The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, June 9, 2020 began at 5:30 p.m. Remote participation due to COVID-19.

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

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Silva read the resignation of Mrs. Fernandes from the Board of Selectmen, effective immediately.

Visitation:

5:30 p.m. - Carrier Ribeiro, Human Resources – Vacation Policy moving forward – carry over due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Ribeiro explained that due to the COVID pandemic and the staff not working on a regular basis and not being able to use their vacation time due to places being shut down the Town has to look at vacation time for the employees. After speaking with other Cities and Towns in the Commonwealth, most municipalities have a 'use it or lose it' vacation policy due to budget issues but with the COVID situation, they are making exceptions. All but one department in Town accrue their vacation time on their anniversary date of hire. In April, the Board approved the extension of the use of the 3 personal days that full-time employees get through September 30, 2020.

Ms. Ribeiro also explained that currently, the union contract allows employees to carry over 1 week of unused vacation time to the following year as long as it is used within 90 days. Due to the COVID pandemic, we would like to allow the employees to extend 2 weeks of vacation time through June 30, 2021 and if the employee had more than 2 weeks' vacation time, for example if the employee had 3 weeks, they could extend 2 weeks through June 30, 2021 and the 3rd week would be paid out to the employee at the current rate. Any additional vacation time for employee's who have over 4 weeks' vacation time would have to be used by that employee's anniversary date or they would lose that time. This would be for any vacation time accrued during 2020. Extending through June 30, 2021 will also help with scheduling.

Going into FY21, the Town will allow employees to carry over 2 weeks of vacation to be used by June 30, 2022. The Town may also have to look at an additional payout but right now we are going to try using the guidelines listed above first. This is comparable to other towns and fair for our employees.

Ms. Collins did explain that the payout for the one week, with a 2% increase will be $52,000.

Mr. Goncalves asked if other departments have been consulted about this and if they feel it is fair?

Ms. Ribeiro explained that a lot of employees are asking about their vacation time and it has been brought to her attention because employees don't want to lose their time. She has touched base informally with department heads about this.

Mr. DeBarge stated that this is the right thing to do for the employees and should not fall at the way side. He also asked if the payout does have to happen, will there be any reimbursement from the State or Federal Government and he has reached out to the powers that be about this. The Police and Fire Department are the only departments that have been able to use some of their vacation time so far.

Mr. Rosenblum echoed all of the others' sentiments that this needs to be done for our employees and after Ms. Ribeiro, Ms. Villano, and Ms. Collins have done their due diligence with this by looking at other towns, does not have an issue with it.

Mr. Silva explained that in the Town of Wilbraham, where he works, vacation time was not extended at all because they already have a policy that extends 2 weeks of vacation time normally. It was brought to the Selectmen there and they rejected it because it causes budgetary issues in the future.

Ms. Villano reiterate that the payout will create an additional $52,000 which will have to be added to the FY21 budget in order to fund it. The excess levy for the Town is currently about $300,000 so the Town can afford to add the additional $52,000 to the budget to do the payout. However, it is handled

by the Board whether it is extending the 2 weeks, it needs to be addressed and allow the employees to take benefit of their vacation. Some employees will still lose vacation time either way.

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Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to adopt the plan as submitted for the vacation time to be paid out and allow the 2-week carry over to June 30, 2021 and then the additional 2 weeks through June 30, 2022 if applicable. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

6:00 p.m. – Kim Collins, Town Accountant, Eric Gregoire, Finance Chairman – FY21 budget discussion.

Ms. Collins wanted to go over the FY21 budget and see if there are any changes that anyone wanted to discuss. She did point out that there was a $300,000 adjustment to fringe benefits in July as a gift from the insurance company due to COVID.

Ms. Villano discussed the merging of Building Commissioner and Facilities Manager duties will cost an additional $45,000 or more and none of the departments are prepared to add that to the FY21 budget. Ms. Villano is recommending that the Town allow the Building Commissioner to assume the duties of both the Building Commissioner and the Facilities Manager, increasing his salary and holding off on hiring for the inspectional position until the following year. If the Selectmen agree to this change, there would be an increase of $16,000 to building but the rest of the budget would pretty much remain the same from the last time the Board had discussed it.

Ms. Collins also explained that the budget was reduced due to vacant positions not being funded and overtime being cut in the Fire and Recreation Departments as well. However, the vacancy in the Board of Assessors office will be reduced not eliminated complete.

Mr. Silva confirmed that overall, the Town is looking at a 4% increase in the budget.

Ms. Villano explained that the budget draft that went out to the Town Precinct members reflects the increase for Town Counsel, the increase in salary for the personal services due to there being 3 elections in FY21 and the Liability Insurance due to the excluded debt projects as well as a review of the value of the Town and the School buildings. Mr. Villano stated that if the Board was inclined to approve the budget tonight, the Board would have to vote on the payout which would be an additional $52,000 added to the budget as well as the Building Commissioners' increase of $16,000 added to the budget as well. She stated that the Finance Committee did a great job going over the budget and questioning different departments.

Mr. Silva explained that the 4% increase to the budget amounts to our tax rate going up to $20.96, which would be $.36 increase or an average bill of $170.

Ms. Collins corrected Mr. Silva and stated that the tax rate would be $20.98, which is a $.36 increase or an average bill of $173.

Mr. Silva stated again that it is a $20.98 tax rate with a $.36 increase from the previous year which is approximately $173 to the average tax payer, which is estimated at $236,000 which is a slight increase in the average.

Ms. Villano confirmed that in FY20 it was $231,000 and it's about a $4,000 increase in the valuation.

Mr. Silva explained that Ludlow's taxes are very modest but they will continue to go up every year unless the Town drastically cuts services or an industry comes in and fits the bill for us. Unfortunately, the Town of Ludlow will continue to see a tax increase for now.

Ms. Collins also pointed out that when the Level 1 budget was being looked at, the taxpayers were going to have a $2 increase and now it is down to $.36 and that is the lowest that the taxpayers have seen since 2018. The Town has gone through the process of looking at every single item and made reductions based on COVID and trends we are seeing in the Town. We have gone back and asked departments to look at their budgets to see what they can take without losing employees.

Mr. Gregoire explained that the Finance Committee was very diligent about looking at every department and trying to address impacting services unfavorably and also saving employees jobs.

Mr. Goncalves is concerned about the additional 19 hours being given to the Building Commissioner/Facilities Manager position that it may not be enough in the future or it may be too much and the Town has nothing to compare it to.

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Ms. Villano explained that with all of the maintenance and repairs that have to be handled for all of the Town's buildings and the fact that the Town will have 2 new buildings coming online and 3 going offline in the next year or two, having the Facilities Manager in position now will help it be implemented in the next year or two. The Town will hold off for now on the inspector's position. Ms. Villano also believes that this position will pay back within the first year of the Building Commissioner adding Facilities Manager to his title.

Mr. DeBarge is on board with giving the 19 hours for the Facilities Manager to Justin Larivee, Building Commissioner and agrees with Ms. Villano that this money being spent will be paid back ten-fold with having Mr. Larivee in this position.

Mr. Rosenblum disagrees due to the fact that he gets numerous complaints from residents that are unable to get in touch with the Building Commissioner now and before COVID never mind adding these responsibilities as well.

Mr. Silva agrees with Mr. Rosenblum regarding complaints from residents not getting answers back from the Building Commissioner. Adding more responsibilities to the Building Commissioner may cause more problems. He also stated that he would love to see some of the workload taken away from Ms. Villano.

Mr. Goncalves suggested that the Board puts the money in place for the position and in the future the Board will sit down with Mr. Larivee, Building Commissioner and figure out what the position is going to be.

Mr. Silva asked if are we just swapping back and forth on different positions, because we are not filling certain vacancies with the Town but now, we are going to add the $16,000 for the Facilities Manager?

Ms. Villano said yes and no; no department is more important than the other but this was just to get the monies accounted for in the budget.

Ms. Collins understands the concerns regarding not having enough time within that department and suggested that maybe the Town should fill that office to the capacity it needs to be to get the work done because it brings in a lot of revenue for the Town. Then, look at it in terms of the classification to see if the Management position makes sense.

Mr. Goncalves wants to be sure this is a good fit for everyone.

Ms. Villano did comment Mr. Larivee helps her out immensely but does acknowledge that Ms. Collins brought up some valid points as well. She also reiterated that if the classification study is approved, completed in four months, we have results and there is a need; do we wait until the next year to fund the money.

Mr. Gregoire the Finance Committee did not have a lot of information regarding this change and how things were going to work and come together. We approved this budget and this was not included in it. It makes me nervous to add anything in, especially this year unless it is absolutely necessary.

Mr. DeBarge commented that the Building Commissioner is inundated with work and the Town does have a levy limit and the Finance Committee has cautioned about finances but maybe the Town should look at funding the part-time position in order to make things work more efficiently.

Mr. Goncalves would like a job description for the Building Commissioner and then the Board can discuss it in more detail.

Ms. Ribeiro stated that there is an Article going to Town Meeting to get the classification study done. Then the Town can take a better look at everyone's job description, including the Building Commissioner as that is the only one that the Town does not have currently. She also commented that she is not a fan

of building a job description around a person. As the Human Resources Director, I do have an issue with combining the Building Commissioner and the Facilities Manager's positions. Certain positions are on hold due to COVID and budgetary reasons that are already on the classification plan and it sends a bad message if we create new positions and not hire into vacant positions and then talk about possible furloughs or layoffs in the future.

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Mr. DeBarge is against having another $80,000 annual position in the Building Department, especially without knowing financial future for FY22, 23 and 24 after the pandemic.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to add the $16,000 to the budget of the Facilities Manger portioned to the Building Commissioner's budget. Vote 3-1. Mr. Rosenblum opposed.

Ms. Collins went over the tax recap and wanted to let the Selectmen know that there was 13% for general local aid, we had to add in the anticipated budget deficit for golf and then there were different reductions in local receipts for meals tax, motor vehicles excise. With all of these assumptions and the anticipated revenue from the trash program and the holiday that we are being given by the insurance, that would have allowed us to end up as an excess levy of $300,000. With the two additions that were just voted on, we are now looking at approximately $225,000. One concern is that the DPW needs to have their trash program up and running and it has to begin by July 1st. After listening to one of the DPW meetings, they had mentioned that the trash program will not start until October 1st and this budget is based on the trash program beginning July 1st. In addition, we do not know what is going to happen with State Aid, we don't have those numbers yet. There have not been any anticipated reductions in Chapter 70. We budgeted for a 14% decrease in general local aid so if it is anything above that we may have to come back and revisit this budget in October if anything due to COVID we don't anticipate what happens. We may need to come back at Special Town Meeting and look at deeper cuts.

Mr. Silva asked if we have focused on the local receipts and where some of the revenues could fall short? In the Town of Wilbraham, the Tax Collector stated that some of the motor vehicle excise taxes are down significantly from last year. Are we toning that down?

Ms. Collins did discuss this with our Tax Collector and was told it was a small decrease but nothing significant. I can speak to the Assessor and see if there are any additional cuts that we can do but with the excess levy of $225,000 it looks like we should be okay right now.

Mr. Silva stated that because I do the local receipts for Wilbraham, the car sales are down and could affect us.

Mr. DeBarge asked if we have heard anything from MGM regarding the stipend that they provide the town.

Ms. Villano and Ms. Collins stated that the town typically does not receive any communication from MGM, we only receive the check from them.

Mr. DeBarge wanted to know when we usually get the check from MGM.

Ms. Collins will have to look into that.

Ms. Villano stated that the dollar amount is not significant but the Town did assume that it would not receive that money this year. The Superintendent does not believe any more will be cut from Chapter 70 because they want the kids in school. Also, some of the dealerships are doing business on line so we don't think there will be a significant drop there either. We are asking that the Board of Selectmen approve the budget as presented tonight and we will also discuss the 1/12 budget as well.

Mr. Gregoire we should look at what the next layer of cuts would be just in case but we have done our best to examine potential cuts and revenues to this point.

Ms. Collins the total amount of additions to the budget is $68,246. The estimated tax rate will be $21.01 with a $.39 increase with these additions and the levy excess would be $232,000.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to accept the budget as stated by the Town Accountant. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

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Ms. Villano did advise that if the Town cannot approve the budget for FY21 and the Town Meeting is cancelled, the Town must have a 1/12 budget in place. This budget will have to be loaded into the Gateway system and approved on a monthly basis by the DOR and the DLS. As a backup, the Board must vote this 1/12 budget.

Ms. Collins explained that she ran monthly totals for all of the funds including the enterprise funds,..., special articles, and the general fund. We need to adopt a 1/12 budget for all of these items but any revolving funds can continue...as they were approved the prior year and were not included. In period one, you are looking at almost $8 million in expenditures as compared to $5.4 million going forward. That is due to the lease payments coming due and Elsa pays the insurance up front in order to save money. The first month will be fine if we cannot get to Town Meeting but this is not ideal because they will be looking line by line and not allowing you to overspend by department and it would have to be approved every single month.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to accept the 1/12 budget. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Correspondence:

125. Board reorganizations.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge seconded by Mr. Goncalves to file. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

126. Stanley J. Corcoran, Executive Vice President – notification of the MIIA Health Trust Board of Directors approved a relief package designed to assist the members.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to file. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

127. Tammy Breen, Special Events and Project Manager, Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts – requesting the Board to consider sending a congratulatory message of commendation to the Girl Scouts in Ludlow who earned the prestigious Girl Scout Silver Award.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for the Board to send a congratulatory message of commendation to the Girl Scouts in Ludlow who earned the prestigious Girl Scout Silver Award. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

128. Brian Quinn, Director, Engineering and Generation Assets, Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company (MMWEC) - informing the Board of important information mailed to residents about living and working safely near a natural gas pipeline.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

129. Andrew Morehouse, Executive Director, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts – informing the Board of the recent donation from the Antonucci Family Foundation to kick off the Foundation's Millions of Meals Initiative.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

130. John R. Maher, Director of Governmental Affairs, Charter Communications – notification of channel lineup changes.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

131. Request of an Alteration of Premises for Iron Duke Brewing.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to approve the request for the alteration of premises for Iron Duke Brewing. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

132. Request of an Alteration of Premises for Barrosa Realty Inc., Flor Do Campo d/b/a Tony and Penny's.

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Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to approve the request for an alteration of premises for Flor Do Campo d/b/a Tony and Penny's. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

133. Request of an Alteration of Premises for Laconia East, Inc. d/b/a El Cid Lounge.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to table the request for alteration of premises for Laconia East. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

134. Carmina Fernandes, Selectmen – informing the Town of Ludlow that she will be resigning as a member of the Board of Selectmen effective immediately.

135. Request of an Alteration of Premises for the Gremio Lusitano Club.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to approve the request for an alteration of Premises for Gremio Lusitano Club. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Unfinished Business:

COVID-19 updates. Mr. Silva stated that we have 1 more case with a total of 119 and 6 deaths.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. to approve and sign the Executive Session Meeting Minutes of March 17, 2020. Derek DeBarge, Antonio Goncalves, Manuel Silva and William Rosenblum were present. Mrs. Fernandes was absent. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum to waive fees for the "Alter of Premises". Vote 4-0. All in favor.

New Business:

For the Board's Information: The CARES Act application was filed on behalf of the Town on June 4, 2020.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for the Board to consider adjusting the quorum for the June 22nd Annual Town Meeting and Special Town Meeting at 6:30 p.m. due to COVID-19. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Board perused Selectmen Meeting Minutes of February 4, 2020.

Board perused Selectmen Meeting Minutes of March 24, 2020.

Board perused Selectmen Meeting Minutes of March 31, 2020.

Miscellaneous:

The Regional Selectmen's meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2020. It will be a remote participation meeting.

Closing Comments:

Mr. Goncalves is encouraged seeing the numbers of COVID cases stabilizing. Residents should not let their guard down just yet. Precinct members should be preparing for the Town Meeting. The Selectmen have received a lot of emails and wanted to acknowledge that they are being received. Welcomes residents to stay safe and stay involved.

Mr. Rosenblum wished the best of luck to Carmina and to enjoy life and family. Everyone be safe and stay healthy.

Mr. DeBarge wanted to let residents know that if you have not received your stimulus money yet, it is now coming in as a debit card and the envelope looks like junk mail so please double check everything that you receive. He knows of three seniors have thrown them out so please double check your mail before throwing it away. Just as an FYI, he will not be available for a meeting on June 23rd.

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Mr. Silva encourages residents to patronage the restaurants who have been approved for outside dining. The small businesses are struggling so we need to help them out. He also wanted to remind the residents that the Town of Ludlow has to abide by the Governor's rules and regulations even if people do not like them.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to adjourn this meeting at 8:01 p.m., and not return to open session. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Ludlow Board of Selectmen

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