the position of Captain for the Ludlow Fire Department effective as of Captain Doyle's retirement. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Chief Pease: I want to thank the Board and the candidates who came out today. It's hard to make a decision but that's my job and we make the best decision that we can, not to take anything away from both of those gentlemen who didn't get the job today. They're instrumental in the Ludlow Fire Department and what we do. I thank them for everything and I hope to see them back again.

Mr. DeBarge: Each and every one of them had impressive letters of recommendation.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Board to approve and sign the Selectmen Meeting Minutes of December 3, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the Selectmen Meeting Minutes of December 3, 2024, with all members present. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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Board to approve and sign the Executive Session Minutes of December 3, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the Executive Session Minutes of December 3, 2024, with all members present. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to renew the agreement between the Town and Faith Community Chapel for snowplowing.

Mr. Goncalves: I think it's been great having it there. I go by there in the morning and we're very fortunate to have that so people can get their kids out of the cars away from the traffic on East Street. We had 3 events last year that we had to plow for. It's a great asset. I highly recommend we renew it.

Mr. Gennette: Have we heard anything from the DPW claiming this is some kind of encumbrance or issue? I don't have any problem with this?

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to renew the agreement between the Town of Ludlow and Faith Community Chapel for snow removal at the East Street address across from East Street School. **Mr. Silva second. Motion passed 4-1-0.**

Board to sign the Ludlow Tennis Club Liquor License, change of manager. (Approved on November 21, 2024.)

Board to sign the Class II License for Matt's Auto Mall. (Approved on December 3, 2024.)

Board to sign the Common Victualler and Entertainment License for CMD Café. (Approved on September 3, 2024.)

NEW BUSINESS

Board to approve and sign the 2025 Liquor Licenses, Common Victualler Licenses and Entertainment Licenses Renewals and waive the fees for the following: Ludlow Council on Aging, Christ the King Church, Ludlow Community Center, Brigham Lodge, The First Church in Ludlow, St. Elizabeth's Parish, St. Peter/Paul Ukrainian Church, Exit 7 Theater, Our Lady of Fatima Parish and Family United Methodist Church.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to approve and sign the 2025 Liquor Licenses, Common Victualler Licenses and Entertainment Licenses Renewals and waive the fees for the following: Ludlow Council on Aging, Christ the King Church, Ludlow Community Center, Brigham Lodge, The First Church in Ludlow, St. Elizabeth's Parish, St. Peter/Paul Ukrainian Church, Exit 7 Theater, Our Lady of Fatima Parish and Family United Methodist Church. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to sign the ABCC 2025 Seasonal Population Increase Estimation Form.

Mr. Goncalves: 19,322.

Mr. DeBarge: We had 21,380 once.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the ABCC 2025 Seasonal Population Increase Estimation form. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss New Year's Eve hours for liquor license establishments.

Mr. Silva: I don't believe we had any issues with the way we've been doing it the past years.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to approve New Year's Eve hours for liquor establishments. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the Class I, II, III Licenses for 2025.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to approve and sign the Class I, II, III Licenses for 2025. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Department of Public Works – Update to Cemetery Rules, Regulations and Fees.

Mr. Goncalves: Do you want to wait until they come in for the trash?

Mr. DeBarge: Sure.

Department of Public Works – Update to Transfer Station and Compost Facility Rules, Regulations & Fees.

Mr. DeBarge: We can save that.

Board to appoint interim Treasurer/Collector retroactive to November 20, 2024.

Mr. Strange: Essentially you have to appoint me as the interim Treasurer/Collector and I'm going to get bonded, until we get a full-time replacement.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to appoint Marc Strange as the interim Treasurer/Collector for the Town of Ludlow retroactive to November 20, 2024. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to appropriate \$12,600 in ARPA funding for engineering services to assist town with implementation of a temporary traffic management plan and pursuing a small bridge grant to fund the design of the Higher Brook small bridge rehabilitation.

Mr. Strange: We discussed previously about me doing an accounting of exactly how much we have in ARPA. I have not been able to do that. Things have been a little bit too busy. I have an estimate in my head. There's 3-4 ARPA projects that came in late and the thought was to put them in front of you all and if you think they're worth approving, approve them and maybe prioritize them and we'll take a look. Afterwards I can take a look and see how much we have left between now and the 31st and we can enter into a signed proposal or contract with those entities and get our ARPA money spent. This particular one is for preliminary design work for the culvert at Higher Brook, which is just outside of the Fire Station. Tighe & Bond would help us put together a grant for the small bridge grant program.

Mr. Goncalves: I think all the engineering is included in the grant.

Mr. Strange: Correct.

Mr. Goncalves: This has to happen. The longer we wait the worse it's going to be. That money is available right now.

Mr. DeBarge: It will be a big traffic issue so we should get this done.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to allocate approximately \$12,600 in ARPA funding for the engineering at the Higher Brook small bridge near the Fire Station on Route 21. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to appropriate \$12,000 in ARPA funds for a new TopsyTurny for Whitney Park.

Mr. Strange: The proposal is to replace a really old jungle gym. It's like a tire swing but more vertical so kids can stand on it. It's a dynamic piece of playground equipment. More contemporary, new and functional.

Mr. DeBarge: Was this a request by Rec?

Mr. Strange: It was not. The company we got the bleacher quote from also provides playground equipment and they sent us a bunch of different suggestions.

Mr. DeBarge: The goal here is to approve what we have tonight and we'll distribute once we find out the actual funds.

Mr. Rosenblum: It also has caution tape on it. It makes sense to get it out of there so it's not a hazard and replace it.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to appropriate \$12,000 in ARPA funds for a new TopsyTurny for Whitney Park. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly appropriate ARPA funds for new bleachers at Whitney Park.

Mr. Rosenblum: Was there a price? It was cut off.

Mr. Strange: There were 3 different ways we could do it. \$23,000 just for the bleachers; 4 of them. There was a price for bleachers with a concrete pad in the \$40's, and an installation cost. The installation brought it up to \$83,000. The question is do we want to just buy the bleachers and have them on hand? We can probably store them at the DPW and then figure out removal of the existing bleachers. I think the DPW is doing this pad here so they can probably pour pads for the bleachers.

Mr. Silva: Do you have the number of people they're going to hold?

Mr. Rosenblum: I don't remember. Mr. DeBarge said a lot of people bring their own fold out chairs. I'd like to know what the capacity is too. One towards one side, one to the other so home and visitor are separated. They're movable and they have chain link on the back of them so no one can fall off the back or a metal barrier across the back.

Mr. DeBarge: Are you looking to get an approval for the bleachers themselves?

Mr. Strange: It's up to you guys. It seems like if you do the whole thing that will be the rest of the ARPA money. We'll probably have to dip into 40R.

Mr. Rosenblum: I wouldn't have a problem with one and one.

Mr. Strange: My daughter plays soccer. We always bring our chairs on the sidelines.

Mr. Silva: I've been under those bleachers an awful lot but I don't recall what's under there. Is it gravel?

Mr. Strange: I think it's just right on the ground.

Mr. Rosenblum: If we approve it can it be withdrawn?

Mr. Strange: You guys can approve it all and we'll have to sign a proposal. These are engineering services and not subject to 30B so we can sign that proposal. I think this company is on State contract. If you approve everything, whatever we don't approve you can come back and rescind the vote. Maybe approve up to \$25,000.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve up to \$25,000 of ARPA or extra funds if needed for new bleachers at Whitney Park. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

VISITATIONS

7:00 p.m. – Tax Classification Hearing

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to open the tax classification hearing at 7:03 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Alves: All the numbers are positive

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Mr. O'Rourke: The executive summary. Fiscal 2025 is an interim year update. The work is complete and has been approved by the Department of Revenue. The fiscal year 25 values are as of 1/1/24 and are based on the sales between 1/1/2022 and 12/31/2023. Our current assessment level is approximately 95%. The DOR allows assessment levels between 90-110%. Third line values have increased by approximately 26% and 10%. The total valuation of the town increased by 7%. New growth came in at \$28,778, 388 for fiscal 2025. Most of the new growth came from new residential construction \$14,951,800 followed by new personal property \$13, 826,588. The minimum residential factor is 88.388. The tax levy has increased by \$1,661,963; 2.1 from \$51,928,939 in fiscal 24 to \$52,990,992 in fiscal 25 which is the maximum allowable limit. The tax rate at 100% will be \$17.18 compared to last year's \$18.09, minus \$.91, so 5.1 decrease. Under the current classification rate of 100% the average single family tax bill will increase by \$249, 4.0% from \$5,626 last year to \$5,581. The average commercial tax bill will increase by \$925, 5.1% from \$12,415 last year to \$13,005. Any attempt to shift more of the tax burden from residential to the CIP classes would result in significant increases to the CIP taxes since these classes comprise only 18.9% of the total value of the town. The impact of any further shift is illustrated in the tables on the next page. Due to the disproportionate increase created by imposing a split rate, the assessors strongly recommend in keeping the classification rate at 100%.

Mr. Alves: The second page illustrates some of what we just talked about. The values of single-family homes increased from last year \$311,000 to \$335,000, about \$19-20,000 increase. The tax bill average is \$5,694 will increase to \$5,924. This is what we've seen the last couple years. We are pretty fiscally conservative. I think the budget proceedings have been pretty tight. Working with Marc and seeing the work being done, we've buttoned it up a little bit. Stuff is very expensive. Same with commercials. Everything is on the up. The average value is \$686,000 went up to \$750,048 along with a bill from \$12,415 in 24 is going up about \$448 to \$12,863. Usually, you want to be well in the 20%. We're actually reversing that. We were at 21% last year but our residential is growing at such a rate that it's flipping the number backwards and residential becomes bigger and bigger.

Mr. Rosenblum: I remember it being close to 20 last time.

Mr. Alves: We were above 20 but everyone sees the new construction town for the residential. It's a machine and it's flipping the number towards the residential. Turning any of that burden increases the burden on other classes. Being conservative, a single rate would make sense for this town at the moment.

Mr. Goncalves: At this rate have we maxed out our 2 ½?

Mr. Alves: We still have some wiggle room in there. \$800,000 or a little less that we didn't completely use it. Our growth helped that. Our receipts came in positive. Growth at 28 million is still pretty healthy compared to some communities. New growth has to be new on the ground. It can't be an update to a kitchen or an addition. New construction. You see the numbers are tremendous on that side of it. Our personal property this year went up a lot as well. We didn't have the solar, like previous years. Our solar has been helping us out a lot. This year we started a re-eval of personal property and it picked up a lot of value. Our reps in the field picked up a lot of new stuff. Next year I'm expecting the same. A couple things online that we're working on. A storage facility would be a tremendous asset for the town financially. We don't get those type of deals every day. Just working through some of the logistics through the town.

Mr. Goncalves: Next year we should bring on some of the mills, right?

Mr. Alves: Yes, the mills will give us a boost as well. We did get some value from the sale of Mill 8 but nothing to the extent of next year because it's going to be a completed project. We do have restrictions on how we can value them because they do have some rent control but I see a healthy number coming from them as well. The lot sales have been pretty healthy as well. As that stuff starts to develop and is online, as of right now we'll be able to tax it fully next year.

Mr. Goncalves: How about the apartments by Harris Brook? Are those going to be 100%?

Mr. Alves: No. Those are going to be a tough nut. They're HAP so very controlled how we can value them by the state. I wish we could go in there and value them fully but we have to dial back and follow the guidelines on how to value them. They won't be at 100%. Market type value will be more state class value. I think that will be a PILOT we'll have to do. Maybe something this board can negotiate.

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Mr. Goncalves: If we were to ever get another one like that is there something we can do preemptively to discuss the taxes?

Mr. Alves: No, not if they're the same 501 like HAP is. They're non-profit so we have limitations on how we can go at them. They pay on the land; they've been paying for years. Once the project is fully completed is when we're going to have to figure out the value and negotiate a PILOT for them. Preemptively we have to look at the bylaws. I'm sure you have talked about it enough. The mills have a lot of potential as well with the large splits in the back. They're looking for a heavy hitter project, not so much splitting into smaller lots. Hopefully some of these things come to fruition. I expect the same type of growth we've had the last few years to keep us going.

Mr. DeBarge: We're hoping for Mill 11 next.

Mr. Alves: Maybe a couple of solars also. A few other battery storage facilities but those are a different approach at the moment. We'll have to work through those humps.

Mr. Silva: You mentioned lot sales over there.

Mr. Alves: Riverside? Yes, they're selling them for about \$180,000, which I thought was pretty generous. About 40,000 SF. Some are vacant, some have buildings on them. I think Tandem Bagel is coming in one of them. As they sell and get developed we should see some benefit from that.

Mr. Strange: I think they're working on Building 9 too. It's behind Mill 8.

Mr. Alves: I think Amazon is in there. The Mills is sectioning off the old lots on the Stockholm instead of having them all in one parcel they're subdividing them and selling them off. It generates a whole lot more value than what they would if they keep them all in a larger parcel.

Mr. Silva: The new building is not subsidized, right?

Mr. Alves: It's market rate. There is some subsidized in there.

Mr. Silva: So that should be bringing in full.

Mr. Gennette: Do the mills contribute to our number unit quota? How close are we getting to that?

Mr. Strange: I'd have to ask Doug.

Mr. Alves: That's going to be tremendous value. They did a great job, as everyone sees. It's going to have a lot of good value but they're going to have a little bit of controlled rent.

Mr. Goncalves: The building directly behind the Senior Center there was a warehouse.

Mr. Alves: There's an Amazon and a newer one. Those sold separately from the mills as well. They cut those out.

Mr. Goncalves: They cut those out right there on the corner. They're just about ready to go. That was a 2-3-million-dollar project.

Mr. Alves: They're cleaning up and a lot more value when they break up the lots and sell them. Then a business comes in with their enterprise. It's definitely looking good down there.

Mr. Silva: Why would we go into a PILOT program at HAP housing?

Mr. Alves: They're similar to the old Boys & Girls Club with the HAP. We can have a few different approaches with them. We have a PILOT through HAP now with the Senior building.

Mr. Silva: Why don't you just do a commercial value based on the rents that they're getting, which drastically reduces the price?

Mr. Alves: They're going to be under the HAP name, not for profit.

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Mr. Silva: I've had them before and Falken Housing, which is virtually the same thing, same with the big project in Wilbraham, and that's how we did it. It's a commercial entity and we just grossed out the rents and did an income approach for the value and it seems to be the way to go.

Mr. Alves: We're going to generate money, not as much as a private full-blown entity but they're going to be online. Next year they'll be taxed 1/1/25 for 26. They're not completely done. They're still under construction so we'll be able to pick some of that up but not to the extent when it's fully operational.

Mr. Strange: Should we meet with them?

Mr. Alves: I think we should meet with them. Maybe me and you can sit down with them. I don't have any numbers. They haven't provided me with a single piece of paper with how they're renting, what they're charging, where with the mills they're very proactive and they shared a lot with us.

Mr. Strange: Maybe in the spring. I don't know when they're scheduled to be done with construction.

Mr. Alves: Right now, they look about 50% complete. They've got the structures up, roofing and starting to side it.

Mr. Goncalves: Is there some type of special legislation that prevents us from taxing it normal? Is it because it's the non-profit part of it?

Mr. Alves: We do have some DOR restrictions. We'll have to see what they're charging for rent and figure their values from that. Kind of like mill 10. We only valued them at about close to 3 million because everything is so controlled, where they're probably worth 25 million on the open market. Because they're rent controlled that affects the way we value.

Mr. Strange: It might be valuable to touch on the relationship between the tax rate and the increase in value of the homes. Every year, at least recently, the tax rate has gone down which is a good thing and that's because the values of the homes have gone up, which is also a good thing. Your primary asset is increasing in value. That also means your tax bill is going to increase about \$250.

Mr. Alves: As the values go up and the tax rate goes down and whatever the town needs to operate usually bumps up that difference. It's still a good tax rate because it gives you a lot of wiggle room in the future. I don't see the values dropping. At the rate they're increasing the values will never drop. Back in 08 they went up a lot faster than they came down, but they never came down to the same level. Our sales have been pretty incredible like I'm sure every town is experiencing. Last year was probably our healthiest increase of 14%. This year was a little lower because after last year's increase we tapered off a little bit. We'll probably see the same next year. I can't say it will be the same extent as last year but it's a trend.

Mr. Strange: So, the tax rate is really market driven. We have a certain amount of revenue that the town has to raise through property taxes based upon our budget and there's a certain amount of parcels that we have and depending on the value of those parcels if they're higher that means the rate for each parcel is lower. For us it's old hat now but for the public it's any time I got into this work I would hear my tax rate is going down; great, then you get your bill and it's like you get your bill and you thought the town is trying to pull a fast one. That's not the case. Your values go up, the tax rate goes down; your value goes down, the tax rate goes up.

Mr. Goncalves: You've got the total amount that you need to operate the town divided by the total value.

Mr. Alves: The way to bring the taxes down is our local receipts, which they've been healthy. So, increasing those helps. Less spending as well but the local receipts play a big part in the tax rate

as well. The more money we bring in the less we need to go out to the taxpayers. We're always looking for ways to get our receipts up. Trash fee increase, building permits, stuff like that. We're pretty conservative this year on our recap. We did bring some of the receipts pretty even and some higher than last year because we know they're going up. You have to put a comment in there why they're going up. DOR is happy with it. It was a lot of work the last few days but we got it done and it was good to see the tax rate go down.

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Mr. Silva: I'm going to remind people not to put too much emphasis on tax rates because they don't mean much other than it is what it is and they fall into the division. What really matters is look at the average tax bill in the various communities. We are still pretty low compared to our surrounding communities. If you go on the data bank on the Department of Revenue they have all kinds of information; however, we are getting closer to the upper communities. I believe we're about \$2,000 less than Wilbraham. We used to be quite a bit more. Longmeadow is another animal. That is partly because Longmeadow, every override that's ever been proposed in Wilbraham for schools has passed. Ludlow does not pass overrides. Let's try to remember that. Try to keep your numbers straight on the average tax bill.

Mr. Strange: Going back to the 2nd bullet point on the executive summary, our current assessment level is approximately 95%. The DOR allows assessment levels between 90-110%. I never quite totally understood what that means. Does that mean our total assessed value, we're taking 95% of that total assessment?

Mr. Alves: It's about the sales. We're 95% sales to assessment ratio.

Mr. Goncalves: You basically have to keep this within that range. You can't let it go 3 years and not do any comparable and just adjust the rate and leave the values where they are.

Mr. Alves: Sales come in and have to be adjusted. If a sale comes in and my assessment is \$100,000 less than the sale, that has to go up to 90%. Knowing the number is always going up and down 95 seems to be the number. Some communities are 99, other ones are 97-90. 95 gives us wiggle room to get ready for the sale drop or sale increase. I think we've been as low as 91 and as high as 96.

Mr. Strange: On average? I sold real estate for a brief period of time. I would go on and the assessment would be \$35,000 less than what the market value was.

Mr. Alves: 95 is a good number. Our numbers on the sales compared to our assessment, the higher end properties are a lot closer than our lower end properties. We're way off on those. That's the nature of the market. We're not doing anything wrong. The higher properties sell for what we have because we have fresh numbers. The lower ones are now selling at 250. Unfortunately, we have to bring that up. That's probably the one question we get every year.

Mr. Silva: It's important to know that these assessments are based on 2022-2023. At this point the assessment is done based on those years of sales. Where the sales come in, say it's 95, next year we could be at 90 if things keep going up. The other thing is you don't want to be too low because if you fall below 90 it's a problem. You have to adjust values.

Mr. Strange: If you have a house that somebody has been in for 10-15 years and the market has gone up, then that assessment is probably going to be quite a bit below market rate. If you're not reassessing it.

Mr. Silva: Not necessarily. Those will go up anyway because you're doing an adjustment based on current market conditions. You're going to adjust them. I'm glad we have Vision. You can analyze by different styles, grades, all kinds of things. If you have to adjust your value to 8% you'll have to adjust. Based on several years ago nobody wanted a ranch. It was amazing how cheap they were compared to colonials. Now, people are back and they want ranches and it's flipped. What happens in these market adjustments is now ranches go up; colonials stay there and these people are complaining. There's a lot of variables. As far as the market rate we're staying at 95, we're probably good. Let's say the values start dropping like crazy, you're not allowed over 105 or below 90.

Mr. Alves: The next few years we'll probably want to go up 1 or 2 expecting a drop and as we drop we still are right there. We have to be ahead of the data a little bit.

Mr. Goncalves: It's not going to put pressure on you to have to act quickly vs if you did nothing and the market has a big turn.

Mr. Alves: We use tables for classes, not individual homes so a lot of people have misconceptions that I go in there and target a sale. I do revise all the sales but when we move the values everybody sees the same percent increase on the same type of home and same type of neighborhood. We had a transition from one software to another and having good data was key to spit out the data for this meeting. It was a lot of work but we stayed pretty level.

Resident: If we overtax them it would put the burden on the businesses and you stand the chance of businesses leaving. That affects our smaller businesses in town and the residents. You seem to be headed in the right direction. I don't have a whole lot to offer.

Mr. Gennette: I do see in the motion here that you have 1 for a single tax rate and one for a split tax rate. You're obviously recommending the single.

Mr. Alves: Yes. The next few years business will see a bump because we're doing a re-eval on personal property so that usually brings an increase to values on that end. A lot of our growth is also from utilities. Eversource and such has a tremendous growth so a lot of our commercial growth comes from that. This year we saw a good bump on that as well.

Mr. Goncalves: Which helps with the percentage being a little more on that side even though you're not making an adjustment here it's happening anyway.

Mr. Alves: It's happening anyway. Our residential, with the amount of new homes and subdivisions coming in are pretty steady.

Mr. Gennette: Are most of the towns around us single tax rate?

Mr. Alves: There's a mix. The larger communities are split. Us and Wilbraham are a single tax rate.

Mr. Silva: Cities are a single tax rate and they're up into 30%. It's unfortunate that we got such a decline in commercial properties. Guess who's paying for it now? Residential properties are paying more money. It is what it is.

Mr. Alves: We're lucky right now. Our demographics on commercial keeps increasing, not as the same rate as residential but we have a very healthy commercial side to our town that people sometimes forget about.

Mr. Gennette: It will be a little more challenging to fill that mills park if we ever did try to push the envelope with a tax rate anyway. I think it would be harder to bring business in.

Mr. Alves: It's usually a big sticker shock right off the bat. I think this happened my first year here, 2004, and we ended it the next year because it was dramatic for the businesses so the board reversed their course.

Mr. Silva: Is Joe going to explain the exemption for single family homes, lower end?

Mr. Alves: We have the small residential exemption. Selectmen, with the approval of counsel, may make residential exemption to class I residential properties of principle residence of the taxpayer on January 1. On the amount, the exemption may not exceed 20% of the average assessed value of all class I residential properties. To calculate the exemption the assessors first determine the average assessed value of all residential parcels. The adopted percentage is applied to this amount. The assessment value of each residential parcel that is the domicile of the taxpayer is then reduced by that amount. What this does, we have about 4,300 parcels that would qualify for this and we would take a percentage of their assessment and move it to the higher class of residential, putting more burden on the higher valued homes, that already pay more taxes than anyone else. That number is pretty large. We're talking about 438 million would be shifted.

Mr. Goncalves: A luxury tax?

Mr. Alves: Sure. At the Cape, I don't know if Martha's Vineyard has this but Nantucket is where homes are so big and worth so much money that they want to keep some of the residents still affording a home there to work in the town. I don't think we're that type of town or we're that crazy to shift that amount of money to the higher end homes.

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Mr. Silva: We're almost there. The elderly and lower end are struggling. I hear it all the time. Now they're going to get another \$250 increase. The rate of increase in social security is not happening. It's getting tougher and tougher for them. I harp on this every single year.

Mr. Alves: You're correct. We have an exemption from Veteran's to all sorts of exemptions and that's the people you see struggle. The elderly get exemptions. Those are the hard hit. Having said that, the higher end homes also have a tremendous burden on them. I know they can pay it but how fair is it to bring even more value that's not theirs into that demographic. That's a decision you guys make. We usually make a motion not to adopt a residential exemption. The next one is a small commercial exemption. It works similar but slightly different. They can grant a small commercial exemption to all classes III commercial properties occupied by business with an average employment of no more than 10 and an assessed valuation less than a million. They have to be owned by a resident before they qualify?

Mr. Silva: No if the laws are still the same they have to be valued under 1 million dollars and less than 10 employees. It's vigorous to search which ones qualify. You have to find the ones that qualify, are Ludlow based. Rental properties can even be included, which doesn't make sense because the landlord would get the benefit and the tenant probably wouldn't. You have to get the Secretary of State list.

Mr. Alves: We get a list every year.

Mr. Silva: It's also something that would help the mom & pops and small units that we have. The higher end commercial properties would have to pay for it.

Mr. Alves: You would have to do a good study making sure there's only 10 employees. We get a list from the state that's not 100% accurate. There's a lot of businesses that are on there that obviously don't qualify. By looking at the list we'll probably have 110 parcels that qualify for this and about 35 million worth of value that we would shift to the commercial class. We're shifting values to higher end properties already paying a lot. Commercial is heavy on a few entities so this wouldn't be as hard pressed as the residential. About 5 entities are the majority of our value. It's still a tough ask. We recommend not to adopt the small commercial exemption.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adopt the single tax rate residential factor of 1. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to not adopt the residential exemption. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to not adopt a small commercial exemption. Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Alves: Normally I would ask you to go on DLS and sign but they have gotten rid of that. It's the clerk and my board so you're off the hook.

NEW BUSINESS

Department of Public Works – Update to Cemetery Rules, Regulations & Fees. Update to Transfer Station and Compost Facility Rules, Regulations & Fees.

Mr. Goodreau: We have an increase on the sticker fee from \$20-\$30. Our main cost was the brush grinding. Right now we have unlimited brush so no we'll allow people 2 loads of brush for free and we're going to charge \$20 per additional load. We're paying \$40,000/year in brush grinding.

Mr. Gennette: How are you going to regulate that?

Mr. Goodreau: We'll have a guy out back and he'll hand them slips.

Mr. Tomas: Which we don't have now.

Mr. Gennette: If this doesn't work out we can always revisit.

Mr. Tomas: It's getting very expensive to grind brush.

Mr. Goodreau: Everything else stayed the same except it went up to \$30, seniors will still be free. A couple items went up \$5 to break even.

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Mr. DeBarge: All that is listed at your office.

Mr. Goodreau: The only changes with the cemetery are the foundations. The concrete has gone up so much we're not breaking even so we raised the monument foundations to cover the cost of the concrete. We increased nonresident prices from \$1,200 to \$1,500.

Mr. Gennette: I'm sure we've done it all along but I didn't realize it, but nonresidents can get plots in our cemetery?

Mr. Goodreau: Yes. It's normally more than the other one. This is to make it the difference that it was before. The other thing was overtime for a Saturday funeral it went to \$400.

Mr. Gennette: Do we need to formally adopt these or is this just notification?

Mr. Goodreau: It's just letting you know this is going to take effect.

Mr. Silva: Because we're the acting board do we need to do anything?

Mr. Goodreau: The trash will take effect January 1. They would just talk about the changes that will take effect. The cemetery will be effective as of today.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to approve the recommendations of the DPW for the cemetery fees as outlined before us. I further move we approve the fees for the transfer station and compost facility. Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Rosenblum: Are we still able to dump grass?

Mr. Goodreau: No changes.

Mr. Rosenblum: There was a notification that went out based on weather at this point.

Mr. Tomas: It's closed right now. For a snowstorm we shut it down because it gets too muddy back there.

Mr. Goodreau: We put up barricades so people could get salt and sand.

Mr. Rosenblum: You put out a notification based on the first snow fall.

Mr. Gennette: Grass & leaves you can still dump.

Board to approve and sign the contract with USA Waste for trash and recycling services.

7:20 p.m. – Trash Committee

Mr. DeBarge: We wanted you guys here because last meeting we were going to sign. We understand it wasn't ready. Not necessarily all the contractual numbers but most importantly what the change is. Company changes, the bins, the streaming, stuff like that. If you can point that out we can let them know what you did on the committee. It was a hell of a job by the committee. I think the new contract with the company is fantastic. I think the intangibles are fantastic. The size of the barrels, the single streaming. The bonus is that it's costing us less. You did the work so let us know. We don't need to get into the weeds of all of it but the highlights.

Mr. Goodreau: Basically, we're going to go with USA Waste. For the last 4 months we've been going back and forth with 3-4 haulers. USA for disposal and collection never really changed their numbers. They were from the start the low bidder. Other companies had come down over the course of those 4 months. These guys were pretty consistent. We're going to switch to automation. That will entail every resident will get one 65-gallon container for trash which will get picked up weekly and one 95-gallon recycling that will be bi-weekly but it will be switched to single stream where all your recyclables go into one container. Your trash collection days will stay the same and the pickup schedule will stay the same. The only thing is on your recycling if you're not on the first week it will be the next week. Then it will be every other week. Collection days will stay the same. The only difference is it's automation and you'll have the 2 carts provided. They'll be delivered to your house assembled.

Mr. Silva: Recycling will be every other week. Wouldn't it be more cost effective for them to do it all at once?

Mr. Goodreau: They can't. They're going to have 3 different trucks in town, 2 for trash. There will be 2 different routes in town for trash. The 3rd truck will just be doing recycling. They have enough time to do 1 route for the day and the next week they'll be at the other one.

Mr. DeBarge: What is the resident's responsibility to the barrels?

Mr. Goodreau: Normal wear and tear, if something happens to them, when they deliver them to each house they scan them all in and there's tags in them so we know where every barrel is. If one gets damaged we give them that serial number and we have a 10-year warranty on these. If something goes wrong they replace it for free. We'll buy some spare tires, lids, and store them and USA Waste is going to maintain the carts for free as long as we provide parts.

Mr. Gennette: The total cost for the barrels is included in the contract?

Mr. Goodreau: No. We are going to lease. When you go through the lease we're saving about \$70,000/year by us purchasing than having the contract. We were able to get into a 6-year lease with the company. Five years would have been \$15,172. A 6-year lease is \$12,678. We're saving \$30,000/year in our budget for 6 years and when I did the math we're only paying \$2,000 more in interest. \$910,000 over 60 months or \$912,000 over 6 years. It was a no-brainer.

Mr. Gennette: What are you saving from the existing contract to what the contract is now?

Mr. Goodreau: Without the carts, we're \$100,000 less for the first year of this contract to what we're paying currently in the contract. With the carts it's about \$150-\$200,000 in our budget. We're roughly \$50,000 more in the first year than we currently are and that's purchasing the carts.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, my blue bins now become storage. How much does a blue bin hold?

Mr. Goodreau: 18 gallons. This is going to be 5 times as much.

Mr. Goncalves: On the purple bags you'll continue to be able to buy them and you can put them out.

Mr. Goodreau: We anticipate a lot less purple bags since we double the trash per week. Also, in this contract they aren't going to charge us anything extra if there happens to be a purple bag out. Other contractors were going to charge us \$1/bag because it's full automation. They are going to pick them up as part of this contract for nothing.

Mr. Rosenblum: Since we've doubled the capacity in our barrels for trash weekly, the people that have been paying \$11.75 for a roll of 5 bags means their cost should go down depending on what the new fee is going to be.

Mr. Goodreau: Anything that goes to the transfer station will have to be in a purple bag.

Mr. Gennette: I tried fighting to get rid of the purple bags because I think it's ridiculous. With the size of the barrels, you're going to use them so infrequently it wasn't worth dying on that hill.

Mr. Silva: Inception date?

Mr. Goodreau: It will be July 1. USA came out and did an inventory of our municipal buildings and got what they need for dumpsters. What's in that contract they will be picking it up. Rehrig has us in their schedule for production in June. It will take 2 weeks to deliver to every household. By the middle to the end of June you'll have carts at every house.

Mr. Gennette: These belong with the property. If you decide you want to move out of your house you're not taking your trash barrel with you.

Mr. Goodreau: You'd be surprised, and we really didn't understand this, but when they showed us it is a web-based thing. On a screen you'll have yellow dots all over the screen where every barrel is.

Mr. Gennette: Somebody can't steal somebody else's bins.

Mr. Goncalves: Somebody is not going to be able to complain they didn't get picked up because the truck will go by, it will scan the tag and it will be filmed as it is being emptied.

Mr. Goodreau: The main thing you run into is if trash wasn't picked up it's because they didn't have it out by 7 a.m. and trash happened to come early that day. With the tag system they'll be able to tell what time the trash was out. They do have cameras on their trucks for insurance purposes so they could watch back the footage and see what time they went by that house.

Mr. Rosenblum: Will there be an education to the people?

Mr. Goodreau: USA Waste is putting together an education package. They're going to get together with the cart company and they're going to attach them to the cart when they get delivered.

Mr. Rosenblum: When you drive through other communities it's almost military style.

Mr. Tomas: They have a website that is very user friendly.

Mr. Goodreau: USA Waste is creating a separate just Ludlow so there will be certain employees that will deal with Ludlow people. There will be a number for Ludlow residents so they'll be the ones familiar with our community and they'll take all the calls for any concerns.

Mr. Rosenblum: When it comes to communication we could communicate until our eyes turn blue but someone is still not going to find out. The instructions will be with the barrels when they're distributed.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Sanches, as chair of the Finance Committee and member of the Trash Committee, how do you feel about this?

Mr. Sanches: Great. The automation is huge. Coming from family of 4, having a 65-gallon is going to be very helpful and will cut down on the bags. With the 95-gallon, putting the cardboard and everything together in the recycling is going to be a big improvement as well. Big improvements for the community.

Mr. Rosenblum: As a larger family, how many times do you put purple bags out?

Mr. Sanches: Once a week. One, sometimes 2.

Mr. Rosenblum: When you think about the cost what it is for you...

Mr. Gennette: As far as the old contract, the one that's going to be expiring July 1, that existing contract is how much for the year? How much do we pay Waste Management right now?

Mr. Goodreau: Their collection cost was 1,356,042.

Mr. Gennette: We charge \$100 per resident right now and how much does that bring in towards that cost?

Mr. Goodreau: Around \$650,000. We also have the purple bag revenue and transfer station revenue.

Mr. Gennette: About 60% of the cost? That's something to consider when we're talking about fees. Are we going to talk about the fee at all?

Mr. DeBarge: I wasn't planning on doing that tonight. We're talking about trash collection. That's going to be a budget conversation.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and Chairman sign the contract with USA Waste for the trash and recycling services for the Town of Ludlow. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Mr. Goncalves: Great job by the guys at DPW. They were able to get everybody bidding against each other. Every week it was getting cheaper.

Mr. DeBarge: We're going to save board to review classification requests on new business and discuss FY26 level 1 budget until the end.

Board to approve and sign contract for Mass Munifin, Inc. for Treasurer/Collector consultant in the amount of \$100,000.

Mr. Strange: This is not to exceed \$100,000.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign contract for Mass Munifin, Inc. for Treasurer/Collector consultant not to exceed \$100,000. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign contract for ADP, Inc. for payroll services in the amount of \$96,257.

Mr. Strange: The \$96,257 is the quote they provided us for both the school and the town. The pricing model is per transaction. It's per process per pay period. The schools have 520 employees, we have 200. The way it broke down is school is about \$70,000 and town is \$30,000. We offered to split it in the middle with the schools and they couldn't do it so the town's portion of this is only \$30,000. They wanted to formulate the contract such that they are going to build out the back end and put all of the school information in the event the schools do want to pony up and automate their payroll. This is going to make our payroll function so much more efficient. Right now, it's heavily manual and it will allow employees to go in and fill out their own I9 and W4, print out their own W2. There's an employee self-service. They can check their accrual, print out their own pay stubs. It's going to make our operations more efficient and potentially save us a position. We had taken a position out of the treasurer/collector to save money. I put it back in and now we'll probably end up taking that position back out.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign and where appropriate the Chairman only sign the contract between ADP for payroll services and the Town of Ludlow in the amount of \$96,257. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign contract for Larochelle Construction for Library window restoration in the amount of \$260,900.

Mr. Gennette: This has already been approved; it's just the contract for it.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to approve and sign the contract for Larochelle Construction for Library window restoration in the amount of \$260,900. **Mr. Rosenblum second.**

Mr. Rosenblum: Remember when they first came to us and this was \$15,000.

Mr. Gennette: This has been a 3-year nightmare.

All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to discuss FY2026 reclassification requests.

Mr. Strange: For the new positions, the library is requesting a new part-time admin assistant, salary being \$27,679 but that also comes with benefits. Chief Pease is requesting 2 firefighter paramedics. Debbie Gates is requesting a full-time recreation office assistant. Jamie and Jim are requesting 2 full-time PW-1 laborers. Eric Segundo at the Veteran's office, there is already a part-time senior clerk and he's requesting that she be bumped up from part-time to full-time. It's a reclassification but because it's going to trigger benefits we put it in the new positions request category.

Mr. Gennette: Administrative assistant for the library, is that for Melissa?

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mr. Gennette: I know they've been putting in extra hours, do you know if they have an overtime budget.

Mr. Strange: I don't know if they have an overtime budget. I know Melissa does a really good job with her budget. Other than Ryan I'd say she's probably the 2nd best one about sticking to her budget. I don't know if they have an overtime line. If she does it's not a big one.

Mr. Gennette: The way I look at this year is we don't know what's coming down the pike and I'm worried about creating new positions unless there's a reason for it. If they have overtime and they're trying to eliminate that overtime and put a position in there then I understand the need. If this is extra, as much as I know she's working her tail off we might have to wait a couple years.

Mr. Silva: I'm not ready to make any moves until we look at this budget because what I see is not pretty. I don't think we can make any moves right now until we get deeper into the budget and get into level 2.

Mr. Strange: I don't see any way we could add new positions this year.

Mr. Silva: We're well over our limit and to do anything at this time, we don't have to do it right now.

Mr. Strange: I do think the DPW needs more laborers, the library could use some help, Ryan could use another firefighter paramedic. I have no idea where the funding would come from.

Mr. DeBarge: I agree with the new position thing, at least until level 2 comes out. Tara at the Veterans Center, who is part-time, the Veterans Center runs on 1 ½ people. One full-time director and Tara and they rely on volunteers. Thank God for the number of volunteers the Vet Center has because it wouldn't be able to run with a part-time clerk. Eric can't be at the center all the time and the times Tara is not working and Eric needs to be away, if there is not a volunteer there we need to close the center. We need somebody there for Veterans at all times. If you want to call it a reclass from part-time to full-time is a necessity.

Mr. Strange: The reclassifications are in the level 1 budget. They're in my opinion relatively short money. We're requesting Joe Alves to get upgraded for a couple reasons. He's been stuck where he is for 12-13 years. We thrust upon him, kicking and screaming initially, a new CAMA software database. We've been managing him a little more closely and he's responding terrifically. I thought it was time for an upgrade for Joe. The next 3 are part of an MOA with the LATOSS union. We have an agreement with LATOSS where Amy Kurtz is going to be coming out of the union because it's a confidential position so she'll no longer be in the union. She's currently an administrative assistant just not in the union so we are proposing that she gets upgraded to an executive assistant and I would like to give her a little more responsibilities because she's super capable and I think she's interested in taking on some more responsibilities. The next 2 are Melissa Graf and Sharon Martins at the PD who are the impetuses for the MOA. They had requested upgrades in the middle of the year and we essentially said let us know on your anniversary date or during the budget cycle and that triggered a bunch of things. They got an upgrade through the MOA for not too much money. The library youth services assistant got reclassified for another \$900. DPW is putting in for an upgrade for Debbie Jolicoeur from L3 step 3 to L4 step 1. The other 2 are Jimmy and Kenny who for some reason during the last reclassification study did not get reclassified. They were still under the old GL4 wage. They weren't even on the current management classification scales. We basically put them on where we think they should be. We didn't want to pay them less so we bumped Kenny up a little bit and Jimmy a little bit. The Veterans senior clerk is Tara. The total

cost of the reclassification is \$45,000. I emailed you the level 1 but I didn't print anything out. Generally speaking, the way I'm approaching level 1 is similar to the way I approached it last year. We're creating a budget for the board to consider, for FinCom to provide feedback on and much of this is probably going to change. There are certainly factors in here that can change. Level 1 right now has a 4% increase for the schools. The thought being there's been some pretty public strife between the town and the schools. The town has expressed publicly that there's been a lack of funding and we wanted to give them a chance to recoup whatever lost funding was. We don't know when we go between level 1 and level 2 process whether we can keep it at 4% but all things equal that was the thought pattern there. Right now, the town increase is about 4%. If you look at the budget there's the general fund, which is all the departments and that's about 4%, and our enterprise funds go up quite a bit, about 7%. That's because there's a pretty big Springfield Sewer & Water Commission fee coming down the pike due to new capital. They have a big capital project coming along so they're increasing their fees. The level 1 budget also contemplates a \$300 trash fee so we wanted to get that out early. That's going to be a little bit of a shock to the system to a lot of residents. As we move down through this process we're happy to make a presentation at level 2 to show that many communities around us either have comparable trash fees or they don't provide trash services for their residents. If a resident in Ludlow is looking to secure their own trash services it would probably be twice that. That's not anything that I or the board wants to do or FinCom. It's not a comfortable, happy conversation. The fact of the matter is we're dealing with after affects of multi-year inflationary economy, even though inflation has calmed down a little bit the prices have not come down. Also, throughout that period, salaries have risen a little bit to try to keep in stride with the inflationary increases. Employee benefits like health insurance have greatly outpaced 2 ½ %. We budgeted for an 8% increase this year, last year was 5-6%. The year before that was more. That's a big line item when you're talking about an 8% increase that's \$800,000+.

Mr. Goncalves: Did we get a 2-year freeze on those?

Mr. Strange: We had a 2-year freeze so this year we had a cap on the average. The GIC average is looking at between 6-11%. MIIA is warning us and suggesting a 10%.

Mr. Goncalves: Why not go shopping?

Mr. Strange: We're locked in for the year plus it takes a cycle. We met with Dowd last year and it takes a cycle to get all your losses. You have to extract all your reports from MIIA and it takes a year to figure out where the savings are. Even when we talked to Dowd the savings were only going to be about \$100,000 for the year.

Mr. Goncalves: The GIC is going up but where were they by comparison to where we're at now?

Mr. Strange: I don't know.

Mr. Goncalves: It could go up 10% but still be considered lower than what we're paying right now.

Mr. Strange: They suggested we put in 10%. I put in 8% for a couple reasons. I can't imagine the MIIA average is going to be more than 8%. It could be but the other thing is we really pad our employee benefits line. At the end of the year, we're usually able to give back some money to free cash out of that line, because it allows us to have some free cash to pay for capital. If we're at 8% and it's a little bit above I'm still comfortable that we're ok. Nevertheless, you're talking at 2 ½ % that's 2 million dollars. Of that 2 million dollars nearly half of that is health insurance. I'll put together a cost increase for, we put in a non-union COLA of 3%, I'll price out the non-union COLAs at 3 and 2% and see what that means between the health insurance and COLA's. A lot of the expenses are fixed. There's only so much we can do to bridge that gap. We also put in a 6% retirement number based upon some early returns from Hampden County Retirement Board and also historical trends. I want the board and public rest assured that I know every line in this budget and we're going to put together the best possible budget we can. Any fee increases are not going to be anything that we want to do. I can't, in good conscience, use free cash this year to balance the budget.

Mr. DeBarge: Nobody wants to.

Mr. Strange: I can't do it. If that means we have to increase the trash fee, I will take the calls, I will take the screaming. It's just not good for the town. It's a slippery slope that Belchertown fell into 30 years ago and they cannot get out of it. They can't do capital projects, they can't fix roads, they can't do things. It's not where we want to be. We don't have to be. Our trash service and fee is very low compared to our neighbors. We have our own dispatch. Our health insurance splits are really generous. To make the budget such a battle every year. But having said that the increases are real. When you only go up 2 ½ % and the cost increases are 6-8%, there's only so much you can do without raising fees and I hate that. It gives me stress to think about that and how it impacts residents but that's the reality we live in.

Mr. DeBarge: I don't disagree with you. We have a lot to think about going into level 2 and all of that.

Mr. Strange: We're at level 1 and I'll go through and I'll do some cutting. At the top of my head, I know some places we can cut. Direction from you guys. Do you want me to look at lowering the trash fee, do you want me to do some models? \$300, \$250, \$200? Do you want me to cut all wants from departments? Utilities went up, vehicle repairs went up, gas, I think you have to keep those in there because those expenses are going up. I think it's easy to identify some of the wants. Even if we lower the schools from 4 to 3% you're only talking \$380,000. If we don't keep the \$300 trash fee it's going to be peanuts because the \$100 fee is \$650,000 in revenue. A \$50 is worth 1% of the school budget.

Mr. Rosenblum: That trash fee is based on \$100. Our housing units are generally 7,300. \$650,000 is based on the fact that we're going to have households that don't pay. We had a discussion earlier, when you're in Belchertown if you compare to that I think the dump sticker there is \$120. They're paying basically \$50/month for their trash. You're \$600/year over there. I understand that some of the trash is built into our taxes too. I would say do \$200, \$250 and \$300 just to see where it falls. I think this trash deal is a home run. Automated, bigger barrels. When this went to dual stream, everyone was up in arms. It stinks but if I said I'm going to go get my own it's going to cost me more. I don't think it's so much the price it's more the service. With this the service is going to be that much better. If someone complains about the trash not being picked up we can find out because we know your barrel is to your address, cameras on the truck, did you have your trash out when it was supposed to go out. People are willing to pay for great service.

Mr. Strange: Whatever the trash fee is that we're looking at, we're looking at twice a year or 4 times a year billing so you don't get hit with a big fee in the summer or fall when you're not expecting it. Quarterly would be great. Whatever we can do to ease the pain whatever the increase is.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Silva: With all the new stuff, people were used to channel 191, information from the television. With the new streaming stuff you don't have it.

Mr. Goncalves: Go to the internet. Ludlowcabletv.org.

Mr. Silva: I want to be able to tell them if they go on Ludlow Cable they'll be able to see all the meetings. I want the thing scrolling down giving people information.

Mr. Strange: Do you want it on the cable channel or the internet stream?

Mr. Silva: Wherever they can get it.

Mr. Strange: I can ask Mike about that.

Mr. Gennette: The town website should have all of that.

Mr. Silva: The website is cumbersome. If I can't navigate around, most people that I know won't be able to.

Mr. Strange: It depends on what they're looking for but the Get Lost in Ludlow site is going to be really good. We had a little bit of a technical glitch but we got a ton of submissions for business listings and events in town.

Mr. Silva: I understand. The regular people we need to inform.

Mr. Strange: This is a great question. I'm always wondering what's the best way to communicate with residents. What do you suggest? A tv scroll?

Mr. Silva: Yes. The scroll gave you what the DPW hours are and all of a sudden it's gone.

Mr. Strange: Mike Hill does a great job with updating our Facebook page so he can also put that stuff on 191 or whatever channel it is. I can ask him to do that.


Mr. Rosenblum: I just wanted to add 1 thing to the trash with the revenue aspect. What also brings that number down is senior abatements. I think we missed it in our last closing comments right after Thanksgiving, congratulations to Ludlow Football team who won on Thanksgiving. In the spirit of giving and good cheer I wish everybody a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year. On the line of athletics, the boy's hockey team opened up with 2 wins in overtime. Enjoy your families and have a Happy Holidays.

Mr. Gennette: I want to congratulate Mr. Ellison in his new position and wish everybody a Merry Christmas. I hope you have a wonderful, safe holiday.

Mr. Goncalves: Congratulations to Zack and thank you to the other 2 gentlemen who came in. Merry Christmas and have a safe holiday. Check on your elderly neighbors and lend a hand where you can. Happy New Year and Merry Christmas and whatever holiday you celebrate.

Mr. DeBarge: I want to thank everybody that came out Saturday to the wreath laying. We laid down 1,115 wreaths and 965 wreaths at Island Pond Cemetery alone. The biggest crowd I've ever seen. Great ceremony. A lot of people came out. It was cold but it was a nice day. One of my favorite things are the flags and wreaths on the veteran's graves. Thanks to everybody that donated. Those 1,200 wreaths are not free. All the business and individuals thank you for donating. It's nice to put a new wreath on the stone of a veteran. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year. We have First Responders appreciation dinner January 9 at the Gremio from 5-7. Our first meeting in January is the 7th.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to close the adjourn our last meeting of 2024 at 8:37 p.m. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.



Chairperson

