Town of Ludlow
Office of the Select Board

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

The Meeting of the Select Board held on Tuesday, August 11, 2026, began at 6:00 p.m. at the Ludlow Senior Center.

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

First order of business: Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Rosenblum: 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.

NEW BUSINESS

FY27 Goal Setting Discussion
Mr. Strange said the board had two sheets before them: the fiscal year 2027 goals, which include items carried over from fiscal year 2026 along with additional goals submitted by Anthony, and the fiscal year 2026 goals provided for reference. Mr. Alves confirmed that any goals not completed in the prior year were carried forward. Mr. Strange said he was prepared to review each goal and its status, and the board could decide which to keep, remove, or add.

He began with the goal of determining a public-purpose use for 63 Chestnut Street and 54 Winsor Street. He explained that these former school buildings are deed-restricted for educational or other public purposes. The town has applied for a feasibility study grant through the Community One Stop program, submitted by Josh Carpenter, and is awaiting a response. The feasibility study would evaluate possible public uses. Mr. Strange noted that viable public uses may be limited. Mr. Sanches asked whether the properties were deed-restricted to educational use only, and Mr. Alves clarified the restriction was for public use. Mr. Silva asked whether Town Counsel explored ways to change the restriction. Mr. Strange said counsel determined the restriction cannot be removed because the original grantor entity no longer exists. Mr. Alves suggested exploring whether a coordinated approach with the Housing Authority could offer opportunities, possibly by combining nearby parcels. Mr. Gennette recalled that Winn Companies had previously evaluated redevelopment but faced resistance from the Housing Authority. Mr. Strange added that redevelopment could require temporary displacement of current tenants, and there was concern that affordable units might be lost in the long term unless deed restrictions remained. Mr. Silva said that if redevelopment proves impractical, the town should consider demolishing the buildings and using the land for parking, which would meet the public-purpose requirement and eliminate substantial insurance costs. Mr. Alves noted that expanded parking could benefit the park area, though not East Street specifically. Mr. Rosenblum said converting the site to parking would support Cultural Council events and food truck activities, making the location more usable for community gatherings. Mr. Silva added that Celebrate Ludlow often faces parking challenges in the area and emphasized that the town currently spends around $40,000 on insurance for the buildings.
Mr. Alves said the feasibility study is still worthwhile, and demolition should be considered only if the study yields no viable options. Mr. Gennette said the land could be a potential future site for a police station, with demolition providing a clean slate. Mr. Rosenblum asked about the cost of demolition, referencing the Veterans Park demolition estimate. Mr. Strange said the winning bid for Veterans Park was around $550,000, with other bids closer

to $900,000, and that the town benefitted from grant funding that offset asbestos-related expenses. Mr. Rosenblum asked about funding sources for demolition, and Mr. Strange said free cash within the capital program, bonding, or stabilization could be options. Mr. Gennette suggested that stabilization could be appropriate for a one-time cost, avoiding interest payments associated with bonding. Mr. Alves agreed that stabilization could be used if the amount fell within a reasonable range. Mr. Rosenblum asked about current stabilization levels. Mr. Strange said the account holds approximately $7.8 million. Mr. Gennette added that this places the town at roughly 8 percent of operating expenses, which is within the recommended 7 to 9 percent benchmark.

Mr. Strange reviewed the goal related to updating the bylaw on the placement of private signs on public property. He said he was unsure whether the board wished to keep this item on the list. He explained that last year he spoke with BJ, the town's zoning enforcement officer, who said the issue is primarily an enforcement challenge. With only one person responsible for enforcement, she is already managing a heavy workload. In practice, BJ removes signs when she sees them and brings them back to her office or discards them, but enforcement is not consistent due to time constraints. Mr. Alves suggested discussing this goal together with the goal addressing unkempt properties, which he had originally introduced. He said complaints about neglected properties are the most frequent ones he receives, with residents upset about maintaining their own homes while neighboring properties fall into disrepair. He asked whether improving enforcement rather than bylaws might be more effective and whether the town could make it easier for residents to report concerns, perhaps through a website portal. Mr. Rosenblum noted that many municipalities use 311 systems. Mr. Strange said the town receives numerous online submissions already and that the website includes a "report a concern" feature that routes issues to the appropriate department. Mr. Alves suggested improving visibility of this feature by placing it directly on departmental pages. Mr. Rosenblum said the dropdown should ask which department the concern relates to, allowing issues such as unkempt properties to be automatically routed to zoning enforcement. Mr. Alves emphasized that the intent is not to encourage neighbors to file complaints against one another unnecessarily. He said each case must be understood individually, noting that some residents may be elderly or unable to maintain their property. He said the town should offer assistance where possible rather than immediately issuing fines. Mr. Silva said enforcement already exists through zoning, and property complaints must be handled by the Building Department. He added that calling the Select Board will not resolve enforcement, and complaints must be submitted through proper zoning channels. Mr. Alves suggested reframing the goals to focus on improving enforcement mechanisms. Mr. Sanches agreed, noting that enforcement capacity was the root issue. Mr. Silva said meaningful improvement may require additional staffing, similar to Springfield's model of multiple enforcement officers. Mr. Strange noted that Paulina recently sent over proposed amendments to the unkempt property bylaw, addressing challenges such as absentee landlords and lengthy enforcement timelines. These amendments are under review. Board members discussed situations where residents may lack the financial ability to address property issues. Mr. Gennette suggested working with local civic organizations to provide assistance for residents in need. Mr. Rosenblum added that youth groups such as scouts could assist with lawn care for community service hours. They discussed unusual cases, including one involving a resident who refused to cut her lawn for reason of claimed habitat preservation. Mr. Rosenblum said Conservation could verify such claims. Regarding signage, Mr. Alves said enforcement remains an issue and asked to see proposed enforcement methods. Mr. Strange explained that signs on public property violate existing rules, but lack of staff makes proactive enforcement difficult. He said increasing fines may help reduce violations. Mr. Silva noted that fewer signs appear this year, likely due to BJ's efforts. Mr. Gennette asked whether violations could be treated as littering, which carries a fine, and Mr. Strange said $300 is the maximum allowable fine. Mr. Sanches clarified that the town currently has a sign policy but would be considering a new bylaw with enforcement provisions. Mr. Strange said the main challenge is insufficient resources for proactive enforcement, and raising fines could help discourage violations.
Mr. Sanches asked about timelines, noting that the goal's target date had passed. Mr. Strange said proposed amendments to the unkempt property bylaw are expected to move forward for the October 26 Town Meeting. The sign bylaw timeline was not updated, as BJ did not indicate significant traction on the issue. After discussion, the board agreed that they would like to see enforcement options and potential revisions from staff before determining how to proceed.

Mr. Strange reviewed the goal concerning solicitation regulations. He explained that the item had been held over because enforcement is a significant challenge. He said that residents often report solar or sales representatives who refuse to leave when asked, but by the time police are contacted, the individuals have already moved on. Enforcement relies heavily on residents identifying the company and reporting it. While solicitors are required to register with the Police Department, capturing violations in real time is difficult. Mr. Rosenblum said enforcement ultimately depends on residents asking solicitors to show identification and whether they are registered. If not, residents may end the conversation. He noted his own neighborhood receives frequent visits from solar and electric company representatives. Mr. Strange suggested that the town may benefit from issuing broad public guidance or reminders, so residents understand their options. Mr. Gennette said residents should not have to deal with solicitations at their door at all and questioned whether the town could prohibit solicitation entirely. Mr. Strange said the town already prohibits solicitation unless a vendor is registered, but violations still occur. Mr. Gennette suggested banning commercial solicitation outright. Mr. Sanches asked whether a current bylaw exists. Mr. Alves noted that some forms of door-to-door activity, such as political campaigning or religious outreach, may receive constitutional protections. He agreed that the primary issue appears to be commercial vendors. Mr. Alves asked whether other communities have implemented full or partial bans and whether the town could explore options. Mr. Strange said he would speak with Chief Brennan. Mr. Gennette said the goal should be to determine what is legally possible before committing to a direction. Mr. Sanches said the timeline listed in the goals is acceptable and asked whether the board would be considering an amendment. Mr. Strange said the intent would be to update the bylaw, but the town is not ready to bring an article to the October Town Meeting. Mr. Alves suggested rewording some goals so they are more achievable. He recommended that the solicitation goal for the coming months should be framed as an exploration of possible updates and enforcement improvements rather than a final deliverable. He said a phased approach will help prevent goals from becoming stalled or overlooked as the year progresses.

Mr. Strange reviewed the goal related to creating a Strategic Planning Committee, noting it was a holdover from the prior year. Mr. Gennette said he had originally proposed the committee, explaining that the town cannot meet every need and should identify its core priorities. He said Ludlow benefits from strong institutions such as the Boys & Girls Club, the Senior Center, the library, and Veterans Services, and that a Strategic Planning Committee could help the town define long-term goals and a clear direction. He said he did not want to dive too deeply into the committee's details at this time but felt it remained important unless the board preferred to keep strategic planning at the Select Board level for now. He asked whether a bylaw would be needed or if the board could simply establish a recommending committee. Mr. Strange said the Select Board could create such a committee without a bylaw. Mr. Alves asked whether a draft document already existed. Mr. Gennette said he had drafted one, though he noted that he does not generally favor excessive policy but sees gaps that must be addressed. He said a Strategic Planning Committee could unify departments and community organizations around shared long-term goals for Ludlow. He said that rather than filling fields with solar panels or battery storage, the town should have a coordinated plan reflecting community preferences. He added that he had not pushed the proposal recently because the Public Safety Facilities Committee had taken priority. He said it was up to the board whether to keep or delay the goal. Mr. Alves said he supported the concept and asked what the committee would ultimately provide, such as ten-year goals or more detailed recommendations. Mr. Gennette said the committee would determine its own scope but would likely focus on long-term planning across departments, including the school system, especially as education and technology evolve. He emphasized that the committee's work would be a "living document" updated over time. Mr. Silva said the town once had a long-range planning committee. Mr. Gennette said it had been dissolved after not meeting for many years. Mr. Silva recalled that it had originally been structured well and included school representation. Mr. Gennette said the new committee would essentially be a revitalization of that effort. Mr. Rosenblum noted that many individuals serving on the Public Safety Facilities Committee would likely be involved in strategic planning due to overlapping areas of expertise. He said creation of a Strategic Planning Committee could be valuable, especially if formed through a simple charge and charter rather than a full bylaw. He said a committee composed of department heads, stakeholders, and residents could provide broader input than the Select Board alone. Mr. Gennette agreed and said a dedicated committee would give residents a place to bring ideas and be heard. He said such a committee could also help establish consistent direction, noting that clearer priorities would improve decisions such as distribution of opioid settlement funds. He said Ludlow CARES, the Michael J. Dias Foundation, and the Board of Health already represent the town's primary focus areas for opioid programming, and a strategic plan would strengthen consistency in decision-making. He suggested presenting the drafted charge and charter to the board at a future meeting. Mr. Strange said he would bring the draft forward soon so the board could review and decide how to proceed.

Mr. Strange reviewed the goal regarding the town election date, noting it was a request originally brought forward by Mr. Alves. He explained that the topic had been postponed at the May Town Meeting and that any change would require coordination with the schools and other stakeholders affected by election scheduling. Mr. Rosenblum recalled that the schools were the primary concern last time. Mr. Alves confirmed this, explaining that the School Committee had already approved its calendar, which included professional development days on election days, and the proposed new date did not align with their schedule. He said he recently met with the superintendent, who indicated that the school calendar is typically finalized around February, and suggested the town begin discussions prior to that point. He noted that voters at Town Meeting seemed generally supportive of revisiting the election date, as holding elections after Town Meeting would allow newly elected officials to participate more fully in budget decisions. Mr. Silva reiterated his long-standing suggestion that the town consider holding its election on a Saturday to increase voter turnout. Mr. Alves said he was open to various options, including a Saturday election, but emphasized that the decision must be coordinated with the Town Clerk, the schools, and the overall town calendar. He pointed out that many nearby communities hold elections within a week of Town Meeting and added that the intention behind this proposal is not to lengthen officials' terms, as any change could explicitly take effect the following year. Mr. Strange asked whether the board wanted him to prepare something for the October Town Meeting. Mr. Alves recommended not rushing the process, explaining that any change would not take effect for the upcoming March election and should be implemented thoughtfully. Mr. Rosenblum agreed, saying the next spring is too soon and that the schools' calendar deadlines make a rushed change impractical. Mr. Gennette said he supported anything that might increase voter turnout and noted that elections held during the week often see lower participation. Mr. Alves suggested researching turnout figures in comparable suburban towns with weekday versus Saturday elections as a useful data point moving forward.

Mr. Strange reviewed the next goal, noting it was another holdover from the prior year and part of the ongoing work tied to the town's 2023 financial management review. He said the town has been steadily addressing the recommendations and that one of the simpler items would be converting the Board of Assessors to an appointed board. He noted there has been considerable discussion on that topic already, and it may be appropriate to move it forward. Mr. Silva said he has long supported making the Board of Assessors appointed, based on his 35 years of experience in municipal operations. He explained that the current setup allows individuals to become assessors through popularity rather than qualification, and that the lack of contested races further contributes to the issue. He said assessing requires extensive knowledge of real estate, bylaws, and state regulations, and that he has encountered assessors who misunderstood legal requirements. He believes an appointment process would attract more qualified candidates. Mr. Alves thanked Mr. Silva for his perspective and said he would like to review all recommendations from the financial management review before moving forward. He asked for a summary listing the recommendations. Mr. Strange said the document is not lengthy and includes an executive summary with additional technical details and that he can send it to the board. Mr. Alves suggested placing the review on a future agenda so the board can determine which recommendations it might pursue. Mr. Rosenblum noted that the last financial management review prior to 2023 was in 2009.

Mr. Strange introduced the next agenda item, an update to the entertainment license application. Mr. Gennette explained that he had watched the previous meeting and appreciated the discussion, noting that framing the document as guidance rather than policy was helpful. Mr. Alves clarified that his intent was to establish guardrails rather than roadblocks. Mr. Gennette agreed, saying the goal was to outline the structure of the application and expectations, with details to be worked out. Mr. Alves noted that the Board had agreed to pause and revisit the topic, adding that the upcoming discussion should determine whether to pursue a formal policy or simply update the application. Mr. Gennette expressed support for updating the application. Mr. Rosenblum described an approach where applicants would indicate whether they planned outdoor music, which would trigger an additional amendment or guidance document. Mr. Gennette felt this should be handled through two separate documents, with an outdoor entertainment license accompanied by a distinct guidelines sheet. Mr. Rosenblum agreed and noted that this approach would cover both larger venues and smaller situations, such as restaurants playing music on outdoor speakers. He emphasized the need to account for different types of outdoor sound. Mr. Gennette added that certain operations, such as Lusitano events and sports activities, fall under special permits or are expected community noises and would not be affected by these changes.

Mr. Strange introduced the review and revision of the personnel policy manual. He noted that he and Carrie met the previous week to go through the document and will provide red-lined edits for the Board to consider. Mr. Silva recalled that the manual is typically updated regularly. Mr. Strange confirmed that several adjustments are needed, including updates required by law, the addition of a remote work policy, and one additional policy. He stated that the Board should expect to receive the proposed revisions soon.

Mr. Strange reviewed the item on implementing a performance management process for department heads, noting that the effort has not yet advanced. He stated that evaluations can be challenging for various reasons and expressed his preference to meet with department heads to develop a mutually agreed-upon rubric. He explained that expectations should be clear, so evaluations are based on shared understanding. He added that although they meet regularly with department heads, they have not yet had the opportunity to create this framework.

Mr. Strange introduced the topic of a comparison report on commercial property assessments, noting that such work generally falls under the Board of Assessors. He said the Board could request a report comparing local commercial assessments with those of surrounding communities, though he questioned how useful such comparisons would be. Mr. Silva explained that commercial values depend heavily on each community's commercial base and income potential, making cross-community comparisons difficult and often not meaningful. The Board discussed what the purpose of such a report would be and whether it should be included as a Select Board goal. Mr. Silva stated that while a report on local commercial sales and assessments could be provided, comparisons to other communities would likely offer limited value. During the conversation, Mr. Strange referenced valuation issues at the Mills related to unoccupied commercial space. Mr. Gennette clarified that his original question concerned commercial lots on Millside Drive that have been sold but not yet developed. He asked whether any agreements required timely construction on those properties. Mr. Silva and Mr. Strange noted that all Millside Drive lots have been sold and site plan review submissions are expected, but no development-timing conditions exist.

Mr. Strange reviewed the goal of updating the financial policy manual, noting that although the Board had discussed it previously, it has not been revisited in detail. He said updates are needed, including stabilization fund language, budget process policy, and guidance on use of the building infrastructure fund. He explained that recent conversations raised questions about approval thresholds for expenditures and whether certain amounts should require Select Board approval. Mr. Sanches noted that while the financial policy was adopted in 2019, the online version lacks adopted dates and many town policies appear online without clear adoption information. He recommended either adding an adopted date to every page or placing a single adopted date at the beginning and removing page-by-page placeholders. He emphasized the importance of following existing policies, pointing out that several requirements—such as free cash target dates—have not been met. The Board discussed how to approach an update. Mr. Strange suggested reviewing the manual, adding adopted dates, and determining which sections need revisions. He also referenced DLS template policies that could be considered. Mr. Sanches stressed that before updating the manual, the town should work to adhere to the policies already in place. Members reviewed the need for greater compliance with the budget calendar and departmental deadlines. Mr. Strange explained that he had created a finance calendar by identifying key dates from the policy manual and that it would be distributed to departments. He noted that historically deadlines have been missed, in part because the Town Administrator lacks authority to enforce them. He planned to have financial staff explain directly to the Board why certain policy deadlines may not be met this year, particularly regarding five-year forecasting, which the new Town Accountant is not yet prepared to complete. Discussion also covered the capital bylaw and its application to requests outside the regular budget cycle. Mr. Strange noted that capital requests exceeding $20,000 should technically go through CIPC even when funded by sources such as the building infrastructure fund, though this has been applied inconsistently. Members debated whether emergency needs should be treated differently and how stabilization funds would factor into future capital planning. Mr. Gennette emphasized that CIPC's role is to make recommendations, with final decisions resting with the Select Board and ultimately Town Meeting. The Board agreed that the financial policy manual should receive a short-term update to correct adoption dates, followed by a broader review of the policy to determine any necessary revisions.

Mr. Strange discussed the goal of certifying free cash by December 31, noting that he regularly emphasizes the importance of meeting that deadline. He explained that Michelle Hill is currently managing issues inherited from Mass Munifin while also being short-staffed, which has limited her ability to complete monthly reconciliations needed for timely certification. He said she has been working extensively, including over the weekend, and plans to have her come before the Board to explain her progress and any delays. He added that Michelle White would do the same if needed. Mr. Strange stated that meeting the December 31 deadline would be ideal. Mr. Silva asked whether the Department of Revenue could accommodate certification at that point in the year, and Mr. Strange responded that most towns submit in October or November, with DOR experiencing a lull afterward, so he does not anticipate a delay. He noted that the town has a strong working relationship with DOR and could likely obtain flexibility if needed.

Mr. Strange reviewed the final two proposed goals submitted by Mr. Sanches and Mr. Alves: establishing and funding plans for the next phase of Whitney Park improvements and establishing and funding a plan for replacing the LHS tennis courts. Mr. Alves suggested both goals be framed as exploratory to allow for updates as feasibility is assessed. The Board discussed the condition of the high school tennis courts, noting they are no longer suitable for hosting matches and that previous repair estimates were substantial. Members also referenced past intentions to address the courts, which were delayed due to other urgent capital needs. The Board discussed broader recreation planning, including future development at Vets Park, which in its concept plan includes pickleball courts. They reviewed the condition of existing facilities such as basketball courts at Baird and the small soccer field at Harris Brook. Members agreed the town should prioritize rehabilitating current assets before building new ones and consider the needs of various sports—including tennis, pickleball, basketball, and soccer—alongside any long-term recreational planning. Mr. Silva and Mr. Sanches added that additional locations, such as Electric Park, may offer opportunities for expanded recreation space. Regarding Vets Park, Mr. Alves explained that the town is awaiting a federal funding decision and that no significant action should be taken until the outcome is known. He noted that the concept plan is already complete and can be referenced, with next steps depending on whether the town receives full, partial, or no funding. Mr. Strange confirmed the plan is ready and simply pending federal response.

Mr. Gennette proposed adding a goal related to the former Ludlow Hospital building, now operating as a clinic. He stated that the police department spends considerable time there responding to incidents, resulting in significant overtime costs and potential liability concerns. He suggested determining whether the town could legally charge the clinic for police time, similar to how police details are billed for roadwork. Mr. Silva asked for more information about the nature of the calls occurring at the facility, and Mr. Gennette explained that it operates as a drug addiction clinic with frequent medical emergencies, disturbances, and court-mandated clients, leading to regular police and fire responses. Mr. Gennette said the town should evaluate whether the clinic is expected to provide its own security and whether the town has any authority to require it. He recommended gathering information from the police chief and possibly town counsel before approaching the organization. Mr. Sanches asked for clarification of the goal, and Mr. Gennette said the intent is to assess the impact on public safety resources and determine what options the town may have for addressing the issue.

Mr. Sanches raised the topic of the First Meeting House. Mr. Strange reported that he met earlier in the day with members of the Historical Commission and other stakeholders, including Elaine Hodgman, Karen Pilon, Brian Bylicki, Jared Hapka, Brittany, Josh, and Pam Hayes. He said the meeting was productive and showed strong support for preserving the building. The group reviewed past efforts, assessed the current condition, and discussed developing a plan for future restoration. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission will be engaged, and Josh is coordinating with their historical planner. A site visit took place following the meeting, and Mr. Strange noted the building is in very poor condition. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for August 27. Mr. Strange said the participants expressed interest in reestablishing the First Meeting House Committee as a subcommittee of the Historical Commission, which will require review of the committee's charge and charter. Mr. Rosenblum recalled that ADA compliance, including installation of an elevator and the absence of a sprinkler system, would represent significant costs. Mr. Gennette noted the building is not on the historical register, which limits certain regulatory flexibilities. Mr. Sanches asked whether the Board intended to add this as a goal with a conditions assessment completed by March 2027. Mr. Strange said that could be done but emphasized the need to determine through PVPC what type of feasibility study or engineering assessment would be required, as the building needs extensive work.

Mr. Sanches asked whether the Board intended to prioritize the list of proposed goals. Mr. Gennette then raised an additional question regarding the Collector's Office, suggesting the town consider limiting public hours during slower periods to give staff time to catch up on internal work. Mr. Strange said this would be up to the Board. Mr. Rosenblum noted that many residents, including retirees, visit throughout the day, and reducing hours could be difficult. Mr. Gennette suggested an alternative approach of assigning a staff member to serve as an intake contact to greet residents, collect necessary information, and provide follow-up tickets, which he said could improve customer service and reduce strain on the department.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to close the strategic planning meeting at 7:50 p.m. **Mr. Sanches second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

William [signature] Chairman

[signature]

[signature]

[signature]

John [signature]

Ludlow Select Board

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