The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, January 17, 2023 began at 5:30 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen's Conference Room.

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

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

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

VISITATIONS:

5:35 – Finance Committee to discuss Level 2 Budget.

Mr. Goncalves: There has been a lot of work done behind the scenes, meeting with the departments, etc. So, I want to turn it over to Marc Strange to bring us up to date on where we are in the process.

Mr. Strange: I put together a memo, I think it's at your chairs if you want to come sit at the table. I put together a memo as far as an overview of what the process was and some items of note in the budget. Kim Collins and I, along with Carrie Ribeiro, met with each department through every single line of their budget to get an idea of where our expenditures have been on each individual line item, not only for this year but for the previous 3 fiscal years, which was super helpful, I thought, to understand how departments are operating and what kind of funding levels they need in relation to operations. After Level 1, the budget was about 2.4 million dollars over budget. That does include sufficient funding for the schools to overcome their ESSR Fund deficit, which is about 1.4 million dollars. That left the Town about a million dollars over budget after Level 1. Again, we had gone through each line in every department and were able to pare down those million dollars to about $162,237 over our intended budget. That includes a 3% increase for the schools. That's the number that FinCom will be working with over the coming weeks. There is still some uncertainty with respect to increases in our retirement assessment, health insurance and some other employment tax-related items. Also, the Treasurer/Collector question on the March ballot, if that passes that will change our calculation. Then we'll be getting the Cherry Sheets sometime in the next couple months and that will change our calculation as well. As we sit here, we're looking at $162,000 over our allowed 2.5% increase. Some items of note I have in your memos: As it sits where the Town budget would increase by approximately 4%, which is what the increase was last year. That's kind of on par where we've been. The only new position that is funded in the Level 2 is a Health Director position. Currently our Public Health Coordinator is acting as the Health Director. The Health Department really needs a Department Head, so the thought is the Health Director would be named the permanent Health Director and she'd be getting paid a higher salary, but the impact on the department and Town budget would be mitigated by us un-funding her current position, which is the Public Health Coordinator. It's not a total wash, but it's close. In addition to the Health Director position, we made a point to strengthen our management team. One of the reclassifications in the Level 2 budget is reclassifying our Human Resources Director to an Assistant Town Administrator/Human Resources Director position. This type of position is really common in towns around the Commonwealth. As it stands right now, if I'm out or not available, there's a gap in management, which doesn't sound like a big deal, but if there's decisions that need to be made, I have to be accessible remotely, if I am accessible, to manage from afar. It's not the best way to have your management team formulated. In addition to the Health Director and Assistant Town Administrator, as you all remember, Town Meeting approved funding for a Chief Procurement Officer and Facilities Director last year. The people in these two positions are knocking it out of the park. We're really happy with what they've been doing. We feel like our management team is coming into focus. In terms of some of the individual departments; we reduced our Town Counsel budget by 16%. The Town put an RFP out for new Town Counsel and new law firm. We ended up with Meade, Tellerman and Costa, who has been doing an outstanding job. They came in significantly below what our fiscal 23 re-budget was for Town Counsel services. We also reduced our IT budget by about 5% by outsourcing our network admin services. We also prioritized investments in security and software, whereas previously we had done a lot of our purchasing in the way of hardware. We feel like we're able to service the Town's IT needs with better security and accessibility. We have a new email platform, which is MS365 and has multi-factor authentication. We're upgrading our MUNIS product to the Cloud

product, which will be helpful, and we also have a new website. There are other upgrades I won't get into. We feel like even with a 5% decrease, it really increased our IT services. A couple departments to note. The Police budget for Level 1 came in at a 12-13% increase over the fiscal 23. We were able to pare that down to 2.4% increase in Level 2, which still incorporates a 3% COLA for all its members plus a full Quinn Bill educational incentive, which is really good for recruiting and retention purposes and we'd be maintaining level services. We can get into some of those details later on if you still have questions. Regarding the DPW budget, kind of the same thing. Level 1 request was 5% over the fiscal 23 budget. We were able to pare that down to a 1.8% increase. For the DPW, we really went and focused on every single line item and took a look at what's been spent on sidewalks and street repairs and personnel, and we made minimal cuts to the Level 1 budget. A 1.8% increase should keep the DPW at a level service. Lastly, the budget also includes long overdue reclassifications for Council on Aging staff members, who it's been quite a while since they received any upgrades. The total of all those employees being reclassified is about $45,000.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you Marc. We're very fortunate to be this far away from bringing this to Town Meeting and having a joint meeting with Finance Committee. Welcome. Do you guys want to open your meeting?

Ms. Cincone: Yes, I'd like to open up, well we can't we don't have a quorum.

Mr. Goncalves: Three is not a quorum?

Ms. Cincone: No, so we're just going to stay a part of your meeting if that's OK. This is posted and I expected … but we're missing quite a few people.

Mr. Goncalves: Yeah. Why don't you guys go ahead and lead us through the highlights.

Mrs. Collins: Marc has pretty much gone through everything. The only thing that I would point out he talked about generally is which departments had requests adjusted in Level 2. If you look on page 1 of the recap and it goes down onto page 2. I know it's very small but off to the right where it says Level 2 adjustments it details out all of the assumptions. What was adjusted in Level 2 in each department. It's approximately 1.5 million, which represents 4.5%. I'm going to read them to you because you probably can't see them. It's about 1.5 million at the school, about 4.5%. It brought their requests down from 7% to 3. $260,000 of that was for purchases for body cams and cruiser cams in the Police Department. At this point, I don't think there's union approval for any of those things. Those were taken out of the request in Level 2. There were 2 patrol officers that were unfunded, so those positions are un-filled right now. Then there was a lease, which they're not going to need and then a line item for cameras, which they've never utilized. So those were taken out of the Level 2. Level 2 initially included all of the new position requests and all of the reclassification requests, as Marc was reviewing them, as you as a Board were reviewing them, there were basically recommendations, which Marc already touched on, about the Health Director. Also, the Council on Aging reclassifications, the Human Resources/Director classification and there was a custodian reclassification. When you're looking at all these things that were reduced in Level 2, Sargent, Sargent benefits, all those positions, it's not that they were removed. They were requested and it was recommended that in Level 2 they're not funded.

Mrs. Cincone: Out of the $25,000 that you've got shown here for new positions, is that basically $25,000/person?

Mrs. Collins: Pretty much. It's kind of an average because we're not including retirement and FICA and all those things, but if you took the highest plan, it's $25,000. It kind of mets out across the board. Other than positions, the other largest reduction is in dispatch. We reduced the per diem amount because we budget as if we're hiring per diem employees, I think it's $25/week. He never uses that. He never hires that many people per diem. So, we reduced that budget. There was a request from Recreation for Counselors. It was on the high side once again. They typically do not hire 35-40 Counselors, but they do request that. They never need it, so we reduce it in line with the amount of Counselors they've hired in the past.

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Mr. Silva: The counselors at Recreation, are they part of the pool and Haviland Pond?

Mrs. Collins: It's for the summer camp counselors.

Mr. Silva: It's just for the summer camp. Thank you. Just wondering because if Haviland Pond happens to get open that other side will need some.

Mrs. Collins: Lifeguards are on that, but we didn't touch the lifeguards.

Mr. Goncalves: I know you mentioned earlier the increase for health insurance and/or retirement, you guys are estimating 3% right now.

Mr. Strange: I don't remember what we used.

Mrs. Collins: The retirement might be closer to 5%, which is on average what it goes up. I believe health insurance is 3%.

Mr. Goncalves: I think the line item you've got here is 3 and 3. Employee benefits.

Mrs. Collins: Employee benefits includes a lot of things. There's all of the insurances and all of the retirement and everything netted together.

Mr. Strange: I see it. 3 and 3.

Mr. Goncalves: That would be a good number. I think last year health insurance actually reduced a little bit.

Mrs. Collins: I don't see that happening again.

Mr. Goncalves: I can tell you in my world, we're seeing everything level. Fingers crossed. I haven't seen any of the health insurance plans I'm involved with increase this year. The last 5-6 months. Any other questions guys? We're putting a million dollars for stabilization? I didn't look at it yet.

Mr. Strange: Yes.

Mrs. Cincone: Do you have an estimate on free cash from last year?

Mrs. Collins: 4.4 million.

Mr. Goncalves: I recently read an article with the City of Springfield and what they did with their Stabilization Fund. They actually invested into short term treasury. They've got 40 million dollars. They're getting 4.5% with the money pretty readily available with short-term securities. That's a nice rate of return. Have we looked at anything like that?

Mr. Strange: I haven't.

Mrs. Collins: I would say that's a conversation you're going to want to have with the Treasurer. I know that she does work with financial advisors to determine what our best options are. I'm not sure of the decision she's made recently.

Mr. Goncalves: It's just surprising because with the amount of money that Springfield had for it to be that big of news it must be something new and exciting that they are actually able to get 4-4.5% on that money. That was a huge return by comparison.

Mrs. Collins: I would say that's definitely something to have a conversation with Elsa about.

Mrs. Cincone: Are you talking about using stabilization or free cash. You're not going to use any to reduce the tax rate?

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Mr. DeBarge: No.

Mrs. Cincone: Thank you.

Mr. DeBarge: Dolly, bite your tongue.

Mrs. Cincone: I know I'm going to get enough emails asking how come, are they going to, because that was always an argument I had when I was on the Finance Committee before, and I want to be ready for it. I'm ok with that.

Mrs. Collins: In terms of that I want to point out, if you look on the last page on the recap, the line highlighted in orange where it says to use Free Cash to reduce the tax rate, this only goes back to 2019 but probably back to 2018, we haven't used any Free Cash to for the tax rate, with the exception of the 288,912 in fiscal 23 because the trash came in excessively over budget and we did use the Free Cash for that. Probably since 17 or 18, it has been policy of the Town not to use Free Cash to reduce the tax rate.

Mrs. Cincone: Thank you, I appreciate that. It makes more sense than anyone I used to argue with the members of my Board when I was on Finance before. I said, "don't use it, you need to keep it", "no we need to reduce it". It's an argument that had gone on for a long time and I didn't notice this going along until now. Thank you.

Mr. Rosenblum: In response to that, because I hated when that would happen and in effect what it did was keep our tax rate flat, but we know that taxes go up and once we put in a new school and senior center coupled with the fact, we kept it flat. We went like this, where normally it should go like this, straight up. That's when we got killed 5-6 years ago with everyone saying what's going on with our taxes. Well, it's because, sorry to say, prior boards decided to pay it down with Free Cash, which is No.

Mrs. Cincone: As you said, if we anticipate no Capital improvements to the Town, that's one thing. But we knew it was coming eventually.

Mr. Goncalves: The casino money, that's a nice bump for $100,000-$175. Do we have a lot of years of that left?

Mr. Strange: Is that the look back? Don't they give you a look back bump every 5 years.

Mrs. Collins: I think it's typically $100,000 and an additional $75. There is a page in your worksheet…Did you send the whole worksheet?

Mr. Strange: I just sent this.

Mrs. Collins: There was a 9-year agreement and we're about 3 years in, so we have about 6 years left, and it goes between $100-$175 each year.

Mr. Goncalves: So, this is the max?

Mrs. Collins: Yes.

Mr. Goncalves: So, we're going to stay here at $175?

Mrs. Collins: I would want to look back at that tab, because I did put in, according to the agreement, how much we would be getting each year. I would refer to that tab.

Mr. Goncalves: And we're running Cherry sheets level to last year so we're assuming we're not going to get any more than last year. With any luck a good chunk of that $162 could be on a Cherry sheet.

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Mrs. Collins: On average it's about $70,000.

Mr. Goncalves: Questions guys?

Mr. Gennette: How far into the school are we with this? Do we have more numbers coming from them?

Mr. Strange: I think Dr. Tiano will be presenting his budget with the cuts on February 14.

Mr. Goncalves: Do you see a problem with the 3%?

Mr. Strange: I don't know. I think they have the equivalent of 29 full time employes that are funded with ESSR. I don't know how they're going to get through that. I know they're working through each line of the budget. Hopefully they can get through that on their end without us increasing the 3%. If we do have to increase 3%, that changes the game.

Mr. DeBarge: In that game, it could change if the school cannot come down to where we need them to at 3%...so now where we are with the suggestions made, we're $162,000 over the levy. That's with the school having 3%. If they can't come up with 3% or if they need the 7.5 that Mr. Tiano said they may need, where is our emergency funding? Is it the OPEB is it Free Cash? I'm optimistic about where we are as a town at this time of the year. Being $162 over I would assume, from my recollection, is kind of par for the course of where we are moving into these, for Level 2 at least. What do you do to if we run into an issue? No one wants to see any positions cut but the school is in a very difficult situation, which kind of puts us into a difficult situation too. Where is our fall back? Does it have to be with OPEB what we're putting in? Does it have to be with Free Cash? There's no other alternative, is there?

Mrs. Collins: The only way to fund your budget above your levy would be to use Free Cash. It means you put less money into something else. Stabilization you could put less money. But the issue is still that you're using Free Cash to reduce your tax rate and it's a one time in flow of cash. That's the reason we only use Free Cash to fund Capital projects and one-time expenses. If you continue to use that Free Cash to subsidize your budget, there's just going to be a bigger issue next year. They're going to get 2%, 3%, 4% raises and it's just going to compound. It's budget cuts or layoffs. Those are the options.

Mr. Strange: I think we would take an even closer look on the Town side where we could cut out even $5-$10,000 just to get us as tight as we possibly can. It's really going to depend on what the delta is. What they can cut comfortably and where they end up.

Mr. Goncalves: Golf Enterprise is $130,000 swing. Are we sure about that money? The revenue.

Mrs. Collins: Are you talking about the increase?

Mr. Goncalves: From $770-$891.

Mrs. Collins: I think the reason their budget is going up so much is because they're putting their golf cart lease into their operating fund. I know they also needed a forestry line item. Either way, it doesn't affect our tax rate.

Mr. Goncalves: There was just a big difference there compared to every other year.

Mrs. Collins: This will be the first year the Town is not funding their golf cart lease, they're funding it on their own.

Mrs. Cincone: They used to put it under Capital.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Are they going into a new lease after they went on a 3-year lease? Then they want to turn those carts in and keep going on a new lease?

Mrs. Collins: Yea, I think they're trying to go to Town Meeting to see if they can do a 4-year lease and if not, they would stick with a 3-year lease.

Mr. Rosenblum: I like to ask that question because most leases are 5 years. The point being is why do we have to roll into another new lease and not go with these carts for another 3-4 years without a lease? I don't remember seeing how the lease is, but some leases are a buy out at a dollar a cart or something to that effect or a balloon payment at the end. This one is going up to about $33,000 or $66. All I know is it doubled.

Mrs. Collins: Yes, it doubled.

Mr. Rosenblum: I don't understand why we have to keep going into a new lease and rolling carts every 3-5 years, where you can get 7-8 years out of a cart if you maintain them properly.

Mrs. Collins: I think the issue was they didn't want to end up with all these carts at the end and they didn't have anyone to maintain them, so it was easier to have a maintenance plan and the lease. I'm not sure what their options are on this current 3-year lease, but I know we can't enter into more than a 3-year lease without getting approval at Town Meeting.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'll check with them some more. Thank you.

Mr. Silva: These numbers are coming into place unfortunately, not really. I don't know about anyone else but I'm in the public an awful lot and our taxpayers are outraged. They're getting $400-$500 increases. This right here is another $400-$500 increase next year. A thousand dollars in these 2 years is a lot. Unfortunately, I know we have prop 2.5 and they should expect an increase every year. We're in some serious tax increases. I don't know where it's going to go. While we can probably work this out hopefully, and we're still over budget, that was my reservation last meeting we had. Where we're going and the reason, I was just hold on a little bit here and let's see what the school's going to do. I don't know if everyone realizes that at least for me this is going to be $600/year. That's a lot. There are people that just can't afford all of this. I don't know where or how to help but we really do need to start holding our pocketbooks. I know we need things and people want services and yet they don't want to pay taxes. Somehow, we have to figure out ways to not go as high as this. I don't know if any of you have looked at it. The average value went up to $272. If you multiply the rate that's going to be times $272, $5,100 the taxes are going to be next year.

Mrs. Collins: $272 is the average now?

Mr. Goncalves: $272 at $20 is $300 more than you said. $5,400.

Mr. Silva: We have to look at that, unfortunately, we just have to. Like I said, I'm out there all the time and they're outrageous now this year. They don't understand it and I try to explain it.

Mr. Goncalves: You have to stop spending so much time in public.

Mr. Silva: That's a great idea.

Ms. Cincone: You can get away with it, he can't.

Mr. Rosenblum: To be clear on this for myself, a deficit in the ESSR funding, which is the equivalent of ARPA funding for the School Department, that money was supposed to be on temporary positions, correct?

Mr. Silva: Not necessarily.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Or salary increases?

Mrs. Collins: Technically they could have used the money to fund new positions, but they had to realize they would have to find a way to fund those going forward. It's not like they had to be temporary.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm saying it really is ARPA for schools it's sitting there on the last page what they've always said is this money, which is in essence free money, you don't have to pay back but what's going to end up happening is if you fund full time positions, that's not what it's for. I don't understand where the miscommunication or misreading of that funding is. Because now it puts the rest of the town in a quandary because we have to subsidize something that wasn't supposed to be, oh we're going to go ahead and keep these 12 positions and we'll find a way to fund them later, which means coming to us and the Town and saying give us more money. It's really kind of a slap in the face. It's not the current people now obviously because this happened 2-3 years ago. It comes to a point where we'll just do it and figure it out later. Great. Sticking us with 1.4 million dollars. I just wanted to get clear on that because I think it stinks.

Mr. Goncalves: For the viewers to understand, of the 82 million, the school is 37 million dollars of that.

Mr. Rosenblum: 45% of our budget.

Mr. Goncalves: 45% of the Town budget goes to the schools already. So, a 2% increase to the schools is almost the equivalent of almost 1% across the board increase.

Mr. Rosenblum: We're getting to the point where every year 3% is going to end up being in a couple years 1.6 every year. If we had gone 7-7.5 that's a huge ask. It's just a little disappointing that in the beginning it wasn't looked at. The way we would be spending our ARPA funding is we're doing it on things that we've always said is not to increase your expenses. That's what that funding is for. Not to increase expenses. Yet it is increasing expenses. Thank you.

Mr. Silva: I forgot. We have to understand that Ludlow is not as affluent as a lot of other communities. If we look at our per capita vs Wilbraham and surrounding communities, we are very, very low. When we increase the taxes this much, it's really hurting a lot of people. That's why I have reservations about these tax increases.

Mr. Gennette: I'm all set.

Mr. Goncalves: Dolly, how about you guys?

Ms. Cincone: No.

Ms. Lombardi: When are we going to have the final amount of this Cherry sheet?

Mrs. Collins: I think there's 5 levels to the budget, so I think we'll probably see one in the next couple weeks. The first level in the next couple weeks. There's really not much change.

Ms. Lombardi: Is there much change to what we're seeing here compared to what the final would be?

Mrs. Collins: There won't be much change to what you see here and what you end up with. It could be March before you see those numbers.

Ms. Lombardi: We have to base it off of this amount?

Mr. Rosenblum: The increase on that is minimal.

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Mr. Goncalves: One year it actually went down a little bit. $180,000 bump, and then $250,000 bump coming into last year. It would be nice to get an average of the last couple years.

Mr. Silva: Maybe since they have such an increase in tax revenues, they can increase those.

Ms. Cincone: They're sitting on a lot of money.

Mr. Goncalves: About 6.5 billion dollars in their piggy bank right now. Kim, any comments, ideas?

Mr. DeBarge: We're here to vote on the recommendations from Marc and Kim and everyone, right? The Board of Health, Council on Aging, and all of that.

Mr. Goncalves: I don't think anyone sees a big problem with that.

Mr. Silva: Marc, do we need to do that now? Are we voting on certain things?

Mr. Goncalves: We're doing the Council on Aging increase and Health position.

Mr. Strange: I think you can probably hold off on a vote. FinCom is going to take what we have and work their magic and see what the suggestions are at the end of that. And then implement all those changes at Level 3.

Mr. Goncalves: What are we doing with the School Committee? Are they coming in and we roll up our sleeves since it's half of our budget?

Mr. Strange: We're going to them February 28 as a Board.

Ms. Cincone: What's on the 14th?

Mr. Strange: Their public hearing where Dr. Tiano is presenting their balance budget of the School Committee is February 14.

Mr. Silva: I've been through a situation where the community … in and after was all said and done we were $137 over and we had to go back and have a quick special town meeting to reduce all the budgets by a percent. We don't want to do that. It's a nightmare.

Mr. Rosenblum: At the same time, by voting on anything now it's kind of doing what we did before and adding to the confusion. The last couple years with the budget process is where we voted on things and then they came back and said you guys already approved this so why are we looking at it. In the timeline, this is us getting a look at it, seeing what it is after you put in the new classification and new positions, go back to FinCom, and come back to us again and look at it that way and then Level 3 is either where we tweak it or we go one more level, or whatever we have to do. I wouldn't vote on anything right now because we changed the process to a point where it's nice.

Ms. Cincone: And cooperative.

Mr. Rosenblum: It's not confusing right now. OK we've seen this, we know it, we can chew on it some more and it goes back to FinCom, and they can make their recommendations.

Ms. Cincone: We don't have enough people here to vote.

Mr. Strange: Matt Goncalves snuck in.

Ms. Cincone: We still need one more, I think.

Mr. Goncalves: You have 9?

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Ms. Cincone: The bylaws say 9.

Mr. DeBarge: You don't have 9, do you?

Ms. Cincone: No, we have 7. We can work with 7 and use 5 as a quorum.

Mrs. Collins: You can still have a meeting.

Ms. Cincone: Yea, we can't vote on anything.

Mr. Rosenblum: You can open a meeting, have the meeting, but not vote because you don't have a quorum.

Mrs. Collins: I just wanted to point out, if you look at your reclassification new position requests, the Town Administrator recommendations on the right total about $156,000, those are included. You haven't approved them yet. But they're included in the Level 2 request. Basically, your new positions are what you're over by the levy, based on what your current estimates are. My next step in the process would be to run the detailed report line by line with previous history, Level 2 requests. I will send that to FinCom and they would start going through which departments they want to meet with, keeping in mind the new positions and hopefully coming to you with a budget below the levy.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you guys very much. It's nice to be at this point in the process and be so far ahead by comparison to where we've been in the last couple of years.

Ms. Cincone: I have to agree with you on that.

Mr. Goncalves: Our backs aren't up against the wall.

Ms. Cincone: And people aren't ready to kill every department.

Mr. Gennette: I don't know how we approve any new positions when it's roughly the same amount that we're over.

Mr. Goncalves: That would be the wash, which is great because we're staying almost level minus those positions, which is super. I think the school is going to be key. Hopefully some of those ESSR positions they can eliminate before they get to us and keep that number down.

Ms. Cincone: You can't spend multiple year monies with one-time funds.

Mr. Goncalves: I understand their point in that there were a lot of issues coming out of COVID and a lot of special attention that was necessary. I think it's time to wean ourselves off of all those excesses. Anybody else?

Ms. Cincone: Anybody on my committee have any questions?

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you very much.

6:00 pm Kim Batista to discuss vote by mail for Annual Election and number of police officers at polls.

Mr. Goncalves: Obviously, you just heard we can't have any police officers, we're going to have to get you a gun.

Mrs. Batista: The Governor signed Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2022 last year. That's implementing early voting for all elections, including Town Elections. That means vote by mail only for Town Elections. Giving you the figures. If you choose to opt out, you have to do it 45 days before the

annual election, and you'd have to hold a public hearing to discuss it. I'm not asking you to do that, just giving you an option.

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Mr. Goncalves: We had early voting last year. What percentage of our voters are using early voting?

Mrs. Batista: About 20%. Because it was a general election, you can't really go by that. Presidential is going to be a lot more. Probably 50%.

Mr. Goncalves: Not that it's a staggering amount of money, just thinking out loud and in the future, is there a reason we have to maintain all those precincts?

Mrs. Batista: By law you have to. It goes by how many registered voters are in each precinct. The State mandates how many voters are in each precinct.

Mr. Goncalves: Right but voting locations.

Mrs. Batista: Locations is different. You could put them all in one location but there's not a lot of space, parking, it has to be handicapped accessible. If you know of any it would be easier for me.

Mr. Goncalves: What is it costing us to maintain all those voting locations?

Mrs. Batista: You still have to have check in people. It still cost similar. It wouldn't be a great change.

Mr. Goncalves: What about police officers?

Mrs. Batista: You could have a little bit less. You'd still have to be secure in the area with 6 precincts. I know some people do that.

Mr. Goncalves: Just thinking about cutting it in half just to see what would happen.

Mr. Silva: Are we paying our police officers to be here?

Mrs. Batista: No.

Mr. Silva: Could we have our auxiliary officers hold these positions?

Mr. DeBarge: No, it's a union issue.

Mr. Silva: The other question I have is, Kim you're talking about early voting, not mail voting?

Mrs. Batista: It's vote by mail. All of these figures have to do with vote by mail.

Mr. Gennette: Have we seen an increase in voters since we started doing vote by mail?

Mrs. Batista: A little bit, not a lot.

Mr. Gennette: It seems to me we don't get a very big voter turnout. If we've only got 10% of the population that comes out to vote I don't know that we need 4 locations, 6 locations for it.

Mrs. Batista: We actually have 5. Six precincts. I moved 2 precincts into one location. I don't know where I would put 6 precincts in one location. If it's in a school, school is open. There's not a lot of parking. I did think maybe the Senior Center, but I don't think it's big enough.

Mr. Goncalves: What about any of the clubs?

Mrs. Batista: You can't because they hold liquor there.

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Mr. DeBarge: I think the easy thing is to have school not take session during Town Elections just like they do in State. I mentioned it to our new superintendent too. I think it's more of a safety issue than a convenience issue. To not have school in session during our Town Election, and if you wanted to lessen the number of voting stations you could do Harris Brook, the High School and East Street School as long as you didn't have school during. I think that would be much more advantageous to us but for more of a safety issue I don't think we should be doing elections in schools when we have session. I think that would solve the problem after that too.

Mrs. Batista: I think that they don't have school other than the primary.

Mr. Silva: Just move the elections to Saturday.

Mr. Goncalves: That would be great, you might get a turnout.

Mrs. Batista: We have early voting on Saturdays and a lot of people don't show up.

Mr. Goncalves: There's probably a lot of people who can't make it to the poll for some reason, they're either traveling…

Mrs. Batista: They do absentee or mail in. If you think of a place big enough to hold 6 precincts in one location that would be great.

Mr. Goncalves: So you wanted to discuss the number of police officers at the polls.

Mrs. Batista: Last time you did a vote to allow the Police Chief to approve a significant number of police officers for each polling location. Every year you're going to do the same vote to let them handle how many police officers to designate for each polling location. I have the vote that was done last year.

Mr. DeBarge: They could put 5 in each one if they wanted, is that what you're saying?

Mr. Goncalves: Do we get reimbursement from the State?

Mrs. Batista: We do get some reimbursement from the police officers. As a matter of fact, I'm working on that now, to receive reimbursement for some of the early voting that we had to expense out. In 2020 I received a grant, but there is no grant this year.

Mr. Goncalves: I think we need to make that motion James?

Mr. Gennette: This is the same motion as last year? We don't want to change any of this?

Mr. Goncalves: From what I've seen, the Chief is being reasonable.

Mr. Gennette: Do you guys want to see it before or discuss it?

Mr. Rosenblum: Mrs. Batista, do you feel that since we have 5 locations basically you would have one police officer per precinct, which means, I can't remember which location has the 2, is it Baird?

Mrs. Batista: Baird Middle School.

Mr. Rosenblum: Having maybe 2 there so you're covering one police officer per precinct.

Mr. Goncalves: What we're saying is we're allowing the Chief to make that determination, that's what we did last year.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette to approve a sufficient number of police officers, but not less than 1, at the polling locations at every location therein to preserve order and to protect the election officers and supervisors from any interference with their duties, to aid enforcing the laws related to elections as required by Section 72 of MGL Chapter 54, which was changed in Section 13 of 92 of the Acts of 2022; furthermore, to designate the Police Chief the authority to assign specific police officers according to schedule and availability. The Town Clerk will advise the Police Chief of the location and time an officer is needed. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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Mr. Goncalves: Thank you Kim for coming in. We're running a little ahead, we can do some correspondence.

CORRESPONDENCE:

4. Denise Kukla informing the Board of her resignation from the Insurance Advisory Committee effective immediately. **Motion made by Mr. Silva** to accept the resignation of Denise Kukla from the Insurance Advisory Committee. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**
Mr. Goncalves: Thank you for your service.

5. Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company regarding Vegetation Management Plan. **Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to file. **Mr. DeBarge second. Mr. Gennette abstain. Motion passed 4-0-1.**

6. Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Company notifying the Board that they will be conducting the 2023 1st quarter inspection of its natural gas pipeline January 1st – March 31, 2023. **Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to file. **Mr. DeBarge second. Mr. Gennette abstain. Motion passed 4-0-1.**

7. Eversource Electric Approved Rates 2023.

Mr. Goncalves: Everyone got a bill already and they know they went up. Just looking real quick. There's a couple of minuses in the hundredths of decimal points, nothing really major. Those are also available for review.

Mr. Rosenblum: I don't know if a lot of people do it, but I actually shop the delivery fee every year and I shop the better rates. You can do it. I gotta get the website but you can actually shop it where you can get it for 6 or 12 months and it helps with your bill. To be honest, with the new rates, my bill didn't go up much at all. It might have gone up because I have one child at college and she's not blasting her lights all the time. My electric bill stayed somewhat flat. I'll find that information and pass it along.

Mr. Silva: Did you find out anything about changing the rate as far as service. Let's say the power goes out, it's still the same services from the electric company.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think it's MassSwitch, something like that. I can't remember exactly because we only do it once a year. I get an email saying your delivery fee rate is going to change, I go in and shop all the different rates and you can get 9 cents instead of 13 or 18 cents.

Mr. Silva: If your services go down and you need service, what happens?

Mr. Goncalves: You still call the power company.

Mr. Gennette: Eversource is the delivery company. They don't dictate supply.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to file. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

8. Springfield Water and Sewer Advanced Notice: Tier 2 Water Quality Violation (HAA5 and TTHM) and construction progress of the new West Parish Filters Water Treatment Plant.

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Mr. DeBarge: Same letter we always get about the same kind of chemicals too high on the water.

Mr. Goncalves: It says it's not an immediate health hazard, but I think it's heading in that direction, so they're required to notify us.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to file. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

UNFINISHED BUINESS

Board to approve and sign contract on Ludlow Mills Conservation Restriction (Tabled from 1/3/2023). **Motion made by Mr. DeBarge** to approve and sign the contract on Ludlow Mills Conservation Restriction which was tabled from January 3rd. **Mr. Gennette second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign Selectmen's meeting Minutes of December 6, 2022. **Motion made by Mr. DeBarge** to approve and sign Selectmen's Meeting Minutes of December 6, 2022, with Mr. Chairman being absent. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

NEW BUSINESS

Board to direct the Town Clerk to place two Housing Authority vacancies on the March 2023Annual Town Election ballot. **Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum** to direct the Town Clerk to place two Housing Authority vacancies on the March 2023 Annual Town Election ballot. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve extended hours for liquor establishments on Super Bowl Sunday.

Mr. Goncalves: What have we done in the past?

Mr. DeBarge: It says right here 2.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve extended hours for liquor establishments on Super Bowl Sunday to be 2 a.m. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to acknowledge and approve the Citations for the 100th birthday of the following Ludlow residents for the month of January: Rosinda M. Ribeiro and Sophie Gazda.

Mr. Goncalves: Happy Birthday to both these ladies. God Bless You.

Mr. DeBarge: Happy Birthday.

Mr. Goncalves: The Board of Selectmen would like to wish you a special day that honors your 100th birthday and everything you've done to make this world a better place for the last 10 decades. You've experienced many milestones and have witnessed extraordinary changes in the world over the last 100 years. May your memories continue to provide your family and friends with the insight and wisdom that age and experience imparts. Congratulations Mrs. Ribeiro and Mrs. Gazda.

Mr. Gennette: Congratulations.

Mr. DeBarge: Hear, hear. Happy Birthday.

Mr. Rosenblum: Congratulations.

Mr. Goncalves: I think we're ready Mr. Moll. Come on up sir.

6:30 pm John Moll to discuss agreement of historical artifacts.

Mr. Moll: So, this is in regard to the agreement that you should have between the four parties there. The Town, the Historical Commission, the Library and WestMass. Recently we obtained a number of artifacts from WestMass that were part of Ludlow Manufacturing Associates. I'll show you a little bit of what it entails. This here is a pretty nice piece. It's fire mapping from the old mills that actually sat on the other side of the bridge from where they are now, where the Citizens Bank, the old Ludlow Bank, is. We have taken possession of hundreds of maps and plans. We had no place

to display these or house them. The Historical Commission had a couple cabinets in the first-floor meeting room. We are entering into an agreement with the library. We were able to get a wooden cabinet from 1900 refinished and put in the library to house these. The idea was as an effort between the Historical Commission and Library we would store them there, make them available when people want to view them. The caveat of this agreement is at some point down the road, and we got the First Meeting House that could be turned into a quasi-museum, and we would be able to relocate those. That's what that document entails.

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Mr. Goncalves: That's good stuff.

Mr. Moll: It is. Some of the other things we were able to obtain is a glass negative.

Mr. Goncalves: I know that there's boxes and boxes of those down at the mills. I've seen them, I've touched them. I'm not sure how many you were able to get.

Mr. Moll: There was about 400 of them. Pat McGowan is digitizing. At one time there were 1,600 plates. Time and for other reasons we don't have them. We do have cellulose negatives of all of these. This is one we had done. These negatives are well over a hundred years old. You can see that having them developed…

Mr. Goncalves: Do you know how old this picture is?

Mr. Moll: That is 1930.

Mr. Goncalves: Can you get a camera on this? 1930 our Fire Department. So, there's a lot of this sort of stuff with the negatives that are being stored?

Mr. Moll: There are. The LMA documented everything essentially. They built all those houses. East Street, Maple Street. There's a negative of every one of theirs. Not necessarily glass but at least a cellulose negative.

Mr. Goncalves: I remember one time with Ken Delude being down there at the WestMass office and the majority of them were this size but there were just boxes and boxes.

Mr. Moll: We've had our eyes on them for a number of years and the powers that be decided it was time.

Mr. Goncalves: I know somewhere at home I've got a couple of magazines called The Mill. It was the mills monthly periodical. It talked about promotions, education, immigrants coming over, introduction of new portions of the mills. I'd be glad to donate it to you guys.

Mr. Moll: Was it called the Ludlow Log?

Mr. Goncalves: That one sounds familiar, but there's another one called The Mill. They had a bowling team.

Mr. Moll: There were bowling lanes in the old Boys & Girls Club. The company definitely developed the Town at that point in the 1900's. We were just looking to sanction that agreement.

Motion made by Mr. Gennette Whereas the Ludlow Historical Commission is charged with acquiring, protecting and preserving artifacts and memorabilia pertinent to the history of Ludlow, Massachusetts, whereas the Hubbard Memorial Library has means to digitize, catalog and serve as a repository for such historical artifacts and memorabilia until such time is a more suitable location becomes available, whereas WestMass Area Development Corporation (WestMass) has donated to the Town of Ludlow its stored historical documents, photographs and plans associated with the Ludlow Mills complex while retaining the right to view such material as needed when reasonable prior to agreement 12/21. The Historical Commission, with the approval of the Board of Selectmen, wishes to enter into the following agreement with said parties. In keeping with the

agreement said by both WestMass and the Ludlow Board of Selectmen all materials donated by WestMass and publicly displayed shall have credit given to WestMass in the following language: Donated to the Town of Ludlow by WestMass Area Development Corporation materials given by other individuals or entities shall be credited at the discretion of the donors, artifacts and memorabilia shall be made available for display and for viewing by the general public only under the direct supervision of a member of the Historical Commission and/or staff member of the Hubbard Memorial Library. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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Mr. Goncalves: Thank you very much for your work.

BOARD UPDATES/MISC.

Mr. Goncalves: Chairman to approve and sign all bills, warrants and abatements. Mr. Silva brought something up. Have we officially taken the resignation from Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Stepanek. I thought Mr. Carpenter for sure.

Mr. Silva: That might have been done a few weeks ago. Because it's in new business I thought maybe…

Mr. Strange: The Housing Authority? I'll have to check with Kim Batista on that. This all kind of came through her office. There were emails going back and forth but I wasn't privy to all of them.

Mr. Silva: If we haven't, I'd still like to thank Mr. Stepanek who served on there for quite a few years. Hopefully it's not health wise. And Mr. Carpenter for also stepping in. Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you. I know I already said this but 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 to the Town Accountant's office.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Rosenblum: The comment I made earlier about the electricity, the website is energyswitchma.gov. What this does is regarding who supplies your electric supply. You go to it. It says I'm shopping for my home or my business, your zip code. It will give you the supply rates. I shop them, once on 6 months, but this one was 12 months. Sometimes they're 13, 15 19 cents and you're able to find them at 8 and a half to 9 cents. It's a good savings. Also, last week we had our Special Town Meeting regarding 4 articles. One in particular was disbanding the Board of Public Works. First of all, I'd like to thank the people that got up and spoke. At least they're showing interest in it and generally the people that spoke speak at most Town meetings, which is great because at least they're looking out for everyone's best interest. It seemed to me that the way that its worded has to be by statute, correct? The way article 1 is worded. I think the impression that everyone gets is that we are taking over the DPW, which I try to reiterate over and over again to anyone I talk to and say that we're not. To Mr. Strange's point, he actually made a great correlation in the fact of saying it's the same thing as though you have a police chief or a fire chief. They're running their department and they come to us when they need something, and I made the analogy to Wilbraham because Wilbraham does the same exact thing that we're looking at. They have a woman, Tanya, I spoke with their past chair who is no longer on their Select Board, and he said yes, they have their director of DPW, as the chief would come to us with any kind of requests or any kind of information that's what she would do. But the Board lets her run it, like we would our police chief or fire chief. I think that's where people are saying that we're not qualified, you're right, we're not qualified to run DPW. We're voted in to oversee parts of business, licensing authority and things of that nature in this town and that's the exact same thing that we would be doing with our police chief and fire chief. I think the clarification with that needs to be made. Again, this is business, not anything personal. What it comes down to is the fact that yes, we're looking at current situations that are going on, but this has been going on for years. As long as I can remember when I used to watch Larry Nascimento on this Board at the same time, I'd watch BPW, and I'd see chairs flying across the table. That's not happening but I'm just saying there needs to be change and this is the direction that everyone talks about wanting to go in. A change in the form of government, change in the charter. Not that this is a step that way, but this is kind of where we want to go in that direction. One last point is that everyone talks about our Board and

how we're part time, and things of that nature. When we had the meeting with the Board of Public Works, Mr. Ouellette looked across the table and said "I agree with Mr. Rosenblum, we need change. In the same sense, what about disbanding the Board of Selectmen?" We all sat there and said if we get a new charter and we make the change, we get the Charter Commission, we interview those people, look at resumes, get it to Town Meeting, goes to the State, it gets approved or kicked back. One way or another, yes that's where we want to go. I say it over and over again. I got on this to help change the government. I might not be right in everything I do. I'm not an expert on everything we talk about on this Board, but what we're here to do, all 5 of us, and I can speak for all 5 of us because I know we all talk about this, is we want to get it in the right place to where its top down and someone is held accountable. I just want to make that clear because I think the people try to think it's a power struggle. It really isn't. I talked to all 5 of those people at some point prior, during and after. We're not rolling in the streets fighting. We're talking like adults and that's what we want to do. Thank you.

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Mr. Silva: After that, I had something but maybe after the others go, I'll remember.

Mr. DeBarge: I like a good interaction from our precinct members. I think we need a lot more of it. The only thing I wish some of them would do is come up when they want to say something and have more facts than opinions. I know this much. My phone doesn't ring a lot when it comes to Town Meeting questions from articles or anything like that, and I put my cell phone number out on social media. You have some that vote, some that don't vote on things. Some that vote just to spite somebody else. This is the issue that we have. Interaction is great. There were comments made about what liaisons for the Board of Selectmen are supposed to do. That was incorrect. There were comments made about what the Boards were supposed to do, which were incorrect. Boards are not supposed to run the departments. Boards are supposed to be there to listen to the director, not be involved in daily operations. It's good to have people that know what they're doing that have some type of background privy to that but they're not there to run it. I will say this to the voters coming up in March, please, look around, ask us. Most importantly, see what's going on and you'll be able to see it. The other thing I wanted to mention was within the last week we lost 2 great men that have done a great service to the Town, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention them. Richard Moskal was a member of the Finance Committee and I also sat with him on the Senior Center Building Committee. I think maybe 3 days after that, Fred Lafayette passed away, who was our Chairman on the Senior Center Building Committee. Two fantastic men that gave a lot to their committees and a lot to this community. I'll miss working with them both. Thanks

Mr. Gennette: Ponying off of what Derek said about the losses that we had. I probably wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for the Lafayette Family. Their son, Brian, is a very good friend of mine. I've known him since we were 15 years old and it's what got me started in Ludlow. I've been very close with the Lafayette family for a very long time and I'm very sorry for their loss. It was a big loss. I wasn't going to talk too much about the Board of Public Works but since you guys already did, I have to mention a lot of people are saying that the Board of Selectmen want to increase the fees and I have to tell you I want to eliminate the trash fee. I think it's a logistic nightmare. I don't want a trash fee at all. The residents that come to me, here's what they want. They want to put their trash out in the morning, they want to go to work, and they want to bring empty barrels back in the afternoon. That's it. They don't want a trash bill, they don't want purple bags, they don't want stickers, have to worry about weight. It's a big mess. That's the only thing I have to say about the Board of Public Works at this time.

Mr. Rosenblum: Can I add something?

Mr. Goncalves: No.

Mr. Silva: I remember what I wanted to say. Those of you that heard tonight our meeting with the people involved in setting the budget is that we are working tirelessly to give the taxpayer the best for their buck and best services we possibly can. We're really trying to do our best. I don't like the tax increases as much as you don't. It's awful that we keep seeing increase after increase and now that we're into the retirement stage, it's a lot harder for these to keep going up. Know that we're all up here trying to do our best and keep taxes down as much as possible. Hopefully we'll get there and do a little better than the things you heard today. I didn't like them as much as you didn't like it. The increase is significant, and we'll do our best. Thank you.

Mr. Rosenblum: I wanted to add to Derek's point. I made a comment during Town Meeting, and I apologize if I sounded a little rude when I did say it, but it was something that hit me once I heard it from 2 people that spoke. Both of them said that when they went and talked to the Board of Public Works about what was going on. I asked one person that spoke and said did you ever come to our Board and ask us about anything? The answer was within the last 45 days and that was the context of the response. Again, I apologize to that person if I seemed a little rude. The 2nd person that spoke never spoke to our Board. I understand that people support one side or the other and, in some instances, now a days its 100% one way and 0% the other way. I have no problem answering a question and in the same sense both of those people I talked to in the past about things and we've agreed a little bit but agree to disagree. I would just hope people would reach out to us to see what we have to say. Again, emails can come into the Board of Selectmen's office. I'm a little less reluctant to put my cell phone out there like Mr. DeBarge but in the same sense we can be contacted. Lastly, to Mr. Gennette's point about the trash, yea, we don't want to increase it. I've actually said, you know what happens with the trash is that people don't like the service because you'll see the comments on social media of people saying "Wow, I'm with this company and I can throw out whatever I want." What's the fee for that? $50/month or $120/quarter. They're paying more than what you're paying with the additional hundred and what comes out of your taxes. People want service. To the point of where we are with our trash, I would support eliminating it and you go out and find your own person. In the same sense, I'd love to throw a recliner out there if I had one.

Mr. Gennette: I didn't say eliminate trash pickup, I said eliminate the bill.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm saying you could. A lot of other communities around us don't pay for it. Individuals and businesses pay for it. It's an option. I would support it. If there's something better, I would go with that too.

Mr. Goncalves: I don't want to beat a dead horse. The DPW situation is something that somebody has got to really analyze and think about before they get to the polls in March. 345 communities in the State of Massachusetts have eliminated DPW or don't have one. There are 6 communities that actually use this system. There's got to be something said for that. We got caught blindsided with the rubbish removal, the bills skyrocketing and the contract situation. We were between directors or anybody that could sit and negotiate a contract properly has a little something to do with where we are right now. Hopefully that problem will fix itself. Like was mentioned, Mr. Lafayette and Mr. Moskal, a lot of time was given to this Town. Very faithful residents and they'll be missed, I'm sure. To the people doing the budget work right now, I can't say enough. It's so nice to be this far away from having to make a decision and have such a good grip on it. Marc, thank you. Finance Committee & Kim. We're not scrambling. The last couple of years we appeared to be scrambling at this point. I think we're way ahead of it. We don't want to increase taxes. Unfortunately, it's kind of hard not to with cost of living going up, contract negotiations, health insurance, retirement benefits. I don't think there's a lot of people out there that haven't experienced an increase some time in their life, if not every year and our hands are tied to a certain extent. Certainly, where Police & Fire are getting additional funding and the schools. That touches everybody in town. We'll do our best to keep that under control for.

Mr. DeBarge: I just want to remind everybody. Look at openings for Board of Selectmen. It's Tony, so please take papers out. Town Clerk, Town Collector, Town Moderator, Board of Assessors, Board of Health, Library Trustees, Board of Public Works, Recreation Committee, School Committee, Planning Board, Ludlow Housing Authority. Two of those. So, you guys on those keyboards behind the computers complaining about everybody and then coming out and not saying anything. There's your positions. Let's see some nomination papers until February 3.

Mr. Goncalves: Several of those, nobody, the incumbents are not running, and nobody has taken papers out.

Mr. DeBarge: If you're going to complain all day long, come out and run for a position.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to adjourn meeting at 6:55 p.m. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

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Chairman

Ludlow Board of Selectmen