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**Town of Ludlow
Office of the Select Board**

The Meeting of the Select Board held on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, began at 5:30 p.m. in the Select Board's Conference Room.

Members Present: Anthony Alves, James Gennette, William Rosenblum and Manuel Silva.

First order of business: Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Silva: Pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, section 20(f), after notifying the Select Board chair, any person may record the open session of this Select Board meeting, subject to reasonable requirements of the chair. This meeting is being recorded by Ludlow Community Television. If anyone else is recording, please identify yourself now. There is no one.

5:30-5:45 P.M. – PUBLIC COMMENT

VISITATION

5:45 P.M. – Larry Brace – Veteran's Office Claims Consultant Interview

Mr. Silva: Thank you, sir, for stepping up and wanting to do this for us and for the vets actually. So, we'd like to meet people that come and help us out. So, if you could give us a briefing about yourself as well as anybody that's listening.

Mr. Brace: My name is Larry Brace. I lived in Westfield for a lot of years. I'm a 22-year veteran of the Air Force International Guard. Retired on disability in February 2020. Father of two. I have a son who's 33. He's in the Guard in Connecticut and he's employed full-time with Pratt & Whitney. And then I've got a daughter who's 31 and she's a marriage and family counselor down in South Windsor. That's pretty much it, I guess. I retired on disability and that process that I went through at that time is really what I think made me the right person for this position. I think when you go through something like getting thrown to the fire you learn it and you retain it because it's just valuable information.

Mr. Silva: For my purposes and also for anyone the Veteran's Claims Consultant, what exactly or not exactly, but give us a briefing of what it is you're gonna do for the veteran's.

Mr. Brace: I think a big part of it is doing the veterans' claims, getting into the system and actually they walk in the door, and I know from my perspective the veterans go in most of the time they're overwhelmed because the VA is just a tough system to navigate. So, I think that's a big part of the job. When I walked into that office, the day I interviewed with Eric Segundo and Lisa Halpin, that office, they had a lot going on in there. It was a busy office which is nice to see because it's the outreach to the veterans in the local area. It's pretty much offering benefits. Letting them know what benefits are available even if it's not filing a claim for monetary benefits. Just trying to help them out and every persons different. When I was going through my case, I didn't know what questions to ask. I know you relied on a lot of friends that have gone through it but there was nobody that really had the answers. I think I can with my experience I think I can help the veterans of the community out.

Mr. Silva: Any questions, anyone?

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Brace thank you for your service first off. Appreciate it. I'm just wondering have you done any volunteer work down at the Veteran's Center yet with Eric?

Mr. Brace: Not here I haven't. This one I didn't even know about. I had helped some friends of mine file their claims just unofficially. It wasn't an official capacity, and it was one of them that saw the position on Facebook, and they sent it to me and said Hey, that we think you'd be a good fit for this, you should apply for it. I did go at one point to the veteran services office in Somers, CT and was gonna do volunteer work there with them at that time. I don't know if they had the amount of outreach that this office does or not but they as far as filing claims they didn't need the help, so I didn't end up going there.

Mr. Gennette: You're a Ludlow resident I see but you're volunteering in Connecticut.

Mr. Brace: No, I'm in Enfield, CT.

Mr. Gennette: Oh, you're an Enfield, CT resident. So, why are you, I'm just wondering, why Ludlow? Oh, because that's what we're hiring. I just answered my own question.

Mr. Brace: Yeah, it's that and part of, I've looked, I've been wanting to do a position like this for a long time. I can't do it with the VA because part of the federal disability is I can't get a federal job. So, the minute I take a federal job then that affects my disability retirement. So, I've been on the lookout, but I didn't like I said it was a friend that sent me this posting and I applied for it and I think I'd do a good job at it.

Mr. Gennette: Well, perfect. Thank you for applying. I'm all set Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Brace, thank you for your service. He actually asked what I was going to ask anyways. But anything that we can do to help our veterans and be able to make their claims a little bit more seamless and just to help them out because I know that it can be very confusing, so I appreciate the fact that you're willing to step up and do this for us.

Mr. Alves: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Brace, thanks for applying. You know reading through your packet your purpose and passion seems quite clear to want a role like this. Thanks for applying and thanks for your service as well.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to appoint Larry Brace as the Veteran's Office Claims Consultant. Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.

6:00 P.M. – Mike Rodrigues, Vanished Valley – To discuss changes to outdoor concert venue.

Mr. Silva: So, thank you for one taking our request to do something to alleviate some of the issues that some of your neighbors are having with the noise volume and so on and so forth. My understanding is that you've done certain things that you might think will help in doing that. And if you could let us know what it is you're doing.

Mr. Rodrigues: So, we moved the stage over to the opposite side of the beer garden so that it's facing the building now versus facing the back neighborhood of the people that are complaining the most. We've had it there before and I feel that when it's facing the building, the building absorbs a lot of the music anyway. We would have made those changes before but there's no ordinance in town. We never known we were out of compliance but we're more than happy to make changes to appease the neighbors and keep the peace. We're here to get along with everyone and do the best we can for the town and not to get on anybody's bad side. But we did move it and I feel that's going to make a big difference. Besides that, we do always have a security guy that walks the property. We do have a decibel meter that we have them walk around with and check the property, so we'll have them make sure that they're doing that more times throughout the night. I hear that we're gonna have an ordinance in town so that helps. If we could add a decibel level to it, I'm for it because without having some kind of level of what we should all follow then it's what's loud to you might not be loud to me or it's all gonna be hearsay. So, I think that would be helpful for anybody in town cause again I could have my security guy go around and say alright if the limit is 30 and we're at 35 you can go to the band and say we're above the limit let's turn it down. But without having some kind of guidance there really isn't besides whoever shows up and how they feel about it.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, that has been already written. So, it will be going into the next Town Meeting. It was originally in the original one that went through which we did the hours of operation, what was it until 10 p.m. I believe it was. And originally we did have those in there but I can't remember how but it came out and I think part of it was as a whole it barely passed just with the hours is that I don't remember but I thought the thought was it might not have passed with the decibels but after speaking with the residents and everything I have no problem. You sent me the original and I just kind of made a couple changes in the words and that'll be on the Warrant that I believe it will be up until 10 p.m. I believe 65 and then 50 from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. So, that's gonna go before Town Meeting. So, now just as a reminder this is one that's coming from the Board. If the Board approves it or not but chances are it's gonna go on the Warrant is that we put it there but now, it's in the Town's hands. So, it's not necessarily saying this Board do it, we're doing it but now it has to be approved by Town Meeting because the way this form of government is, it goes through Town Meeting. Our hands are tied on a lot of things unless they get approved at Town Meeting or don't get approved. Just so you know, I did, it really was no changes it was just taking the original one and it will be an Amendment and at this point I don't even know if the Attorney General has approved the original Article yet.

Mr. Strange: No, not yet.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, even the hours haven't been approved yet the 10 p.m.

Mr. Vital: Well, I feel that you definitely should have some sort of decibel numbers so that everybody cause we do have a meter that I go around in the neighborhood and it's nowhere near the numbers that were said. I mean I have it on my phone, we've got 25. The highest I've seen was 32. So, I don't know where people are getting their numbers from and we're not here to be bad neighbors at all. I just wish it didn't go this route. So, I'm a little bit disappointed that it came this far. I wish that people hadn't called but I don't wanna rehash any stuff but I just wish that people hadn't called up and I gotta defend my help. That's all I'm here for. I'm defending them because if you want changes you gotta go to the owners not the people that are answering the phones. They have nothing to do with the operation. As far as that goes I definitely want to be a good neighbor and we're here to listen and do what we can.

Mr. Rosenblum: And Mr. Chairman to that point is that yeah is moving forward. I know that I had reached out and we had talked about what you could do. I know the Chairman did as well. Compromise is where we need to be on this and everyone be good neighbors. And again, having seen the pictures and hoping that the decibel gets passed at Town Meeting is that at least we have some standards in which to go by and at that point now and then the soon to be Chief is here now. Then once those parameters are set then it falls into the police department start enforcing it.

Mr. Vital: It doesn't matter who carries it. The numbers are gonna be the numbers.

Mr. Rosenblum: Yeah, and you don't know this, I've might've told you this, I don't have a problem buying decibel readers and putting them in the cars too.

Chief Brennan: We were actually discussing this. I discussed this with them. With or without the bylaw we might just get them just for comparison analysis because if you have readers and then we might just wanna see.

Mr. Rosenblum: And I think it gives the objective look too. Not to say that yours is off but in the same sense if the police are coming in as the enforcement, then they sit there and they go yup, yup, okay and that's from the property line.

Chief Brennan: It's gonna be an independent reading too.

Mr. Rosenblum: And it's an independent reading.

Mr. Rodrigues: Just helps their argument as well.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm happy that we can move forward and try and solve this. Is it gonna be absolutely perfect the first, maybe not. There might be a tweak here or there who knows but at least we're moving in the right direction.

Mr. Vital: If there needs to be tweaks, I mean there's gotta be some sort of communication. You just can't be screaming at somebody that answered the phone.

Mr. Rodrigues: Even with the ordinance at 10 we stopped at 9 every weekend.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think your application actually says midnight but your business closes at 10 too.

Mr. Rodrigues: Yeah, we have no intention of going. I mean I don't want my staff ..

Mr. Silva: But we do, even though we have until 10 there is on the bylaws that it's a 9 o'clock do not disturb isn't it chief if I recall.

Chief Brennan: It depends on what day of the week I believe.

Mr. Silva: It's no disturb at 9 o'clock. So, it's good that you stop at 9.

Mr. Rosenblum: Michael Sunday to Thursday and then a Friday, Saturday?

Chief Brennan: Yes.

Mr. Silva: So, we're moving forward just as we heard the comments. We went over; we hashed everything over and hopefully this will help. Just to let everybody know that this is a trial to see if it in fact is gonna do what we need it to do and if not then we'll try something else. That's all we can do.

Mr. Rodrigues: All a compromise, right?

Mr. Gennette: Originally, I had said my piece in an email. I did a little bit of research on this, and I appreciate you guys really trying to come to the table with some adjustments to try to appease the neighbors. It's pretty important. I hope that we can kinda keep fostering that kind of mentality. For us, we're policy makers. That's what we do. Policy and budget and as soon as this problem came up, we created a policy and sent it to Town Meeting for their approval. So, we're doing what we're supposed to do as well and if we can just keep coming to the table and doing the work that we need to do I think we should be able to remedy this situation. It all takes time though. Kind of like Bill said, it takes the state to approve this and that could be forever and a day before the state actually kicks anything back. And actually Marc, I don't even think that we can put anything on the Warrant until that passes, correct?

Mr. Strange: Yes. We got to wait and see what the AG's office says.

Mr. Gennette: So, if they don't even get back to us before the next Warrant, we may not be able to put the reading on until October of next year.

Mr. Silva: Because we don't get it, doesn't mean that we can't try to abide by the readings that we're going to be placing in. So, we'll move to those and stay with those for the time being. That's all.

Mr. Gennette: Yes, but we can't give the chief an official ... because there's no law for him to actually abide by.

Mr. Silva: But at least they'll have them.

Mr. Rodrigues: But we have an idea of what it should be. Guidance.

Mr. Gennette: We're giving the police department the opportunity to be able to keep everything in realm. Right now, there's nothing so they can't. They have to go from zero to everything.

Mr. Rodrigues: I don't need that piece of paper to say that it's gonna say that either. If it's 60 and they are saying it's 70 then we're gonna fix it. If the police officers are saying this then we're gonna have to respect what they're saying and abide by what they're telling us.

Mr. Alves: Thanks for coming in. Can you guys do me a favor. I haven't been out back. This is the plot plan. Can you just show me where the stage was before and where it was facing? So, it was facing out.

Mr. Rodrigues: We did pick up the site plan and we're actually putting that into the site plan as well. So, it will be adjusted.

Mr. Alves: Go through planning and all that. I think it was said, I forgot who said it. I think these types of things are the last thing we want to spend time on, right? Neighbor's disputes, all that. So anyway, folks can get along we promote that and I appreciate you guys coming to the table with some form of change. The willingness to make a change, you know, I feel like I'm willing to give this a shot obviously I think Mr. Rosenblum said as well, this might take iterations, there might be tweaks or whatever but whatever we can do to hopefully get everybody to a happy medium I hope we can get there. And I just think the other thing to just keep in mind to is the entertainment license, that's a privilege, right? So doing whatever we can to make sure changes like this, give it a shot, coming to the table making changes helps out too. I appreciate that.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman, I just wanna make one note just to have an understanding how the layout is out in the back. Actually, by flipping the stage, before the stage was up high which means the noise would probably carry easier because it's pointing out into the neighborhood. Now it's down lower which the building and probably even part of the landscape is probably gonna help absorb some of the sound as well because now your sound level isn't really traveling out and over, it's traveling almost into your building.

Mr. Vital: It's only a negative and you gotta think of this too, we're not sound professionals but the only thing I'm worried about is it bouncing off the building and it hitting back.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah, but you should have patrons between. There are people there and that's gonna dull a lot of it down.

Mr. Vital: We'll do what we need to do.

Mr. Alves: It's a trial, right? You try it. You see what works, what doesn't and.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah. You gotta start somewhere.

6:15 P.M – Police Chief Interview – Lt. Michael Brennan.

Mr. Silva: Welcome and congratulations for moving forward with this. Gentlemen, any questions that you have for the Chief?

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Chairman I have questions. We're gonna get into it. So, anyways I figure that we have a brand-new chief coming in and it's not really probably okay to just say let's just assign him and give him a handshake and move him on. So, I'm gonna challenge you a little bit. So, my first question is body cameras and working conditions versus safety. Basically, body worn cameras have been raised as a change in working conditions by unions not necessarily here but just as a broad statement with associated compensation demands. At the same time officers widely express support for cameras as a protective and accountability tool. As Chief, how would you frame body cameras from a labor, safety, and operational standpoint and how would you navigate implementation in a way that prioritizes officer safety, public trust, and the fiscal responsibility while remaining compliant with competitive bargaining obligations?

Chief Brennan: Okay. That's a lot. You may have to keep me on track here. If I get off track, please point me in the right direction. Just real quickly for people watching I'm Mike Brennan. I'm the provisional Police Chief. It's good to introduce myself. I think for people that may be watching. I'm referred to as Lieutenant and that's the reason why I'm in this acting capacity

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as the provisional Chief. I've been with the department going on 26 years. Provisional Chief for the last five months or so. It's been a real honor and privilege to do that role. I am a town resident. I've been a resident since 1988 when I moved here with my family from Springfield. I am a veteran of the United States Army Reserve. I served in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2005. I am a father of two children. Daughter Peyton, she goes to Merrimack College and my son Reese who is currently in Ludlow High School, graduating this year. Husband to my wife Tonya. She works for Grodsky Heating and son to Edward and Sylvia Brennan. I got to get them in there. Again, back to the body worn camera questions. I wasn't procrastinating the question. Body worn cameras implementation in terms of collective bargaining, yes it would be a change in work conditions for the Ludlow Police Department. We actually don't have a body worn camera program, nor do we actually have a policy in effect. So, we would have to begin from scratch. We'd have to speak with our police union but not just the patrol union but our supervisor's union as well because each would have their own concerns. Patrol would have their own concerns. Supervisors have not just the same probably concerns as patrol but also management and supervision of the program. They would want to know and I'm sure they'd wanna be part of the policy. Where would we get the policy from? The POST Committee had actually developed some best practices with it. I would be looking to adopt most if not all of those recommendations made from POST, but it leaves out a lot of things to be desired in terms of those small matters of practice and how to wear them and so forth. That I think they are leaving to those individual departments to implement. And that's largely because each department has their own concerns. There's different sizes departments. These things cost a lot of money. What programs are you gonna end up using. What technology you end up implementing and then of course the contracts that go with that. Obviously, I think the union would be concerned with negotiating a contract almost always there's some centered around compensation. But outside of that like I mentioned, they are gonna want to know policy and they're gonna want to understand training. They're gonna want to understand equipment. How it's going to be funded and how they're gonna be trained. If they're gonna be provided the right equipment. In terms of policy and safety I know that the body worn cameras have shown some levels of safety in terms of the studies that have been done on them. Use of force incidents for example. There's been departments that have implemented them, they noticed some differences in use of force incidents, maybe because officers are exercising or more prone to exercise deescalation efforts because they know they're on camera, they're gonna be good actors and also for the public who realizes they're also on camera maybe I'm going to behave and not hand over video evidence to the prosecution. So, there is that but that's not a panacea. As you can see from watching any number of YouTube or news network body camera covers there's plenty of bad acting going on and all kinds of events. Whether it's from the public or the officer involved. So, again it's just not a fix all. But it has some measure of improvement in terms of safety, in terms of public accountability, I think in public trust. It certainly increases a credibility of an agency that's capturing these types of stuff. That's able to put these things out in terms of like I mentioned before, use of force incidents or any critical incident where a department may want to release the tape. Let the public see. If there's particularly any question whether or not something was justified or not justified. And as far as the total overall cost and such I think we have to develop the program first. We're gonna have to get something on paper and negotiate it with our unions first, both patrol and supervisors, before we can then start seeing about possible grants to cover this because in looking at the grants that are available to this stuff I think you have to have a policy or contract language first before they'll even entertain just handing you over money to fund these for the programs. And there's all kinds of body worn camera programs in terms of how many you're gonna field, what type you're gonna field, data storage, retention periods with the data storage. Whether it's gonna be uploaded into a cloud or you're gonna maintain it on a local server. All these things impact costs. I'm sure our residents understand, I think by and large they'll understand the accountability part of it. I think they'll wanna probably understand the cost of it.

Mr. Gennette: Absolutely. No, that was very detailed. Thank you for that. My next line is and I'll actually go right to IT a little bit, the police department's IT environment has lagged behind municipal standards this has operational, security, and liability implications. As Chief, what is your philosophy regarding IT governance, cybersecurity, and interdepartmental collaboration with municipal IT and how would you ensure progress rather than avoidance?

Chief Brennan: So, in looking at our IT, it started out really, I remember coming to the department or even starting in policing many years ago I don't think we even had emails or

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internet capability. We had an RMS system which was an application software that worked on old versions of windows. We had an old system of basically a database, like the old MS-DOS system that was for communications with the FBI and the Department of Criminal Justice Information Services. It is way back, but it only went web-based in the last ten or fifteen years. We were still using these old database type systems to communicate. In fact, the web base has some traces of those old systems. It still kind of looks like that. So, what's the philosophy, to get to the heart of the question. One, it's a concern especially when you're using web-based applications now that can be corrupted and are prone to hacks and all kinds of things. When we first fielded these things years ago, I don't think anybody in our department, unless they came from a computer science or information technology background, had any real idea how to manage or I don't even know if cybersecurity was a major concern when these things were adopted. And I think every department was doing their own thing. The police department did one thing, and I think fire obviously did other things that were germane to them. Schools, town systems, I know we are using Munis. All these independent systems that perform on different functions for different Town departments. I think the philosophy has to be something similar to what a company does. If you're running a municipal, if you're responsible for the governance and management and security of all these systems I think there's gotta be a sort of essential oversight on all these systems particularly using web-based platforms.

Mr. Gennette: So, would you say you're more of a progressive kind of a chief or are you just kind of a let's see where we are, let's evaluate it, let's just kind of structurally plan, or are you looking to kind of bring everything up to date?

Chief Brennan: Well, I think we need to bring everything up to date. I would say we need to. Now, we have to do things smart. We have to do things in a realistic and in terms of how to do it, well, let's develop some goals. There's an acronym that they use to develop some of these. It's called SMART goals. To identify specific measurable, achievable, relevant, and then time sensitive as that meets that acronym to ensure that you can progress and meet those. So, is it achievable? Do we have the monies to do this? If not, then let's identify what is achievable. What is relevant. What is the most relevant and most in secure and adopt those first.

Mr. Gennette: And we can help you with that too. Work together on it. Mr. Chairman, I don't know if you have anybody else that wants to ask any questions cause I have two more. My next one and this one's more for the community and it's about centralized dispatch. There's been a lot of communication about dispatch. Our municipality has the infrastructure to either join the state's centralized dispatch system or operate a regional dispatch service for surrounding towns as a potential revenue generator. The prior chief supported the latter. As the incoming chief, do you view regional dispatch as a core operational responsibility of your role something you would personally lead to completion or is this something you would delegate? Please explain how you would assess feasibility, manage risk, and ensure execution rather than indefinite study.

Chief Brennan: So, to answer the question is it a core responsibility, dispatch functions as a one of the core responsibilities of the department. Some of that function is being delegated currently but if you're talking about a change in operations and moving from our current centralized dispatch to a regionalized dispatch and as the last chief and you had mentioned, becoming a host for a regional center, that would definitely require more commitment and oversight and less delegation. So, at least at first, I would be more hands on and wanting to oversee that and not to say micromanage it but I want to be more hands on at first and some of those other tasks can be certainly delegated in terms of how the radios are going to be integrated. Those are some special, specific, technical functions that are gonna have to be probably with the requisite experts that I'm just not.

Mr. Gennette: Do you feel Ludlow's in a position to be able to be a host community for dispatch like that? Centralized?

Chief Brennan: Yes. It's feasible, I think we can take one to even two more departments and I think that would be critical. We've actually discussed some of this with our dispatchers who are I think on board. I would say the majority of them have been and police talking to their union reps. And looking at joining one of the studies, Com studies is a pre-animate one

being done in terms of regionalized dispatch and I've actually already approached them about becoming a host center as a region center. And I think our dispatch is excited to do something like that. I think we have a good product here in Ludlow with our dispatch center and I know that other departments may be struggling. And I think that we could easily accommodate at least one or two departments given their ... Part of that I think we would have to increase maybe plus that by at least one more dispatcher just to cover cause now the workloads are increasing but I don't think that's. I think you're talking about monies that may be coming in from state 911 that can help pay and offset a lot of the technology costs and manpower costs that's associated with doing it.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you. So, my last final question, budget discipline in a well-resourced department. This is my view of what your department is and the reason I'm asking it. The department is fully staffed; officers are well trained and competitively compensated. I'm sure everybody would love to make more money. In vehicles and equipment are modern and in good condition in a context where the baseline is already strong, how do you approach budget development going forward? Specifically, how do you distinguish between essential spending, nice to have enhancements, and areas where restraint or reallocation is appropriate?

Chief Brennan: That's exactly it. So, you have to identify and part of your budget plan is identifying those essential things first. One of those would be obviously your personnel costs in terms of your payroll. Those are sometimes more easily identifiable because you have contracts that you already know what somebody's going to be making hopefully in the next year outside of ongoing contract negotiations you may not know but you can project at the very least what those might be and then you can come up with maybe a dollar figure with that. In terms of overtime costs, we get sort of a report to kind of determine in the last year or so where those are gonna be. We have certain functions that we need to do in terms of that overtime. One is the operational overtime. We have to cover people going out injured, sick, family medical leave, military leaves, you name it and all the other nondiscretionary things relative to the contracts, vacations time, personal days and so forth. So, we account for those things with some of our overtime. The other part is the training. We know that there's certain number every year that we're gonna have to do certain activities to keep our certifications. We just have to. We know we have to do that. And then there's other trainings that are really nice to have but maybe we don't necessarily need it. We try to limit our trainings to those things that we know we have to do. The in-service trainings and it's already expensive on top of any of the other trainings that would be more, I guess discretionary, nice to have. And then, of course, are I guess our discretionary items having to do with our general expenses. We have to pay our bills. Our maintenance bills. Our gas bills. Our telephone bills. We know we have to pay those. We base those on what we're spending now. What we spent in the year before. We try to do a comparison and see where we're going to be and that's basically it.

Mr. Gennette: I got to tell you chief, those are my four questions, and you did a stellar job answering them and I really appreciate it and I look forward to your tenure here with the Town.

Mr. Alves: Mr. Brennan, how are you? I'm glad you went because you did ask one of my questions. Mine would have been shorter. So, I only have one. How do you balance crime reduction/law enforcement with community trust?

Chief Brennan: You're looking at, I think, a lot of times people view crime in terms of it's a perspective, right? Some people may think that crime is high based on what they're seeing in their relative disorder in their own neighborhoods. If you live in a good neighborhood, the quiet neighborhood, you may think crime is down. If you live in a neighborhood that's on a busy street or even traffic going by it might impact your perception of what crime is. Seeing cruisers or hearing cruisers, the media, that all impacts your perception of what crime might be. In terms of crime reduction, how do we do that? Well, we've always been transparent at least in the last five to ten years with putting our numbers out in terms of arrests, summons, to the extent possible and some things we just can't disclose and that has to do with the laws. But people can see the arrests that we're doing and I suppose two perspectives; one person can look at that and say those are really high numbers and another might say that's really not that bad. So, two people might have two different takeaways from that so trying to

be forthcoming with the information. Let people make their own judgements and then of course try to alleviate any fears with crime and part of that is meeting one on one with people sometimes when they bring these things to our table and to our attention. How can we help them and prove whatever feelings are having about crime. One of the most basic complaints we do get has to do with speeding, speeding cars. In terms of crime, it's neither a felony or misdemeanor unless they're driving with a suspended license or intoxicated but relatively those are simple motor vehicle infractions. But they do impact peoples safety, and I think that's the feelings of safety so we try to mitigate those to the extent we can. To the best we can. We do that sometimes by putting officers in roles to enforce the traffic safety. We've done it with technology. Implementing speed signs on certain streets that get a lot of complaints or high activity, and I think those tend to work pretty good for the most part. I think people it's a little bit of education in terms of how fast you're going. What the speed limit is, and I think people do actually reduce their speeds. Most people are trying to comply with the law.

Mr. Alves: I really like the first part of your answer cause I'll say, growing up living in this town for my whole life and growing up, I'll call it in the woods up on Ventura Street, you don't hear sirens unless it's on your street. But now living much closer to Center Street within earshot of the police department and fire department, it's amazing how often you hear sirens. So, I think that was a very relatable point I guess to me. Thank you.

Mr. Rosenblum: Lieutenant, I do have one question, but I have a little bit of a statement too. So, when I first ran as Selectman, Lieutenant Brennan is the one who brought me around the police station. I think I spent three or four hours in there that day. Sat with Chief Madera, he was showing me Narcan. He's showing me everything and I sat in just about every nook of that place. And when we first got to one of my firsts, within the first year was the first chief appointment and Chief Valadas was appointed, it was tough for me just because of all the work that you gave with me but also understanding your experience. So, I'm just glad to see it at this point. I know we've had discussions. I know I've had to apologize to your wife before. But I'm just glad that we're at this point because I always felt that one of the things that I always hoped that I would see through as a Select Board Member through my tenure is to be able to see you become chief. I'm happy for that. With that, simple one, I'm not gonna ask you what your strengths or weaknesses are because that's the layup one, I've had for six and a half years, what's your vision? You've answered a lot of questions here and a lot of these questions probably lay to what your vision is and I think that each chief kind of wants to leave each police officer, easy supervisor, each patrolman, kind of wants to leave their legacy in what they've left behind. What do you see as your vision and what would you like to leave behind when it's time to cash it in and sail off into the sunset?

Chief Brennan: When it's time to leave it all behind my desire and my hope if I've done the job that I've set out to do is to leave the department in good hands. And I'm set up for success in that capacity. We have an excellent staff, excellent officers, excellent supervisors. I want to be able to promote them and be able to watch them just give them the resources to succeed. That's what I want to do. Whether it's training, yes. Some of the times it's just coaching, advice, mentoring. It doesn't cost anything. It's just some direct supervision without micromanagement and encouragement. And sometimes I think a lot can be said, pats on the back, it costs nothing but they're worth so much more. So, that type of encouragement. I want to see, my vision for the Town, that they have some confidence in our abilities to problem solve, to be able to come to us with whatever problem it is and that we will not only competently and professionally handle it but handle it in a diligent manner. That we will see the problem through. Try to address it the best we can. Am I gonna please everybody and I think no because I've learned long ago especially when you have two parties to a conflict somebody's probably gonna walk away maybe less than satisfied. If you at least, do it in a manner that was fair, competent and you try to work through the problem and you took their problem seriously, handle it professionally, I think most times they'll understand. Sometimes one of the points I use is if you watch any sports game, football, baseball, whatever, if you're talking about the referees at the end of the game it's probably not a good game. If the referees do their jobs competently, professionally, you're not talking about them. You're talking about the players and that's what I want to leave. I want the public to understand that they're talking about that they felt like their problems were solved and resolved in a professional manner and not talking necessarily about how the officers weren't taking them seriously.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you.

Mr. Silva: Thank you. I'm not going to go into a lot of things as well. We know what you've done, where you've been, and as you know we are in dire straits. The community and no fault of our own unfortunately otherwise we'd be probably crucified somewhere. But this insurance thing has killed us and the insurances I think if I'm not mistaken is the increase is more than that two and a half increase that you're allowed for the whole town. I mean, that's ridiculous. So, when people out there are yep, yep, yep, yep, so, I want you to answer this for them. Not for me, for them. Police department has too many officers, too many vehicles. Answer that.

Chief Brennan: I would say to somebody driving by who might think we have a lot of vehicles, we do have really, 10 marked units. We have more than that. We have some administrative vehicles, so it looks like we have a lot more and sometimes some of them are parked. Sometimes they're on the street, depending on shift change. Just realize that not every one of those are brand new vehicles. We try to make them look as new, but when you look inside you might see some relatively high miles on them. We do take care of our equipment because those are our horses. We need to get to emergency calls and we maintain them. And if they all look new that's an accredit to our maintenance program Officer Solinski, Sgt. Vigneault, Officer Roach who manage that and then of course the mechanics who actually do it and our officers who take care of them on a daily basis. And we try to get the most out of those cars as we can. Do we have too many officers? Sometimes we don't have enough and that's why we're having to bring in guys on overtime just to cover shifts. I think we have enough officers though now, to manage. I think we're well resourced and staffed adequately. We just put on two officers very recently, Officer Branch and Officer Rivera. Both were transfers and we just handed badge 30 to Officer Rivera who just started the other day. I think that's the first time we actually handed that badge off. I think it felt great to do that. We have a retirement like next week so we're gonna end up handing our badges 29 very soon. But it was a great feeling to kind of get to that point. If we're in dire straits are we gonna be able to keep all those sustains. That's a decision I think that we're gonna have to make going down the road, depending on two and a half overrides and so forth. I understand those. And then we are going to have retirements. Do we replace them? I don't know. I think it's gonna depend on what the budget situation looks like and I think we're all reasonable. We understand that. But obviously we still have a duty to make sure that we cover all the shifts. And real quickly too, in terms of the shift coverage and everything, so much has increased in terms of some of the benefits and so forth. So, we have family medical leaves and certain things they're hard to project. These are great benefits, but we didn't necessarily, historically have them. So, when an officer let's say they have a birth of an infant they're able to take six to twelve weeks of family medical leave off. That's fantastic. It's a great benefit. But those are, we have to cover those shifts now depending on if we're short. Now having more officers helps accommodate those.

Mr. Silva: Thank you, Chief. Can you, I don't know if you wanna call them your closing comments or whatever, just address the public, something you would like to address them with.

Chief Brennan: I hope to always earn everybody's trust. When I come in every day, my job is to earn it every day. Like, don't take anything for granted. And that's the driving principle of any leadership position, right? You don't rest on your laurels and it's performance. Every day you come in because somebody needs something from you as their leader. You have to be able to get up there and pull yourself however you're feeling that day. Somebody's counting on you to lead and pull through. So, my job as a chief is to always earn everybody's trust and that's the one thing I would say. I'm there to earn it every day. In terms of that and just realize for me it's been an honor and a privilege to be a police officer let alone police chief. So, and I think of all the great members of the department that I've worked with and worked with today, it's just an incredible responsibility and I'm just very thankful. And lastly, I want to just thank the Board for seeing me through this role. Thank you, Mr. Strange, for your support. As you can imagine you walk into a new role, it's stressful and I appreciate everybody's support. It's been great. Thank you very much.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to make Provisional Police Chief Lt. Michael Brennan active Police Chief for the Ludlow Police Department effective immediately. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

6:30 P.M. – Provisional Lt. Interview – Sgt. Brad Tierney.

Mr. Silva: Okay Brad, I'll give you the opportunity to tell us a little something about yourself and introduce yourself to the public and to us.

Sgt. Tierney: So, my name is Sergeant Bradford Tierney. I've been with the Ludlow Police Department since 2012. I've been a sergeant since 2021. I've lived in Ludlow since I was seven years old. So, pretty much a lifelong resident here. I live in the community with my wife and two kids. I have my Bachelor's Degree from Criminal Justice and then I went on to get my Master's Degree in Criminal Justice. Recently, a couple of years ago, I was previously in the military for six years, did one deployment to Iraq 2010, 2011. Military policeman. With the department I have a couple of different roles. Mainly one FTO program supervisors. Recently became an accreditation manager taking over Chief Brennan's position doing that. Recently was appointed the Chairman of the Safety Committees since Sergeant Shameklis is retiring and he stepped down from that. So, it's a new role looking forward to doing. And also, I've been spearheading some grants. Been taking over the traffic grant that Sergeant Shameklis used to do. So, recently got our department awarded a little over \$30,000 for traffic and safety enforcement and also the Burn grant. Applied for that and got our department \$15,000 worth of camera upgrades. So, it's a work in progress.

Mr. Silva: Thank you. Anyone questions?

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman, Sergeant Tierney welcome back. Just for everyone's kind of knowledge is that because I know generally you have two Lieutenants and their duties are a little bit different. 3. But there's generally you have duties that are usually to each Lieutenant has a certain.

Chief Brennan: Yeah, I can expand on that if you'd like. So, our department has three main sections for the Lieutenants. One is the detective; that's Detective Bureau Supervisor and that's the one that was new and then we have the Administrative Lieutenant which is currently being overseen by Lieutenant Irwin and then the Operations Lieutenant was over being seen by Lieutenant Irwin, who's doing double duties. So, and he was the Operations Lieutenant primarily. I was the Admin Lieutenant. This position what I'm asking would be taking over the operations function as Lieutenant Irwin oversees the administrative function.

Mr. Rosenblum: I remember that and I remember we did the DB over the dispatch a few years ago or something. That's all I really have for is I just wanted to know. I know that there was a separation of duties between the two.

Chief Brennan: And real quickly too, so, why we're doing a Provisional Lieutenant versus a more permanent, we currently do not have an active civil service list. So, we're gonna be calling for a test. Sometime in the spring when it become eligible we'll contact civil service, we'll ask for a test. The test will be in September and that's when it usually is. It's an annual thing similar to what we have for a Sergeant's test. It's Lieutenant's test. The test is kind of similar. They just ask more specific questions relative to that position. And we'll get scores and certified lists probably sometime in 2027. So, I anticipate that this provisional appointment will be in effect for approximately a year.

Mr. Alves: Sergeant Tierney, good to see you. Just one question. what do you think the best quality or trait you posses that'll help you succeed as a Lieutenant?

Sgt. Tierney: I'd say one of the better qualities I have is the ability to stay calm under pressure. Not get rattled by certain situations. Not let things phase me. Just like back in booking, someone's screaming at you, swearing at you, calling you all sorts of names. Doesn't really bother me. Things roll off me and easily deal with things.

Mr. Gennette: I got a couple. So listen, I don't normally ask these kinds of questions to like regular patrolmen that are just coming on for the first time. But you know, I wanted to keep

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the Chief on the hot seat there for a minute. I thought it was important. But I'm gonna take it a little easier on you. My questions for you are role transition and challenges. As a Sergeant your role is largely hands-on and incident focused. As a Lieutenant your role shifts towards oversight, coordination, and supervising supervisors. How do you understand that change in responsibility and what do you anticipate will be the most challenging aspect of stepping in to the Lieutenant role?

Sgt. Tierney: As a Sergeant you supervise the officers on a day-to-day basis. Whereas Lieutenant you're gonna be more so supervising the Sergeants on a day-to-day basis for the most part. And obviously with that comes more roles, responsibilities. There were things I'm gonna take on but then sort of preparing for the role because I've been watching the Lieutenants. How they do their job, asking questions, seeing what it would take to do this position so I could prepare myself in the future. Didn't think it would be this soon but here we are today. I'd say the more challenging part that I would see is not being able to just as a Sergeant you can get your hands dirty and getting involved with the situation with patrol. But as a Lieutenant you kind of have to step back see the bigger picture more. So, instead of just being involved with all those day-to-day operations you gotta be incident commander there and take over the scene and look at things. Like I said, bigger picture.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah, that's gotta be tough to be hands off. The other question is leadership through others as actually we just kind of touched on it a little bit. As a Lieutenant you will have less direct involvement with individual officers and more responsibility for guiding Sergeants and setting expectations. How do you maintain accountability, consistency, and leadership credibility when you are no longer in the middle of daily operations?

Sgt. Tierney: Certainly, won't be involved with every day-to-day operations like I am with a Sergeant but I'll kind of be like the soundboard for the Sergeants. They got issues, they come back to me, talk to me about things and kind of already to that. I'm the senior Sergeant on second shift so all the other junior guys would come up to me asking me questions so, I'm kind of already familiar with that. But as Lieutenant you're the highest-ranking officer on shift cause the chief's not gonna be on second shift with me so the buck kind of stops with me. You gotta take ownership for everything and make the right decision.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah. Excellent. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. And thank you for filling in the provisional role for now.

Mr. Silva: Thanks for stepping up. What do you think you are going to be in, let's say 10 years and do you see yourself progressing and moving forward and maybe someday being a chief or just keep going on or you think you might get to a point where you're satisfied?

Sgt. Tierney: I mean, I'm certainly still gonna be here in town. To get to the rank of Lieutenant, you're not really going anywhere at that point. Certainly, aspirations to be Chief one day if my time comes, comes but take it as it does. Glad to support the Chief and whoever the Chief is at the time.

Mr. Silva: The Chief did mention that there's gonna be a test done. Obviously, you're gonna be interested in taking the test.

Sgt. Tierney: Yes.

Mr. Silva: Thank you.

Sgt. Tierney: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Alves: I have a discussion point. I just curious if our brand-new Police Chief has anything to add about Mr. Tierney?

Chief Brennan: I'll be really quick. One of your questions, what his best trait was. This is an incredibly humble supervisor for what you're seeing and how he answered that. I just wanna vouch for it. How you're seeing him is how he is at some of the most critical incidents. He's just even keeled professional and a very humble officer. So, I'm sure he'll be a humble

Lieutenant and he's gonna do I think very good in that role. I anticipate very good things, and I wish you the best going forward.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to appoint Bradford Tierney as Provisional Lt. effective immediately. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

CORRESPONDENCE

26-004 Marlana Patton, Peregrine Group – Update on Eversource's Basic Service Prices.

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Chairman, so this is basically from Peregrine Energy. They're our resource for our Ludlow Power Choice. They're the ones that monitor and maintain and do that and this is just an informational they wanted to let us know that the Eversource bill had come out at 0.13683 cents per kWh which is above our 0.1289 so we're still ahead on Ludlow Power Choice which is good and again the point to Ludlow Power Choice is long term stability of our electric. So anyways I just wanted to make note of that, and I thank Marlana Patton and Peregrine Energy for their continued communication.

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

26-005 Springfield Water & Sewer Commission – HAA5 Water Quality Violation and Public Notice.

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

26-006 Mass DOT – Bridge Inspection Report Piney Lane/Broad Brook.

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

26-007 Memo from Safety Committee with notification of appointment of new Chair and Vice Chair.

Mr. Silva: Can somebody read those, since we did have a change and I just wanted to notify anyone listening out there that the Safety Committee is very important. There's a lot of things that people keep requesting and asking and I keep telling them that they first have to go to the Safety Committee and request that they review, inspect. So, can we give them who in fact is the Chairman and actually if we have the people on the Committee at all. Do we have that before? Probably not.

Mr. Gennette: Yep. It's right here.

Mr. Strange: The full roster, I don't believe so.

Mr. Silva: Not the full roster. Okay.

Mr. Gennette: I have the memo here if you want me to read it.

Mr. Silva: Yes, please.

Mr. Gennette: It's very brief. To all departments from the Safety Committee, as of January 12, 2026, please be advised that at the Safety Committee Meeting of January 8, 2026, it was voted unanimously to appoint Sgt. Brad Tierney as the Chair and Capt. Zac Ellison as the Vice Chair.

Mr. Silva: So, for those that did question me on a couple of issues that they have out there if they could just contact either of those gentlemen with their request and you can move forward on your and then once they make a recommendation they come to us and recommend and then we either approve it or we disapprove it but very rarely do we disapprove so do that first.

Mr. Alves: Was that a motion or did he just read it?

Mr. Gennette: I just read it. I did not make a motion.

Mr. Alves: Mr. Chairman, I have the background you're looking for. I pulled up the website if you want me to read the roster members.

Mr. Silva: Yes. Why don't you read the names and maybe they'll have a friend, have somebody that they're familiar with.

Mr. Alves: I actually got an inquiry today from someone and I said you need to start with safety is the way to go. So, the Safety Committee is comprised of Sgt. Brad Tierney as the Chair, Captain Zac Ellison from the Fire Department as the Vice Chair, Deputy Chief Jeff Lavoie from the Fire Department, David Krok from the Police Department, Chris Coelho representing the Planning Board, Jamie Tomas representing the Department of Public Works, Sharon Martins Community Member, Michael O'Rourke Community Member, BJ Church Building Commissioner and the email box for inquiries is safety@Ludlow.ma.us

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to file. Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.

26-008 Letter from Springfield Water & Sewer Commission about elevated disinfection byproducts at the Commission.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman, it's noted that this really isn't an emergency. We would have been notified within 24 hours but there's also I believe a new water treatment plant that's being built. That will be completed in 2028. I believe this is just another update.

Mr. Silva: And for more informational purposes when you do have issues with water we remind you that you're probably better off calling the Springfield Water Commission. That's who takes care of our water here in Ludlow. So, if you call them you'd probably get a quicker answer.

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

26-009 Letter from Chief Pease, Fire Department – Notifying the Select Board of retirement of Firefighter Sean Burt.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman thank you for the 19 years of service for Firefighter Burt. I believe this is effective as of the 17th of this month, so I just wanted to say thank you to his service.

Mr. Silva: When there's a retirement we do have to.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think he'll that they'll end up if there's anyone already that he has as a backup fireman. Didn't we appoint two before.

Mr. Gennette: It says this is a notifier. You were saying for the fill-in?

Mr. Silva: No, we usually accept retirements or resignations as a customary that we usually do.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to accept the retirement for Firefighter Sean Burt as approved by the Hamden County Regional Retirement Board and the Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission. Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

Board to possibly approve and sign reissued Entertainment License for Vanished Valley for the remaining 2026 calendar year.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to approve and sign reissued Entertainment License for Vanished Valley for the remaining 2026 calendar year. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to approve and sign minutes from Meeting of January 6, 2026.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve the minutes from the Meeting of January 6, 2026, with all members present. **Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to appoint Glenn Potter to the Ludlow Cultural Council. **Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to appoint Lindsey Topham to the Ludlow Cultural Council.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to appoint Lindsey Topham to the Ludlow Cultural Council. **Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to appoint Melissa Graf as a volunteer for the shared animal shelter/kennel in Wilbraham.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to appoint Melissa Graf as a volunteer for the shared animal shelter/kennel in Wilbraham. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. Silva: Just for clarification, we're appointing for shared in Wilbraham. I know we share the kennel in Wilbraham. She's one of our volunteers.

Mr. Strange: Right. So, she'll be volunteering on behalf of the Town of Ludlow and the kennel.

Board to approve and sign (3) one-day permits for Cottage Melts sip & shop events on February 14, March 15 and April 18, 2026.

Mr. Alves: Mr. Chairman I'm making a motion to approve I just wanted to say I met these gentlemen a few times. They're active at CARES meetings. They're newer to the community. I think they opened their store in August, I want to say last year. I just want to recognize for being in the community for such a short period of time already being so involved in the things that they're doing. Two good guys and no problem approving these.

Motion made by Mr. Alves to approve and sign (3) one-day permits for Cottage Melts sip & shop events on February 14, March 15, and April 18, 2026. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. Gennette: Second for discussion. I don't understand exactly what the one-day permit is for. Maybe it's just me.

Mr. Silva: I believe they had a couple already these events.

Mr. Rosenblum: Wines and malts beverages.

Mr. Gennette: Is that what it is? It's for wine and malt beverages. Yeah. I was just looking for some clarity.

Board to approve and sign annual bid contract for Steve Santos Landscaping services.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve and sign annual bid contract for Steve Santos Landscaping services. **Mr. Alves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to place a Prop 2.5 override question on an upcoming ballot.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman, this is mostly about sort of timing and process. We spoke with Kim Batista today to get an idea of if Board wanted to put the override question on the March
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Town Election, when you all would have to vote to do that. The last day to do that is February 13th. So, there's only one meeting before February 13th. That's February 3rd. So, the options are to put the question on the ballot, assuming that an override is still gonna be needed after we find out what the health insurance increase is to put it on the March ballot for the voters. And then if it passes at the ballot then Town Meeting Members would vote in May. The other way to do it is to schedule a special election for after Town Meeting. Let Town Meeting vote on it first and then have the special election just for that one question, sometime, probably the end of May. The issue their being we cannot cancel a special election. So, if Town Meeting votes against the override, we still have to hold the special election and the special elections run about \$25,000.

Mr. Silva: Right. Marc, doesn't ballot supersede anything that the Town Meeting would do?

Mr. Gennette: As long as they put it on the ballot.

Mr. Strange: As a practical matter, yes.

Mr. Silva: No, what I'm saying is, if it goes on a ballot and the public says yes, no, whichever, and then you're gonna put it on Town Meeting after, I don't believe that that can be changed. Anytime there's an actual ballot vote, I believe that supersedes anything.

Mr. Gennette: Wait, you're talking about actually putting a proposition two and a half override on the actual March ballot?

Mr. Strange: Correct.

Mr. Alves: You'd have to, if it was ever gonna pass.

Mr. Rosenblum: The way that everything falls, Town Meetings in May. So, to be on a ballot, it has to go on prior to Fiscal Year 27.

Mr. Gennette: I gotcha.

Mr. Silva: But then at Town Meeting would be moved quite honestly. I don't believe it can be changed.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman, we check with Town Council, and he confirmed that it's kind of backwards if you go to the voters first and then Town Meeting, but you can do it.

Mr. Silva: I gotta look that up. I believe that you can't. The public has the ultimate vote for anything. But maybe I'm wrong.

Mr. Rosenblum: As we talk about pure democracies, which is not the electorate, it's the electorate not the representative of the electorate.

Mr. Gennette: I understand that. But you're basically going over their heads. That's basically what you're doing. That's a problem. I mean, that's a slight to Town Meeting and it's a concern for me that that's the case. I always appreciate anything going to the ballot box. But going first, that scares me. And of course we can't wait. We're in a pinch, right? So, if it was going to have to happen as a two and a half override, we have to do it ahead of the fiscal year.

Mr. Silva: Right. And then if it gets defeated at the ballot, then what?

Mr. Gennette: Well, then we're stuck. Plan the layoffs.

Mr. Silva: Town Meeting can't go and say oh.

Mr. Strange: Then we would just pull. We're planning on putting forth two budget options, one with an override. We would just pull the override option from Town Meeting.

Mr. Gennette: And if on that ballot, we will be able to, I know we'll be able to on the ballot, we'll be able to detail what the option, what's happening with the override. So, like the trash fee would come off. You wouldn't have to pay that anymore. That kind of stuff.

Mr. Strange: I think it's just a question. It would just be a question. The other piece would be on us to educate between say February 3rd and March 23rd.

Mr. Gennette: Wow. And we only have one more meeting to decide that that's. I gotta think about this.

Mr. Silva: But personally, I think we just let it go to Town Meeting and then hold a special election if need be. It may not come to that; you know what I mean? If it has to, we're stuck either way. We have to have a special election then we'll have to do it.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman, I actually would prefer to go the route that we normally go which would be Town Meeting and then if they want to do a special election. I mean, yeah, are we gonna bite the bullet on \$25,000? I mean, I think that's worth the two and half million override that we're gonna be looking at. If that's what the number is or whatever it comes to. I'd like to stew on this one a little bit, obviously till the next meeting just because, I'll keep going back to this all the time, is that, yes, I was one of the people that was on the Charter Committee with ten other people, and the Charter did not pass. And our form of government is Town Meeting. So, I'd like to think about this, but I would think that we would go Town Meeting first and then hold a special election if Town Meeting passes it. But then it doesn't matter, we have to pay for it anyways.

Mr. Gennette: You can't circumvent Town Meeting. I agree with you. I think it has to go to them first.

Mr. Silva: Quite honestly, I don't think we need to wait. If you're saying that, if you're saying that and I'm in the same position that. I would definitely would have to go to.

Mr. Gennette: I actually wanna think on this. I really want to table this, this week and come back at it next time. But that's my early inclination is to say we gotta put it before the Town Meeting members first.

Mr. Rosenblum: We're gonna be, I'm telling you, we're throwing \$25,000 to the wind cause it's not gonna make it through Town Meeting, but we're going through the process that we've set.

Mr. Gennette: It's easier. The 25,000 is easier to come up with out of the funds existing than it is, people don't equate operational budget.

Mr. Silva: But we're not throwing the money, are we? I mean, in a way we're gonna have a special Town Meeting after I mean we're gonna have a ballot after the Town Meeting. Will we have time to set up a special election? And if we don't need it, we don't need it.

Mr. Strange: The way that the timing works, so the Town Clerk needs 35 days to put it on, right. So, Town Meeting is May 11th I think. So, if we waited until Town Meeting and then on May 12th started the process, you're now into the middle of June.

Mr. Alves: Like the one week in June. Like the last week in June.

Mr. Strange: And if it doesn't pass, we gotta scramble in terms of notifying people that their being laid off and things like that.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah, that's gonna be a messy 6, 8 weeks no matter what we do. But we can't take the authority away from Town Meeting.

Mr. Strange: If we plan ahead of time and we're willing to as you said, eat the cost of the special town election we can schedule it for the week after. So May 18th we could do a Town Meeting and then the next week have the election.

Mr. Gennetter: Yeah, but that's basically we're signing up \$25,000 but if they don't go for it then and we don't have the special election then we paid 25 for nothing.

Mr. Strange: You still have to have the election. Whether you had 500 people come out or.

Mr. Rosenblum: I would want to go to the next meeting. I'm not gonna make that decision now cause I need to think it out more too.

Mr. Alves: So, at what point, sorry Mr. Chairman, at what point do you have to decide that the election is happening? Can you make that decision after Town Meeting? So, if we're stuck doing the special election anyway, at what point do you have to make that decision? Can you wait until the Town Meeting vote?

Mr. Gennette: Yeah. So, he's saying he can wait until on the 12th.

Mr. Alves: But then we'd be stuck at the end.

Mr. Strange: The problem is you need that 35 days you have to schedule it and there's not enough time between Town Meeting and June 30th. So, we have to schedule it get all the logistics and the procedures worked out, schedule the police officers, schedule the poll workers for a date certain right after Town Meeting.

Mr. Silva: Can Town Meeting be pushed up anyway?

Mr. Strange: It's in the bylaw. If I could Mr. Chairman, just an editorial note. This is a good argument for why we should have the Town Election after Town Meeting, right. Most towns do have Town Meeting and then at the Town Election for a variety of reasons but this is certainly a good argument for that.

Mr. Rosenblum: That would be an article for the bylaw article for another Town Meeting.

Mr. Silva: I'm very surprised that that can happen but don't come for more than I do, I'm sure. But I'm very surprised that that can happen when you have a ballot question and the whole town votes on it.

Mr. Strange: I'm happy to send you the ...

Mr. Gennette: Tough situation Marc.

Mr. Alves: Can I just make a couple points. So, we gotta make a decision next meeting. I think what we need Marc at next meeting is, I'm sure we'll have it, the most up to date figure of where the budget overage sits.

Mr. Silva: Do we have numbers already for the lowered insurance?

Mr. Strange: Saturday we'll know.

Mr. Alves: Right. So, that's a big thing. That's what I'm saying. There's gonna be changes between now and two weeks. So, I think minimum we need what the update is, one because we need it, two, part of the reason I'm saying this is I sat here a couple weeks ago saying at the level we're at, at the time it was about \$2 million to make that sort of colossal changes. Whether its cuts, layoffs, whatever it is, I'd wanna see what the public would say. Right. If that number gets paired back quite a bit, I think it doesn't make it, well it doesn't make it as drastic where I think it then becomes more manageable and we're not talking about laying off hordes of people and closing buildings for days and days and that's very extreme. You guys get where I'm going, right? Like at \$2 million it's a really, really big deal. It's huge changes. And that's where I'm saying I want to see what happens in the next two weeks because if that's more manageable then maybe we make decisions and so be it. We go back to departments, do what we can, and it's a more manageable number. I think the whole timing of the vote, I think that was born out of cost savings and not being under that crunch at the end of the fiscal year with the timing. In terms of superseding Town Meeting in that, I won't get into that, but I mean if the attorney says the order doesn't matter then. That's what

we pay an attorney for. That's not a slight to anyone, that's why we get those opinions. Thank you.

Mr. Silva: Well, I'll tell you as crucial as this is if we can get it into a number that's manageable somewhat, I know we don't want to use free cash. We don't want to use our, this is a rainy day. We have monies for rainy days. This is a rainy day. We might be strapped if we are gonna have to do some of that.

Mr. Strange: My only thing is this would be the third straight year we've used free cash. It's a very slippery slope. But without making, there's ways to do it. We can nudge up our local receipts estimate. We're very conservative on our local receipts estimates and I'll get into that. We can lower our employee benefits line. That's typically pretty healthily budgeted. That's where we get a lot of our free cash from. So instead of using the free cash that's been certified we can sort of.

Mr. Silva: We also have stabilization fund for rainy days and if we have to take some out for this unusual circumstance rather than.

Mr. Alves: Then you're gonna have the same problem next year. And then what are you gonna do, you're just gonna keep sucking down and then you have no stabilization.

Mr. Silva: We may but at least we're in a crunch here. We may have the same thing next year but at least now you know okay we're gonna have the same thing now we.

Mr. Alves: You will have it cause the numbers so big you're gonna have it next year.

Mr. Gennette: And it's compounding. So, not only do we have the problem last year but we carried it forward.

Mr. Silva: Well, the insurance may come down to somewhere. They can't.

Mr. Alves: Mr. Chairman, part of the reason right that there's not a lot of wiggle room is free cash has been used to plug the budget before and that's taken away that wiggle room. And years and years of taxing all the way to the levee limit has left no gap when something like this happens. And you can absorb some of that because it's always been to the levee limit and there's been years of free cash put into the budget. So, when you're faced with a time like this, there's no, you have to cut, you can't absorb any of it.

Mr. Silva: Yeah. I mean we'll do some cuts. I'm not saying take all kinds of money out of there.

Mr. Alves: I'm just making the argument why free cash is a terrible idea.

Mr. Silva: It is a terrible idea, but when you have nowhere else to go you have nowhere else to go. Like you said, you're not gonna be able to make cuts for \$2 million. So, we gotta chip away at it some way. But, I'm just saying I'm not opposed.

Mr. Alves: That's fine. I disagree with you there. That's fine.

Mr. Strange: The slides will be informative here.

Board to discuss FY27 budget options.

Mr. Strange: So, these are sort of draft slides that we'll be presenting on February 11th. So, this is sort of the crux of the issue. What is the problem? We've talked about it quite a bit. Employee benefit cost increases. As we sit here we're budgeting an 18% increase in our health insurance costs. Real numbers, that's more than \$2 million increase from fiscal 26 just for our health insurance. We're also budgeting for a 10% increase in our retirement assessment costs. It's about another \$650,000. So, just those two-line items alone represent a \$2.7 million increase. And by comparison, so, the town really has four sort of sources of revenue every year. The two and a half percent property tax are the 200% increase. Any new growth we typically will budget for \$575,000 in new growth tax dollars. Our local receipts, which are excise taxes fees, the trash fee is in there. Any dollars that we

collect locally, our local receipts obviously. And then we have state aid. Our state aid increase is averaged about 1% every year for the past five or six years. It's really not a reliable source of revenue for towns. Ludlow's not alone in that and considering the state of the state budget we're looking at probably a 1% increase. So, the sum total of our revenue increase is 2.6 million which is obviously about a hundred thousand dollars less than just the health and retirement cost increase. That's before we talk about contractual increases for employees, increases in utilities. We have a 90 something million-dollar budget. There's bound to be plenty of other increases in there. And relative to those that total increase right now are level one and the level one is in all the other requests from all the town departments. The level one increase is \$6.5 million which represents about a 7.8% increase. So, that puts us at right now about a \$2.6 million deficit. That does presume a two and a half percent increase for the schools. Now one very large caveat to this slide is last week we got a call from our MIIA representative. So, MIIA is unveiling the fiscal 27 increases on Saturday, and she wanted to call and let us know that our 18% increase is probably gonna be less than that. They've done a couple things. One is they've renegotiated their prescription reimbursement deal with Blue Cross Blue Shield and they're also voting on whether to continue coverage of the GLP-1's, which is a very large portion of our health insurance increase. And they're gonna vote on that on Saturday. I think right now our increases is probably anywhere between 12 and 18%. So, it's probably gonna be less than 18 but we won't really know for sure until we get the numbers. Obviously, that will change a lot of these numbers and sort of I think take the edge off of our approach a little bit. But I think generally speaking our approach is probably gonna have to be very similar and we'll get into that in future slides.

Mr. Silva: One question. I know you mentioned the growth was normally 500 something but this year I believe it's up to 900.

Mr. Strange: Our growth was 1.2 I think. So, it increased 700,000.

Mr. Silva: Okay. So, will that help there with the.

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mr. Silva: So, if we using that growth what is our negative now? It won't be the 2.6.

Mr. Strange: Yeah, I believe it is still 2.6. I think that's with the extra 700,000.

Mr. Silva: Oh, I thought you said that was 500 something thousand. Okay.

Mr. Strange: So, the way that the Delta works is it gets tacked on to the two and a half as you know, so we're budgeting for 575,000.

Mr. Silva: Yeah but if you increase it to 1.2 then we're not gonna be the two six it's gonna be three something I mean.

Mr. Alves: one nine.

Mr. Strange: Yeah. So, as we typically what we'll do is we'll get with the assessor, and we'll look at the previous five years of new growth. Typically, it's 550 between 550 and 600.

Mr. Silva: At the meeting we had with them they gave us an excellent new growth number which I think gotta be at least 600 that's gonna help us with. If that's gonna help with 600 we're gonna be at two.

Mr. Strange: So, we might be able to adjust that up.

Mr. Alves: Yeah, let's make sure that's studied in with whatever number we get in two weeks.

Mr. Gennette: And also the 18% on the increase insurance, right, that might come down as of this Saturday?

Mr. Strange: Yeah.

Mr. Silva: Did I see an email or something like around 14?

Mr. Strange: So, it sounds like the rep didn't want to give me hard numbers or really be committal. It sounds like each of those two represents a few percentage points. So I think it'll probably come down at least three and if they vote to not cover the GLP-1's anymore it'll probably come down another 2 or 3% after that.

Mr. Silva: So, with the growth and that then we're getting to a little better, then there's a couple other things with retirements and whatnot that we might be able to recoup some money as well from what I'm understanding.

Mr. Gennette: So, this is actually a good point Manny. So, if we had not gone over or used free cash in the past couple of years we wouldn't be looking at 2.6 right now.

Mr. Strange: No, we would be.

Mr. Gennette: We'd still be looking at 2.6? Because doesn't it compound, I mean, we'd still have the operational budget issue and now.

Mr. Strange: The way the budgeting works is Town Meeting receives a budget. They vote on the budget last year for fiscal 26. Part of that, I think it was 170,000 from free cash to balance then we get in all the actual numbers. We get in all the numbers, our new growth is higher so we didn't actually have to use \$170,000 in free cash but that's what we had when we went to Town Meeting.

Mr. Gennette: Yeah, it's just a budget item versus the actual.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, Mr. Chairman, just trying to do some math. If it goes to 15, so we lose 3% off of that increase, is the increase per percentage point maybe like about a hundred I think it's like 113,000 or something like that. So, if it goes down to 15, then we would be saving about 340,000 on that number.

Mr. Alves: So, that's 2.3, give or take. Then we have the health plan changes, which were approximately how much?

Mr. Strange: It's on the next slide, but it's about 920 but that's based upon an 18% increase. Right. That number will change.

Mr. Alves: So, you'd lose some changes, you'd lose some of the wind because.

Mr. Silva: Looks like we're somewhere down a million now with all those changes.

Mr. Strange: I can show you. I wanted to sort of reiterate that this is not a Ludlow problem. This is a letter from the Mass Retirees newsletter, sort of just documenting that this is a statewide issue. The Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, eight of those members actually went from the trust to GIC. GIC for those who don't know is a group insurance commission. They're sort of the quasi state run health insurance broker and they had like a \$700 million deficit last year that the state had to bail out. They're usually pretty competitive certainly with MIIA. WBUR ran a story about not only for municipalities, but how public employers are having to increase their health insurance rates. There was sort of a forum in September that was attended by the head of MIIA, the head of Blue Cross Blue Shield, and then a couple other industry experts. And I thought this quote from the head of the MIIA Health Benefits Trust was telling, unfortunately we don't see any significant cost abatement coming in the near future. We expect challenges to go into 26, 27, and beyond. I think one way to mitigate that is the GLP-1's but the costs are still gonna be increasing. So, what are our options? Option number one is increasing the employee health insurance deductibles from 500 for a single or a double and a 1,000, for a family up to 2,000, 4,000, rough numbers that would save us 921,000. A prop two and a half override at two and a half million would include eliminating the trash fee to mitigate the overall increase. So, the prop two and a half increase on a two and a half million dollar override would be between 250 and \$300 a year on a \$369,000 property which is the median assessed value home in Ludlow. So, for example, if you're a non-senior owned property valued at \$369,000 your total increase

derived from the override would be between 50 and \$100. Another positive for doing the override and getting rid of the trash fee as it makes it more equitable. So, if your house is \$200,000 assessed you might be around a break-even point. If you have a much higher assessed house you're gonna pay more. Just seems more equitable cause we have a lot of seniors who are one person households, they don't generate a lot of trash, but they're paying the same trash fee as sort of a family of six that lives in sort of a bigger house. So, the net revenue from backing out the trash fee and passing a two and a half million dollar override would be about a million dollars. And then we would have to find budget cuts and adjustments in the amount of \$700,000. Some moving pieces there, but do you guys have any questions?

Mr. Gennette: I don't like it. I don't have a question. I don't like it.

Mr. Strange: Option two is the same increase in the employee deductibles, health insurance deductibles and then we just have to come up with whatever that Delta is in the form of budget cuts and adjustments. And the big one here is increasing the trash fee. So, as we list some of the potential cuts and adjustments to the budget, those would probably also be reflected in the option number one just maybe not quite as severe, but the cuts and adjustments would be, reducing the school increase from two and a half to 2%, cutting three or more FTEs from town staff, cutting the summer camp, increasing the trash fee to \$275, but keeping the seniors at \$150, reducing some reserves as we were discussing, adjusting those local receipts line items and also the insurance. And then other line-item reductions that we'll have to figure out.

Mr. Gennette: This is a lot. So, I'm really stuck with the trash fee because it's evident from when it was \$100 to \$200. Now we're talking 275, it's not gonna stop here, it's gonna keep going higher. And I'm gonna say it again, I'm parroting the past couple of years with this whole trash fee, but it should never have been that way. And I'm kind of stuck because the only way that that's ever gonna come out of there and not be a lever that's pushed against the community is if we ever went over two and a half override cause we couldn't pay for it in any other situation. So, it really sucks that I'm in this predicament personally believing the 275. I don't know. It's just a mess. It really is. And I'm sure employees as much as they don't want their health insurance to change, I'm sure they'd prefer to keep their job. So, there's that balance. So, I don't know what to do.

Mr. Silva: It looks to me like there's, we're a little early late but early, with these cuts, some of these cuts and some of these things that could be happening and are happening, I don't think we're that far off. I don't think we need, unless you want to get rid of the trash fee, yeah, but I don't think we need that kind of an override or anything near that by the time we're done tweaking.

Mr. Gennette: And does an override solve our problem for the next year?

Mr. Strange: Yeah.

Mr. Gennette: It solves the problem. So, we don't have this problem again the next year. So, insurance goes up another 15% the year after, we do not have this same problem?

Mr. Strange: It'll buy us some time. So, if there's no, so, let's say we have a 12 to 15% health insurance increase next year, we don't have the top option, the 921,000. We have no more options. So, you take that off the table. We really don't have any more options to increase the trash fee because once you get up to 300, you're looking at an enterprise fund. Really can't charge more than what the cost of the trash is. Now you're really looking at significant cuts, if no override, you're looking at significant cuts.

Mr. Gennette: So, what you're saying is preserve the ability to have some of this stuff the next year should we need it. So, if it went override, we would still be looking at the 921 on available for the next year in 2028.

Mr. Strange: No, those would go away cause we can't raise the deductible anymore than.

Mr. Gennette: So, it's going away either way then. Either we're using it or we're going over it.

Mr. Strange: There's only so many pockets of money you can dip into. The trash fee. We talked about centralizing dispatch, that's a possibility. Getting rid of the trash is a possibility. So, these are bad options, they could be a lot worse next year.

Mr. Alves: Well, that's eventually what's gonna happen because when you get tapped out from the trash fee and it keeps increasing, you're gonna have to give it up cause you can't charge more than it costs. That's the only reason you can increase it now because the fee doesn't cover the cost. So, once you get to that point and fast forward a couple years, you're running into this, right, increasing the trash fee is not gonna be an option. So, then you're gonna have discussions of do you keep trash service, or do you lay people off or do you get rid of another service? Not to mention, how many years is our trash contract?

Mr. Rosenblum: 5.

Mr. Alves: So, you don't know how much that's gonna balloon in five years from now or four whatever we have.

Mr. Gennette: We'll have to be ready for that too.

Mr. Rosenblum: We have the cost estimate per year, for five years.

Mr. Alves: I'm saying after the five.

Mr. Rosenblum: Well, after the five then do you eliminate trash?

Mr. Gennette: Well, this is strategic planning.

Mr. Alves: That's where I'm going. That's likely on the table.

Mr. Rosenblum: Right. That's something that we've talked about in the past is when the negotiations were going, the people that negotiated our trash deal did a great job and I mean we can't but is also going down the road is this cause I think it's in the contract is it shows what we pay each year. So, Mr. Chairman, we've had some other discussions before. Summer camp, how much would that be a savings?

Mr. Strange: A couple hundred thousand.

Mr. Rosenblum: A couple hundred thousand. Because there's reasoning behind the fact that summer camp might not happen even at all anyways with some issues that have happened in the past. And how much do you save if you go from two and a half to two on the schools?

Mr. Strange: Almost 400. Oh no, sorry, two.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, you're saying two and three so, now we're at half a million? Because I would, not that I want to do it, but I think that the schools are probably understanding that two might be coming down the road anyways instead of two and a half or originally it was three.

Mr. Gennette: Well, if we don't get a two and a half override everybody's budgets are gonna be hacked.

Mr. Rosenblum: I get it but what I'm saying is you're looking between two options but you're seeing things within the two options that you might be able to combine and also some whatever our certified free cash is gonna be, what we're putting in the other stabilization funds, what we're using on CIP. Generally if we're spending 2 million on CIP do we only spend a million on CIP? Do we only do our leases on the cars and the fire trucks? Things of that nature. It goes everywhere. How much are we supposed to be putting in the parks? Is it half a million?

Mr. Strange: Yeah.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do we have to put half a million into parks? Can you put 250 or 2?

Mr. Gennette: I saw that too.

Mr. Alves: But the capital improve, that's not gonna solve this figure. That doesn't touch that number.

Mr. Rosenblum: What I'm talking about and again this is the other option, I'm throwing out different options, is what Mr. Silva's talking about is the usage of free cash. If we're not going ahead and we're not using 2 million, we're only using 1 million in CIP, if we're not putting 500,000 into these stabilization funds and we're putting 250, we're curbing back what we're gonna have for reserves in our rainy day fund. I'm throwing out different options too. You gotta look at it different ways of saying, we're gonna spend that free cash somewhere, right? If we're putting 500 into the park stabilization fund, we're taking it from free cash. If we put two in there or 150 or whatever the number is now we've saved that free cash to put back into. So, we might have been at say, hey, this number's 3 million we have, it might be four and a half now because we're using that free cash somewhere. You know better than I do what you're looking at for CIP for requests and everything like that.

Mr. Gennette: It's a lot less this year.

Mr. Rosenblum: Yeah. It's just what I'm saying is that, hey, it's everything. I know we have the wall behind the high school, and we have leases on a new firetruck and some police cars and things of that nature. So, I think these are some other options to be looking at as well.

Mr. Silva: Yeah. And I believe our reserves and our stabilizations, I think we're up there, in good shape. We got them up. They were very low. We got them up to I think what it is 5.

Mr. Rosenblum: It has to be in the what, 7 to 9% and I think we're at over 7 million.

Mr. Silva: Yeah. So, if we can't put that much into that fund, we just can't.

Mr. Rosenblum: Well, we generally put in 300. We used to put in a million, when I first got here, we used to put in a million, we've gone down to what three, right.

Mr. Silva: Because you don't need that.

Mr. Rosenblum: That's the minimum we have to put in there anyway. But I'm just saying is if there's ways that, if we're gonna be using, again, no one likes to take free cash to pay down anything. But also in the same sense is that if we keep sitting there with a large balance of free cash, what are we doing with it?

Mr. Silva: Yeah. Nobody likes to do it, but we do it other ways.

Mr. Rosenblum: Because we do it in different ways, but here's the option is we go to a two and a half override. I'm telling you right now what the option's gonna be. It's gonna be going to the cuts cause the two and a half's not gonna pass.

Mr. Silva: Nope.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do I want to put a two and a half out there? Nope, cause guess what? People don't remember is that we pay it too. Do I want a two and a half? No. But if I think there's ways to get creative with it, with our free cash and where we're putting our free cash in this other stabilization funds, we're using that money anyways.

Mr. Gennette: You'd have to have a five-year plan to wean yourself off of it.

Mr. Rosenblum: Yes. You do. So, that's the thing, is that we start, this budget gets done however it gets done, we're not waiting until September. We're hitting it in July. It's gotta be okay, how are we gonna start doing this stuff now? We gotta, the budget should be 12 months now. Especially now, it can't be, we always go, okay, November we need your requests by a certain date in November from all the departments. That budget goes, the budget's a 12-month cycle now, that's what it is. Then we start looking at, okay, now to your

point, strategic planning, long-term planning, where are we gonna make some changes here or there? Things that might be a little subtle at first, but don't hit as hard now.

Mr. Gennette: I think that you're under the impression that if you use free cash now that we can kind of stave off and kind of, we could make cuts as we go along to kind of get caught up. I just don't think that the world is gonna be in a position where it's gonna get cheaper. I think you're just gonna keep running into a wall where you're gonna have to keep moving more and more and more free cash to balance that budget. All the options are on the table, and I hear what you're saying, and I've run that through my head too. But I think it's a very slippery slope and instead of getting a 2 \$300 increase on somebody's taxes, you end up with 5, 6, \$700 swing at once on somebody's, or major, major layoffs and major benefit cuts to employees. So, I think that you back yourself into a corner, it's a good idea for this year. But like I said, if you don't have that five-year plan and if there isn't a good strategy for it and you're anticipating that the world's gonna get worse, that things aren't gonna get cheaper, then I'd love to see your plan. But I just don't know that we're gonna have that.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm just throwing out other options too to think about because I'm telling you right now, it's gonna go over to cuts. That's not passing.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman, the one thing is these numbers are gonna change. Certainly, after this week. But the other thing is we will be prepared assuming that the override isn't gonna fly. We will be prepared with an option too. But I do want to point something out that the net increase for both of these options is about the same. Right? So, you're increasing the trash fee for 2 to 275. And if you own a home that's valued at more than 370 your increase is gonna be a little bit more but for half the town you're actually looking at a less increase with an override as opposed to increasing the trash fee to 275.

Mr. Gennette: So, say that again.

Mr. Strange: So, with the two and a half override at two and a half million and eliminating the trash fee the increases between 250 and \$300 on the median assessed value home. Again, choosing that as an example. So, if you have a 250 or \$300 increase from the override but you subtract, assuming that you're not seeing your own property \$200, your net increase resulting from the override is between 50 and \$100.

Mr. Gennette: Which is cheaper than what you would've normally had. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Strange: Right now, the trash fee is \$200. So, we're increasing the trash fee by \$75. This is uniformly assessed to every resident. This would be baked into your taxes. So, those numbers would be higher for a higher valued home, lower for lower valued homes. I just wanted to point that out.

Mr. Alves: I think the timeline is in two weeks. We need as much of a solid picture as we can get with whatever tweak.

Mr. Silva: See if it's viable.

Mr. Alves: Because we gotta make a two and a half decision and then you can go from there.

Mr. Gennette: When is our joint meeting with the school? I apologize.

Mr. Alves: Next week. Can you go back to that slide one.

Mr. Gennette: Well, I think this is gonna be the hot topic.

Mr. Alves: So, 1.7 that factors in the health and savings. And we said there was, but that doesn't factor in if the school was reduced.

Mr. Strange: This option two does.

Mr. Alves: No, no, no. I'm starting at that 1.7 number. That's before any of the bullets below it.

Mr. Strange: Correct.

Mr. Silva: But I'd still say it's less than that with that growth.

Mr. Alves: Well, that's the exercise I wanna do, right? So, if we start at one seven and I'm just going by these bullets. I'm not advocating for or against any of these. The school at two would bring you to one five. The potential savings from the health insurance additional, what'd you have that number at Bill? 300. So, that's one, two.

Mr. Rosenblum: Summer camps another three.

Mr. Alves: Then Manny had the number on the growth. So, conceivably you can get to around a million or a little lower is what I'm getting at.

Mr. Strange: Yeah. We can get to a million.

Mr. Silva: It's probably 4 if the numbers come in good with the insurance.

Mr. Alves: Right. And that's not entertaining half that list and other ideas that might be out there. But that goes back to my point before, less than a million is completely different than talking 2 million. It's not the same seismic shift. So, the need to even entertain two and a half at that point and that's where I'm going with, we gotta know as solid as we can in two weeks because we have to make the two and a half decision in two weeks.

Mr. Silva: And even if you decided two and a half, sorry Anthony, even if you decided two and a half, I don't think it'll happen and then you're right back to square one and you're gonna have to be in the crunch and get this done. So, we're better off doing the numbers as best as we can right now and then decide, you know what I mean?

Mr. Alves: That's what I'm saying. We gotta be solid in two weeks and make that decision.

Mr. Silva: I've been in this town for an awful long time. I've been around and it doesn't happen. CPA didn't happen twice. Anything that increases taxes does not happen if the public has the opportunity to vote on it, it just doesn't.

Mr. Alves: Paying for it now.

Mr. Silva: Well, doesn't happen. It was before too. You know what? If you got back years and years it was even leaner.

Mr. Alves: I think that was, we can have the free cash discussion next time, because I don't agree but we don't have to make that decision now.

Mr. Silva: No, I don't agree either but when you're.

Mr. Gennette: When you're left with a million that's where it's gotta come out of.

Mr. Rosenblum: Well, here's the thing too is that.

Mr. Alves: You won't get a yes from me for a million dollars of free cash. I'll tell you right now.

Mr. Silva: The thing is, I don't understand. We keep taking it, put it for this and this.

Mr. Alves: Because those are one-time expenses.

Mr. Silva: When we don't have to.

Mr. Alves: Those are one-time expenses.

Mr. Silva: You're taking the free cash from here to go to stabilization, whatever. You're taking free cash to go back? I mean there's so much free cash that we've been taking to go other avenues that we probably don't have to. So, if we don't have to and we use it for this.

Mr. Alves: But you're not supposed to use it for your budget.

Mr. Silva: It's the same thing. That is your budget.

Mr. Alves: No, it's not. Being a one-time thing is not your budget. Manny, it's not.

Mr. Rosenblum: But the park stabilization fund isn't a one-time thing. Is that something that we're supposed to, that we've talked about funding every year.

Mr. Alves: Yeah. You don't have to fund it but you don't then go and take that money for a recurring expense.

Mr. Gennette: And you didn't take it out of your operational budget.

Mr. Rosenblum: No. What I'm saying is it could be instead of half a million it's 200 or it's 150 or whatever is build it up slowly. I don't know. But what I'm saying is before the February date that we have to make a decision this meeting next week is probably even more important because we're meeting with finance and the school committee. Because now you're gonna get, school committee's gonna want there three or two and a half. We gotta play ball across the board. I'm sure finance committee's gonna have their recommendations or whatever also.

Mr. Alves: But you gotta realize too, what's baked into that deficit number is the free cash that's been used. Because in the next year you gotta chase the budget and you gotta chase the plug.

Mr. Gennette: Unless you come in under budget.

Mr. Alves: And then if you use and when does that happen?

Mr. Gennette: We get an awful lot of free cash back. That's their point.

Mr. Alves: But you don't know that. Hope's not a strategy.

Mr. Gennette: No, but at the end of the year when you have funds from unspent money from your budget, it comes back as free cash. That's what we're looking at for the surplus and I think that's what they're trying to say.

Mr. Alves: It's not a good practice.

Mr. Gennette: One hundred percent I agree with you.

Mr. Silva: It's a remedy. It's not a good thing.

Mr. Alves: It doesn't solve your problem. It kicks the can down the road and then you got the same thing.

Mr. Gennette: It does. You put a band aid on it, but you're still bleeding.

Mr. Alves: The difference is, let's see if I can use a good analogy here cause now, I'm gonna go off on a tangent. Okay? The difference is if I have a car repair and I'm short on money this month and I go to Mr. Gennette and say hey I need a hundred dollars to fix my car and you're a nice guy and you give it to me. That's different then if I have a car loan and I'm short one month and I say, Hey James, excuse me, Hey Mr. Genette, can I borrow a hundred bucks to pay my car loan this month? How do I know you're gonna help me next month? I still have the problem. I solved it this month. I still have the problem. That's the difference between using the money to plug your budget.

Mr. Silva: That's a great scenario. So, now you don't have a car and you ain't getting to your job. So, now your car gets taken away because you're not paying your loan and you can't get to your job.

Mr. Alves: It might not happen in January. It's gonna happen in February if he doesn't help me out. It's still gonna happen.

Mr. Silva: I need to do something now. If I need to do something now I'm going to do whatever I gotta do.

Mr. Alves: Guys, sometimes you gotta make a hard decision. You can't just.

Mr. Silva: Where do you get it Anthony?

Mr. Alves: What do you mean, where do you get it? You gotta live within your means. You don't just go; it is just like okay what would I do? Go into my savings and I'm gonna use my savings every month now. Now I got my car, now I got no money. And then what happens? I got a car, but I can't afford my house.

Mr. Silva: We have to do what we gotta do. We're not saying that we're not gonna make cuts where we had to but if we cannot make the cuts that we think we can make, we just can't.

Mr. Gennette: So, it sounds like you're going two and a half override.

Mr. Alves: I'm not saying that.

Mr. Gennette: Well, you're not using free cash either.

Mr. Rosenblum: Well, no, you're using all the scenarios you have. There might be a little freak out, but there might be this and there's.

Mr. Gennette: It's gonna come right back down to the police department or the school.

Mr. Alves: I'm not saying where it's coming from. I'm saying you have to look at the money. You gotta deal with it.

Mr. Gennette: The only two departments that can really shoulder any of that is the police department and the school. That's it. Respectively.

Mr. Silva: Well, that's the other thing is a little bit too, I believe the police department is gonna have quite a few retirements. Three retirements. Which is we just don't fill em. It's a significant amount. And that too is a band aid.

Mr. Alves: I'm not saying that. You guys are jumping to down roads. I'm not saying don't fill them. We need to see what the numbers are and where we're at.

Mr. Silva: Yes. You're thinking I just okay just say just forget everything. I want to use free cash. No, we're gonna do everything possible without it. But if we're gonna have to use some, we're gonna have to use some money.

Mr. Alves: You can't use a million dollars of free cash. I'll tell you right now.

Mr. Silva: No, no, no. I wasn't talking about a million dollars.

Mr. Gennette: Well, we worked option two down to a million dollars.

Mr. Alves: And you need to think too.

Mr. Silva: We're gonna have cuts. We're gonna do cuts.

Mr. Gennette: We went from that 1.7 down to a mill. We worked it out right here that on average we're probably gonna come down to \$1 million. Where's the million dollars gonna come from?

Mr. Silva: But we didn't do cuts.

Mr. Gennette: So, you're gonna cut a million dollars out of the school and police.

Mr. Silva: If you have a million dollars now if we're not doing the police, we're not doing the police. There's another, I don't know 200 close.

Mr. Gennette: That means you gotta go right up to the school. You better have a good conversation with the school because they're the ones that are gonna take the brunt.

Mr. Silva: We're gonna go at every avenue possible before we do it.

Mr. Alves: Here's the last thing I'll say. You put whatever amount of money in free cash into the budget, right? You wanna look out for the taxpayer, right?

Mr. Silva: Always. I always do. I worked this for 34 years and hours.

Mr. Alves: Putting free cash in a budget to plug the budget keeps their tax higher. It inflates their taxes.

Mr. Silva: No.

Mr. Alves: Of course it does cause you haven't reduced anything. You've plugged it with money from somewhere else. A hundred percent.

Mr. Silva: No, listen, I did recaps. I did recaps my whole life. That was my business.

Mr. Alves: Manny, if you don't reduce the budget they have to pay it.

Mr. Gennette: I can believe with you when I said that I don't like any of this, that's exactly it. Because no matter what situation we're in, there's no good answer. There's no good answer.

Mr. Silva: there you go. That's my point.

Mr. Gennette: That's why Marc keeps going two and a half, two and a half, two and a half. It's because there's no good answer.

Mr. Silva: And my point is it's not gonna work. We need numbers.

Mr. Rosenblum: We need to see where all the increases are. Number by number. What's at level two.

Mr. Strange: Yeah. We have a running tally so I can show you guys that on February 3rd as well.

Mr. Rosenblum: Well, it's probably something that actually would be good for next week's meeting with finance and school committee so that they can see it too.

Mr. Strange: We'll know what the trust increase is on Saturday and we're just gonna add 2% because our overruns are high. So, it'll still be an estimate but it'll be a much closer estimate than what we have now and then I'll present that on Tuesday.

Board to discuss options for employee buyouts for FY27.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman we had previously discussed in light of the Fiscal 27 budget issues potentially offering sort of voluntary buyout packages for employees who maybe obviously willing to take them or ready to go and we reached out to Town Council and Town Council's suggestion is that we offer a voluntary layoff to all Town employees and what that

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does is it gives the Town discretion as to whether or not for those who sign up and offer to take the buyout whether or not we want to accept it. That's sort of the summary of what the process would be or what the offer would be. The question certainly is the Board interested or in favor of offering that and what would the amount of the buyout be.

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Chairman so we have a lot of moving pieces right now, right, with the insurance. We just got the email to come in a little lower. We talk about a buyout for the insurance as well, we've had that conversation. I think this kind of falls in line with it as well. I like the idea of being able to offer somebody this in a situation, but I just don't know if we're actually in a position where we have to do this until Town Meeting decides if we are going to override or not. If we were not approved to go override, then I think this is definitely in place. But I think putting it out a little too early might be a problem and I don't know what is your recommendation for what the buyout would look like.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman and I'll go through the presentation in a little bit, if there is an override vote that's accepted or not we're still gonna have to make cuts and the cuts are probably gonna be if there's no override the cuts will be more than if there's an override. So, there's gonna have to be layoffs, just a matter of, so, the hope is maybe positions that we can, I mean we need everybody but we're looking at absolute necessities right now and people who may be in those positions come forward and accept the buyout amount. So, this is part of the solution in addition to the plan design changes for the health insurance either an override or increasing the trash fee and then cuts. Some staffing cuts. Some programmatic cuts so this is necessarily going to be part of the equation.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you for that. I really think it should be part of what the plan is to kind of get through this. I just worry about launching it too early without getting all our eggs in before we make a decision. I would include it. I just don't know what a buyout would look like. I'm all set Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Silva: The only thing I have Marc is we seem to be actually low staffed. We're low staffed already and by doing this we're gonna be even lower. So, if it's somebody that we actually desperately need in that office we're not going to be able to give them. We have the option of doing it, right?

Mr. Strange: We do. We wouldn't accept it.

Mr. Silva: How would we go about that when we're accepting this one and the next employee we're not accepting it's kind of an unfair advantage.

Mr. Strange: Yeah. There's no easy way to do it. Initially we were wondering maybe we could sort of identify groups of employees who we might be able to offer it to.

Mr. Silva: I think that's probably what we should do is find out who we could offer it to and then we'd be safe that way and not jeopardize other employees that might want it but unfortunately, they didn't get the option.

Mr. Strange: Well yeah so, we asked that question and Town Council said it's better to do it this way to give the option to everybody equally and then have people step forward and submit an application to accept the buyout. There's really no great way to do it.

Mr. Silva: How long do we figure we're gonna be able to hold off to actually figure out that we really need to offer this?

Mr. Strange: It's highly likely we would have to make layoffs this year. This is sort of intervene in that process and give people the opportunity to sort of self-layoff. Otherwise, if we don't do this or if we offer the program and nobody steps forward then we're gonna have to target people who we can lay off.

Mr. Silva: These will be for townwide including every single department.

Mr. Strange: Every Town department. Not schools. Schools make their own choices on that front. But Mr. Chairman to your point we are absolutely barebones on the Town side. If you

go through any department in Town Hall, we have mostly three person departments, which is pretty typical. Our DPW staff is low. Contrary to I think some public opinion we are very lean and mean. We did that a couple years back as you guys remember we cut a lot of positions or we unfunded them. We outsourced our IT function so we're pretty lean. But Mr. Chairman to Mr. Gennette's point this is gonna have to go quickly. Part of it is the discussion about the override getting that right on the ballot. We have some information on that front. So, even though it's January 20th this is gonna happen pretty quickly.

Mr. Silva: Certainly, we can move this forward and then pull it back if we see that.

Mr. Strange: Oh yeah. If things change or maybe we get more state aid this year, then we'd budgeted for. Things happen. My guess is that the margins are so big this year even if we do an override we need to find \$700,000 in cuts at least and if there's no override obviously an increase in the trash fee and probably a million dollars in cuts.

Mr. Alves: Yeah, Mr. Chairman I'll go if you'll allow me. I'm pretty lukewarm on this. I think there's potential positives but also potential negatives. I think there's probably a image of the type of employees that we would anticipate would take this, but I think on the outside of that there's also a loss of talent risk, a loss of institutional knowledge risk. We don't know everybody's personal situation. You could have someone that's 25 years old and they say shoot this is the perfect way to take a year or two off and that could be a very valuable employee. I think it also hedges against any types of savings we could derive from layoffs or efficiencies. And I think without being able to quantify it I think it's difficult as well.

Mr. Strange: Mr. Chairman, so again the Town has discretion as to who we would accept. Obviously, we wouldn't offer a buyout and then replace that position in Fiscal 27. We'd only look to honor those requests for positions that we were not gonna backfill. So, that would be a reduction in the Fiscal 27 and then we would use free cash for the payouts.

Mr. Alves: So, we have discretion meaning we wouldn't have to accept someone's request? So, how would that look with that employee after that we offered this and they take it and then we say no. How would that look when they come to work every day?

Mr. Strange: Yeah. It depends on who it is, right? I thought about that and we'd have to have a conversation with that employee. Kind of see where they are. Obviously, if we were not going to accept it explain to them why. Sort of get an idea of what their motivations were for applying for the layoff. Not having been through this situation before I suspect there would probably be conversations around maybe with us about, I'm thinking about putting in for this what do you guys think? All the points are valid. Again, this was the preferred method because it gives the Town discretion.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

BOARD UPDATES/MISC

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

Mr. Gennette: The Superintendent Search Committee's going well, that's moving along fine. We did have our first capital meeting, and it does look like our capital expenses are gonna come in lower than what we normally expect. The school was pretty reserved in their request issue.

Mr. Silva: The capital have a million dollars for us.

Mr. Gennette: I wouldn't even begin to make that kind of assumption. Other than that Mr. Chairman, I have no other board updates.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Alves: Just a lot of people have been getting sick. Try to stay healthy.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to end the Select Board meeting at 8:01 P.M. Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.






Chairman

Ludlow Select Board

All related documents can be viewed at the Select Board's Office during regular business hours.