Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, February 1, 2022 began at 5:30 p.m. in the Selectmen's Conference Room, Town Hall.

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

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

Visitations:

5:30 p.m. - Ludlow Concerned Parents

Mr. Rosenblum starts the meeting with speakers introducing themselves. Bonnie Manchester, ex-teacher of Ludlow Baird Middle school, Bella Soares, parent/ Ludlow resident, Linda Collins, resident.

Ms. Soares starts by thanking the Board for allowing them to voice their concerns. She explains that she moved back to Ludlow after living in North Carolina for a little while. She was surprised to learn of the issues at the Baird Middle School and made the decision to home school her daughter instead. Some of the issues are inappropriate books, the CRT and the masking of children. The parents in this group have been fighting this since 2019. She witnessed sexual content that was not acceptable for a middle-aged student. She stated that Mr. Gazda discredited them on the news about the inappropriate books and did not show any interest in the matter or do anything about what was happening. She read explicit passages from one of the books. She wanted to know how many kids in Ludlow are being home schooled and why they should not get a refund on their taxes for taking them out of public schools. Also, asked why the children are still being masked when they can go anywhere else and not wear one. The Chairman of the School Committee goes on Facebook and bashes the parents in this town and that is unacceptable. Chip Harrington is the only one that answers questions from parents. The schools should be teaching real life things not pushing an agenda on our children.

Mr. Rosenblum thanked Ms. Soares

Mr. Goncalves the books labeled young adults, is it suggested does the state jump in on any of this, does the state suggest not reading unless young adult or older?

Ms. Manchester stated that a suggested reading level should be made by known to the parent.

Mr. Goncalves asked if it was like a rating, like a PG movie or a ruling like buying cigarettes or alcohol where you must be of a certain age?

Ms. Manchester stated that there are policies and ages do matter. However, the librarian can pick his or her selection.

Ms. Collins addresses her concerns on the matter of the books as well Ludlow's Facebook forum. Residents on the forum denied that these books were in the school's library. The school changed their website and she can no longer search what books are in the school's library. Chip Harrington stated that the Facebook forum is nothing but gossip now. She explained what Mass Resistance and how they were founded. How is Ludlow going to move forward with these concerns and division?

Mr. Rosenblum thanks Ms. Collins.

Ms. Manchester stated that she was met with hostility as soon as she started asking questions. The more you want to talk about it, the more the school wants to shut you down. She does have a law suit coming against the Town. She also gave national news articles to the Selectmen and pointed out that Ludlow is in every one of them.

Ms. Collins stated that she read some of the excerpts from a book to a friend in her 50's and she asked her to stop because it was so disgusting. She also explained that this is not against any gay people but it is about what is appropriate for the age group it is being presented to.

Mr. Silva asked if the school ever gave them an answer as to why these books were kept in the library after the complaints?

Ms. Collins stated that they were told it was a tool for the children's education.

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Mr. DeBarge stated that he has been involved with this parent group from the beginning and spoke at a school committee meeting. This group started before the national narrative became explosive. The parent group requested that this particular book "Sex is a Funny Word" be removed from the library and that is when the Superintendent decided to put a committee together and that committee was NEVER going to remove any of these books.

Mr. Saloio stated that once the books are reviewed by the committee if they go back on the shelf, they can stay there for three years before being reviewed again.

Mr. Gennette thanked everyone for coming in and understands the frustration. The Boards in town are elected and they are supposed to be there for the residents, regardless of their personal feelings about an issue. He asked the parents how they would like to resolve the issues?

Ms. Soares stated that 20-30 years ago you didn't see these types of books in the schools and feels the school should only have books that apply to the curriculum. The schools are causing division in this country. No one in our parent group cares about sexuality or race, we just want our children to learn about our country and love one another.

Ms. Collins explained that there are books in the school that are also teaching CRT even though they are stating it doesn't

Mr. Gennette would like to write a letter to the School Committee stating that the Town wants to work together for a more diverse environment.

Mr. Silva asked how the school can shut down a parent from looking on the website and stated this could be trouble for them.

Ms. Manchester stated that the reason the town has the Red Ribbon Committee because the town has problems with the kids and drugs, depression, suicide and all of those things. Kids will act out things that they read and if they are being exposed to these things at school then parents need to get involved and start asking questions.

Mr. Rosenblum stated that there was supposed to be policies made up in regards to bullying because of what happened to the girl in South Hadley so the state should be contacted about that. The Board of Selectmen does not have authority over the schools but they are always willing to listen to the residents and want everyone to have a voice. Meetings should be held a certain way and he doesn't agree with the way the Chairman of the School Committee runs his meetings. Everyone needs to work together and things could change after the March elections. He believes that the schools should only teach anatomy and reproduction and leave the rest to the parents.

Mr. Goncalves understands the frustration from the parents in regards to the School Committee meeting and having to ask their questions beforehand and then possibly wait 2-3 weeks before the question is answered. However, he does think that everyone needs to keep a level head.

Ms. Collins then stated that when people are seeing things getting 'heated' in these meetings, there is a time and a place for parents to have righteous anger and that is the time and it is not a threat. It is to express that something is wrong and unjust. If the meetings were like this one tonight, there would be no reason to raise their voices.

Mr. Goncalves stated that he is concerned about the legalities with this issue. It is a little scary.

Ms. Collins stated that the parents just want to be notified what their children have access to before they are able to get them.

Ms. Manchester stated that middle school is hard enough without all of this added stuff.

Mr. DeBarge does not understand when schools stopped informing parents of these types of issues. Mask mandates should be taken out of schools as well.

Mr. Rosenbium thanked everyone for coming in.

6:30 p.m. - Council on Aging to discuss snow removal at the Senior Center

Attorney DaCruz, member of the Council on Aging discusses snow removal at the New Senior Center. The new center has a much larger parking lot and sidewalk area then the old one. This past snow storm,

Jodi had to plan for a two-hour delay in order to get everything plowed. There is over 2,000 linear feet of sidewalks. The sidewalks were designed this way to be ADA compliant. Attorney DaCruz handed out photos to the Selectmen. The parking lot does not have to be ADA compliant. The sidewalks have to cleared down to the sidewalks in order for the bump stops to be visible otherwise it is a trip hazard. There were 8 employees out there on Monday clearing those sidewalks. The old senior center had no parking lot and virtually no sidewalks. This is a very busy center and a fall for a senior is life changing. This needs to be addressed in a timely fashion.

Mr. Silva asked if the DPW are responsible for this?

Ms. Villano stated the DPW cleans all of the municipal buildings in town.

Mr. Santos, DPW chairman elaborates on what the DPW is responsible for as far as snow removal at the municipal buildings. He states that he does not have the man power at the DPW because he is working with very limited staff and the budget isn't there. The other discussion that needs to be had is who is going to be able to cut the grass, mulch, cut bushes, etc. The DPW takes on all of these buildings and then it never goes back to the original building.

Attorney DaCruz agrees with Mr. Santos that there needs to be a comprehensive plan for snow removal and grass cutting at the senior center.

Mr. Gennette stated that the DPW is ultimately responsible for this and need to start with them.

Attorney DaCruz stated that something needs to be done about this and if the DPW is unable to do it then someone has to take care of the issue.

Mr. DeBarge stated that the DPW does need to do all of the municipal buildings, however, if they do not have the staff and budget then a contractor may be necessary. We have over 42% of seniors living in this town.

Ms. Zepke stated that she has been concerned about this since the building was being built.

Mr. Santos explained that it will need to be contracted out until they have full staff at the DPW. The priorities are Public Safety with Police and Fire and the roads, then the schools, the Town Hall and the senior center. Suggested making a list of priorities from most important to least important.

Mr. Goncalves asked if the state reimburses the town for snow removal if they go above the budget?

Mr. Santos stated that the state does not reimburse them unless they declare a state of emergency.

Ms. Villano explained that there is a quote out for the landscaping to be done at the Senior Center.

Mr. Silva suggested that Ms. Villano reach out to the current landscapers that the town uses and see if anyone is willing to help out with this as this is safety issue. He asked Mr. Santos what the problem is with the staff shortage with the DPW? He suggested that we hire people immediately.

Ms. Villano stated that it has always been the DPW that does the snow removal at all of the municipal buildings and if the snow continues throughout the day, the custodian goes out and that cleans up.

Mr. Santos reminded the board that they used to have 28 employees in the DPW and now they are trying to rebuild the department. The Sheriff's office used to help out but they are now short-handed because of COVID.

Ms. Peacey explained that the council realizes the constraints that the DPW are under and they are not criticizing them at all but this is urgent because the center cannot be open if it's not cleared out. Care needs to be provided safely and they provide a lot of necessary things like the grab and go lunches.

Attorney DaCruz stated that Ludlow has the most vibrant and active Senior Center in the area and this safety issue needs to be addressed immediately. He also gives credit to the staff at the center because they are very self-sufficient and work with a very small budget.

Ms. Zepke stated that thankfully the Senior Center is closed when the schools are closed.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge seconded by Mr. Goncalves to have the Town Administrator seek an independent contractor for snow removal until such time that we find one to commit to it, the DPW should be responsible for it. Vote 5-0 all in favor.

Correspondence:

21. Pedro Almeida - Petition for the transfer of an All-Alcoholic Beverage License from Bocage, Inc. dba Open Door Café to Open Door Café LLC d/b/a Open Door Café. Board to schedule Public Hearing.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Gennette to schedule a public hearing for Open Door Café to transfer All-Alcoholic Beverage License from Bocage, Inc. dba Open Door Café to Open Door Café LLC d/b/a Open Door Café. Vote 4-0-1. One abstention.

22. Ludlow Elks #2448 – Annual Beano Report for 2021.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

23. Christ the King Social Committee – Annual Beano Report for 2021.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Gennette to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

24. Benson R. Gould, LSP, LEP Principal, CMG Environmental, Inc. – informing the Board of a Notice of Release Abatement Measure (RAM).

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

25. Michele Goncalves, Ludlow Cultural Council – requesting approval to hold the 2nd Ludlow Community Market on Saturday, September 24, 2022 and Sunday, September 25, 2022 at the Mack Donnelly Gazebo.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Silva to approve the 2nd annual Ludlow Community Market on Saturday, September 24,2022 and Sunday September 25,2022 at the Mack Donnelly Gazebo. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

26. Cynthia Levine – letter of resignation from the Commission on Disability as of January 23, 2022.

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Silva to accept the letter of resignation from Cynthia Levine from the Commission of Disability as of January 23, 2022. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

27. Bernard (Butch) Regnier, Resident – letter of interest to serve on the Ludlow 250th Semi-Quincentennial Celebration Committee.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Silva to appoint Bernard (Butch) Regnier to serve on the Ludlow 250th Semi-Quincentennial Celebration Committee. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

28. Ellie Villano, Town Administrator – letter of resignation from Committee/Officer positions held within the Town to be effective February 25, 2022 which coincides with her date of retirement.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to accept the letter of resignation from the Town Administrator, Ellie Villano for the Committee/Officer positions held within the Town to be effective February 25,2022. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

29. Rachel Belanger, Way finders Project Manager – submitting to the Board a flash drive containing a digital copy of the funding application and accompanying documents submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

30. Local Election Districts Review Commission – advising the Board the submission re-dividing Ludlow into precincts has been approved effective as of December 31, 2021.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

31. Mary Pichetti, Director of Capital Planning – providing the Board with a Change Order Review Letter for the Town of Ludlow, Harris Brook Elementary School, Construction Change Orders 30-33.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Silva to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

32. Sandra E. Sheehan, Administrator, PVTA – informing the Board of Assessments for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021.

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Silva to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

33. Deborah J. Boucher, Eversource – providing a response to the Board concerning wires crossing over Sportsman's Road for the light replacement project.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

34. Caroline Carcia, Deputy Executive Director, Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission – providing the Board with the summary report on Other Post- Employment Benefits (OPEB).

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Silva to file. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

35. Adam P. Zysk, PE, Drewberry Engineers Inc. – informing the Board the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Mass DOT) proposes to replace the bridge that carries Piney Lane over Broad Brook and requests comments regarding the project.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Gennette to file, as Ellie has already sent it to the DPW. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

36. Nicole Parker – letter of resignation from the Finance Committee and the Zoning Board of Appeals effective as of January 28, 2022.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to accept Nicole Parkers letter of resignation from the Zoning Board of Appeals effective as of January 28,2022. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

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Unfinished Business:

Board to discuss COVID-19 testing kits.

The Board previously approved a pallet of COVID-19 testing kits, however the Board of Health decided not to order at this time.

Mr. Silva would like to have the Board of Health make the decision if more is needed.

Mr. DeBarge suggested a testing site but also have some kits on hand to give out to residents.

Mr. Gennette would like to leave the funds there in case they need them in the future.

Revisit this in a few weeks.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. Gennette that the Board vote to accept receipt of ARPA funding from the Federal Government in the amount of $6,346,689. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of October 12,2021 with Mr. Rosenblum & Mr.Gennette absent. Vote 3-0-2. Two Abstentions.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Gennette to approve and sign Executive Session Minutes of December 21,2021 with all members present. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

New Business:

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for Board to approve and authorize the Chairman to sign Change Order number 11 for the new Ludlow Senior Center. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for Board to ratify the Chairman's signature on Change Orders number 1-10 and 12 for the new Ludlow Senior Center. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for Board to approve and authorize the Chairman to sign Change Order Number 36 for the Harris Brook Elementary School. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Gennette, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for Board to approve and authorize the Chairman to sign the Agreement between the Town of Ludlow and Hickman & Sgroli Electric, Inc. for the Ludlow Senior Center Generator. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge, seconded by Mr. Goncalves for Board to approve and sign the Agreement between the Town of Ludlow and International of Operating Engineers Local 98, AFL-CIO July 1,2021 through June 30,2024. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board perused the Selectmen Meeting Minutes of October 19, 2021.

Board perused the Selectmen Meeting Minutes of November 2, 2021.

Board perused the Executive Session Meeting Minutes of January 11, 2021.

Board Updates/Misc.:

None

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Updates.

None

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

Mr. Rosenblum reminds the Board on February 8, 2022 they will be conducting interviews for the Town Administrator.

Closing Comments:

Mr. Goncalves reminds residents that the Town is still recruiting precinct members. The deadline is Friday at 5:00pm for any one that is interested and wants the opportunity to make a difference and not just complain on social media. Also beware of the email scams that are out there at this time. Finally, COVID test kits are available from the Federal Government and you are allowed four per household. Visit www.covidtests.gov to obtain them.

Mr. Gennette would like everyone to know that he is on the Walk to End Alzheimer's committee this year and is starting a fund raiser for the town of Ludlow and is looking for the officials or anyone who is interested to join it. Walk will be at HCC in September, please register early at alz.org, or you can reach out to Mr. Gennette at his local number, or walktoendAlzheimers.org.

Mr. Silva asks if Ellie could sit on the interviews for the Town Administration position. Covid numbers are coming down but stay safe and vigilant.

Mr. DeBarge 24 police officers shot and 4 killed in January what is it going to take! Thank God that we don't have that here in Ludlow. There was a firefighter that was killed the other day trying to put out a dumpster fire so when it starts to cross over, maybe now people will wake up. Everyone knows we need our law enforcement and firefighters let's make the politicians see this and get some protection for our police officers and firefighters. Reminds residents especially on Fuller Street that Way finders is coming; expecting full approval.

Mr. Rosenblum agrees with Mr. Goncalves about scams and also warns about the PayPal scam. Reminds people to change passwords often. From visitation earlier today of concerned parents what it needs to come down to is the point where people should be able to sit down together and have a dialog and not have to go to social media and bash each other. No matter what your view is, people have different views and comfort levels. There's no reason why we can't sit down and discuss things or at least find common ground. He found it hard to believe that you can't see the books that are in the school. However, on both sides there should be common ground, and he hopes that they can start to move along and put this behind us but there is still work to be done.

Moved by Mr. Goncalves, seconded by Mr. DeBarge to adjourn this meeting at 7:52 p.m., not return to open session, and to enter Executive Session for the purposes of discussing strategy for negotiations for the Ludlow Firefighters Local 1840. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Ludlow Board of Selectmen

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

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