The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, February 7, 2023, began at 5:30 p.m.

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

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

VISITATIONS:

5:35 p.m. – John O'Leary, PCPV – FY22 Community Development Block Grant Application Hearing

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Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to open the public hearing on the FY22 Community Development Block Grant Application at 5:35 p.m., seconded by Mr. DeBarge. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Mr. Goncalves: Okay, Mr. O'Leary, welcome.

Mr. O'Leary: Okay thank you. I appreciate it and I appreciate the opportunity to allow me to conduct this hearing tonight. So, if you recall a couple of months ago, I was actually in this same position. We talked about a few different activities that we'd like to consider for this years' CDBG Grant Application. So, over those four months we did a lot of data collection, analysis, tried to get the best we could for the town through this block grant program. Just to quickly summarize we had considered park improvement project, a planning study, infrastructure projects and housing rehabilitation systems program. Of those four, we were able to get two into this application. The reason we weren't able to get the park improvements, unfortunately, I know it was a big priority. It was difficult for two reasons, one related to the budget but also the method that we need to income qualify that particular activity would require us months more than what the time that we had leading up to it. So, we had to show the state that the users of that particular park were low to moderate income and that would have required dozens of streets worth of income surveys and unfortunately just isn't the fastest way to do it. I do have a solution to that I will talk about at the end of this, but for the purposes of this year's application unfortunately we're not going to be able to include that as activity. The other one was the planning study, the planning infrastructure study. The reason being that we weren't able to fit that in the budget. So, that's unfortunate but I do intend in a subsequent year to go for that activity again. What we have or were able to include in this year's application is an infrastructure improvement project in the Robert Street neighborhood. So, move...it actually is Marie and Carol Street. So, that's going to look at upgrading and improving the water, sewage, drainage and street service within that neighborhood. So, I had an engineer from Weston and Samson come out and take a look at it and they estimated that total construction cost not including the engineering design fee was approximately $750,000 and on top of that for them to engineer it would be another about $75,000. So, that, oh sorry referencing your handout that I provided to Mary, they distributed those, you have those in front of you. So, that gives a description of the project and the amount. And the next activity was the housing rebuilds and assistance program and the reason why we felt that this was very important was we actually got some great feedback from the community of residents. So, with the help of Marc and Doug, we distributed, town's Facebook page, the town's website, the local newspaper and typically when we do this, we get a handful of people from town that send back in this form of interest, we got twenty people. So, there's definitely a need and an interest. So, we thought that, obviously, we'd like to bump that up more but for at least this year's application we have about six to eight units worth of funding. To be able to have homeowners you know, take a loan out, do over their siding, roofing, windows, heating systems. Upgrade all of those types of things. Any code compliance issues, they can all be upgraded through this program and the nice thing about this is it's a fifteen year

deferred payment loan. So, if they remain in that home for fifteen years, actually the grant, the loan is forgiven, it becomes a grant. So, it's nice for the town.

Mr. DeBarge: That's really good.

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, exactly. Then the remainder of the budget is for PVPC. So, we'll do all the administrative side of things, reporting to HUD, all of the procurement with relation to the infrastructure project, the contract administration of that. So, it's all hands off on the town and then the housing rehab program, we have our own housing specialist that will go out conduct the inspections, they will go out set up, you know monitor that projects progress of the construction. All hands off from the town. You know there are some documents that are required to be signed by the Board of Selectmen, but other than that we do all the stick on the ground stuff and that's over a two-year period. That amount is not my salary so.

Mr. Strange: Unfortunately.

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, yes unfortunately.

Mr. Goncalves: Let us know who we need to talk to, I think you deserve a raise.

Mr. O'Leary: No, I wish, I wish. Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: So, have you on Marie Street etcetera, why that neighborhood?

Mr. O'Leary: So, those are the ones that we were able to qualify through the income survey. So, those we got a high enough response rate to prove to the state that there was more than 51% low to moderate income residents living within that home. We tried a few of the streets around there; Joy Street, Chmura, I don't know how to pronounce it.

Mr. Goncalves: Yes, Chmura.

Mr. O'Leary: Chmura and then Motyka exactly and we just got really low response rates from residents. Not enough to show, yes,

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Mr. DeBarge: Perfect area, that's too bad.

Mr. O'Leary: It is.

Mr. Goncalves: What happens is Joy and Motyka are more multi family, so you're not going to get that homeownership with the homeowner.

Mr. O'Leary: And on that, there is a way around that, what we can do, and I would like to ask if you guys, the Board of Selectmen, excuse me would approve of this is that we would like to PVPC, on behalf of the town conduct a slum and blight study. What that allows us to do is not have to go do income survey each individual street. We'd designate an entire area of town. So, it will require the Board of Selectmen to vote on this and also designate this area slum and blight. I know sometimes that can be sensitive to certain population groups and parts of town but if we go through that process and the town does vote on it, we can essentially skip the income survey and all of those areas would be eligible to receive funds. So, it would be more of a certified way of you know the next decade worth of work. We wouldn't have to qualify each and every individual,

Mr. Goncalves: Will that save us any money on administration?

Mr. O'Leary: So, we wouldn't charge you for that to conduct the slum and blight that's more on the application prep side, those income surveys. So, I mean it would probably be about the same either way.

Mr. Goncalves: And then in the second part on the rehab, there's going to be limits on the amount for each unit?

Mr. O'Leary: Correct.

Mr. Goncalves: Obviously the less money that we make available to each unit, the more units we could do, right?

Mr. O'Leary: Correct.

Mr. Goncalves: Is that something that we need to talk about?

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, so it's up to $40,000 per unit.

Mr. Goncalves: It has to be that?

Mr. O'Leary: No, it can be lower than that.

Mr. Goncalves: It can be lower than that.

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Mr. O'Leary: So, the housing rehab specialist will go to the house inspect and then write up a scope of work that needs to be repaired or what needs to be repaired or upgraded, rehabbed.

Mr. Goncalves: And the decisions for which houses will be made by who?

Mr. O'Leary: So, that's a good question, there's two ways to go about it. There's one that we could do a lottery and then there's also a first come, first serve basis. I know Marc has some experience in Agawam and I believe they did,

Mr. Strange: We did a lottery.

Mr. O'Leary: they did a lottery? So, sometimes that works better and sometimes it doesn't either because what we've recognized, and I don't know if Chris ever explained this to you but when you do a lottery system obviously you know how that works. Sometimes it bogs down the process because that person who got first selected might not be willing or as able to get the documents and get the process initiated and all of that lined up. Where the first come, first serve basis usually people are really wanting to get it done as quickly as they can, and it usually allows the program to move faster. It's up to the town to decide how you guys want to do the intake of that program.

Mr. Strange: Often times, not often but people will get into the lottery, and they'll realize it's a lien on their house for fifteen years. So, you know after fifteen years it's forgiven but people get turned off by the lien. So, they drag their feet and then they're like I don't want to do this anymore. So, then you got to go to the end of the lottery drawing list. So, I mean it wasn't a great experience with the lottery that we had but it's up to these guys.

Mr. O'Leary: Personally, from experience and we have a housing coordinator that does all of the intake of the application and all of that to facilitate that process. I would say first come, first serve basis is probably overall worked better then the lottery system.

Mr. Goncalves: I just don't like the idea that you could get called out on the first come, first serve. So, the guy comes with half his documents and now he's reserved the spot and he's not committed. If we had ten or eight and we pulled ten and these two are standbys and the first ten you have X amount of days to get the paperwork here and if you don't you fall off list and we go to nine and ten.

Mr. O'Leary: Right and that is exactly how it's done, yes. They have a certain amount of time, they have a time limit to get the documents in and as soon as they get all of the proper required documents then they become that first list or you know they become a qualified applicant.

Mr. Goncalves: Is that something we have to decide today?

Mr. O'Leary: It's not.

Mr. Goncalves: Okay.

Mr. O'Leary: But it will be before the application before...

Mr. Goncalves: We'll have to think about that you know. The pros and cons everybody will have maybe a little bit of time to think about it.

Mr. O'Leary: Right.

Mr. Goncalves: That's good stuff.

Mr. Gennette: There's a lot there.

Mr. O'Leary: Yes.

Mr. Goncalves: Questions, comments?

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Mr. DeBarge: This is nothing but positive no matter what area it is, no matter where it is. Yes, we can't get everything that we want but there's got to be other ways for our parks and stuff, but this is great, and I appreciate you coming in each time to explain it to us too.

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, definitely. I mean if you guys allowed me to, I'd like to work with the town going forward.

Mr. DeBarge: For sure.

Mr. Goncalves: Oh, you're our guy John, that's it.

Mr. DeBarge: We're not trading you in, nope.

Mr. O'Leary: I'm a resident here in town too.

Mr. Goncalves: Oh, perfect.

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, so this is just one application but hopefully over the next decade we'll accomplish everything you guys need. I do have, there is a motion form that is part of that packet.

Mr. DeBarge: Yes.

Mr. Gennette: So, what are your plans for next year? You kind of alluded to a couple of things that you were going to be looking for in the future and I just wondered if maybe you can kind of,

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, so I would like, for the first step in the process would be to conduct that slum and blight study to get that off the ground. I'd work with Marc and Doug to kind of select an area of town that we want to at least potentially consider as the designated area. Then what we do, the PVPC staff will go out and do the assessments of both the housing and infrastructure. So, we'll look at everyone's homes within that designated area as well as the existing infrastructure, water, sewer, streets, sidewalks. Then we have a rating system and then we compile all that data, it spits out a number percentage wise, gives us a rating and then we submit it to the state for their approval.

Mr. Gennette: You were on a really good run but that's actually not what I was asking about.

Mr. O'Leary: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Gennette: I was actually talking about; you had talked about the parks down the road maybe next year or the year after that kind of thing.

Mr. O'Leary: Exactly. So, if we have that in place, that slum and blight study, that designated area in place. I think that allows us to then consider serious park improvements, and that planning study and a lot of other potential activities.

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Mr. Gennette: Yes.

Mr. O'Leary: It's key, other than that, and again we had to go individual street by street. It's difficult for certain activities like park improvements.

Mr. Goncalves: So, a motion to the effect of the slum and blight study for the designated area or just in general?

Mr. O'Leary: Yes, so at this point I think if you give us the motion we would, as staff, have hours set aside for us to begin to initiate that process. Usually, we start in the spring with the nicer weather, and it would probably be finished around early summer and then we'll meet back up and kind of give you an update to make sure that that area is what the Board of Selectmen like as the designated area.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Chairman can I just ask does this designation, this slum and blight designation is there any negative to it as far as reputation goes for the community or getting other grants or anything?

Mr. O'Leary: I mean so it is specific to block grants and again it's one of the ways that we are able to qualify a group of population for eligibility to receive block grants. We've done it in the town of Ware. We've done it in the town of Spencer. Two different experiences with those, one town was very resistant and experienced a lot of feedback from residents within that designated area. You know who are you calling slum and blight and you know,

Mr. DeBarge: Yes, that's why I'm asking.

Mr. O'Leary: Both of them were able to get through that and that allowed them to open up much more vast range of projects to use these the grant funds for.

Mr. DeBarge: Gotcha. Okay.

Mr. Goncalves: You would think by now they would have renamed this thing.

Mr. O'Leary: I know.

Mr. Strange: It's a language, a terminology thing.

Mr. Goncalves: Now we had, there was another designation thing I don't know if it was PVPC, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, easier than the acronym. It was a designation down at the county streets off State Street and I know that that area there was qualified for something. You know the Hampshire, Berkshire, Franklin, Duke, Essex that whole area. Do you guys remember This? There was an area,

Mr. DeBarge: Well, that was the area I was thinking for this too.

Mr. O'Leary: To be honest, I'm not entirely sure.

Mr. Strange: It's down by the mills, right? It's on the other side,

Mr. Goncalves: It was a state designation of some type down in that area and it made that particular area qualify for some state or federal money.

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Mr. O'Leary: Was it...

Mr. Goncalves: No, no it wasn't that easy. It might be something to look at.

Mr. O'Leary: Definitely, I'll reach out to maybe our land use and environment department might have had something to do with that.

Mr. Goncalves: There was designation there and it actually came around and picked up a section of West Street or West Avenue, Goddu, Florida, Ronald all the way through there. It wasn't 40R or anything like that, but it was income derived.

Mr. O'Leary: Okay, yes that information is definitely useful.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to authorize PVPC to submit the proposed fiscal year 22/23 community development fund grant application and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development in an amount not to exceed $1.35 million to include construction of the Robert Street neighborhood improvement project phase one and the housing rehabilitation assistance program, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Gennette to authorize for the Chair of the Board of Selectmen to sign all required forms, documents, and authorizations pertaining to the proposed FY22/23 Ludlow Community Development Fund Grant Application, seconded by Mr. DeBarge. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. Gennette to authorize the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to move forward with their slum and blight service, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Mr. O'Leary: Thank you. I appreciate that. So, we'll submit it March 3rd, it's due and then we

usually hear around summer. So, July, August, whether or not the town was awarded the grant. So, hopefully we have some good news this summer.

Mr. Gennette: We'll look forward to seeing you again.

Mr. O'Leary: Thank you everyone.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you John.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to close the hearing at 5:52 p.m., seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Sergeant Interviews:

6:00 p.m. – Jhon Wielblad

Mr. Goncalves: This is one hire tonight, correct?

Chief Valadas: This is one hire tonight but it's an ongoing process to try to fill positions. Sometimes we take one step forward and two steps back. I have been notified that two of my officers are leaving by the end of the month, they are going to State Police.

Mr. Goncalves: Welcome and thank you for your interest in the position. What we are going to do is allow you an opening statement, less than twenty minutes please. Then the Board will ask you a series of questions and then you can have a closing statement at that point. Okay.

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Officer Wielblad: Okay, sounds good.

Mr. Goncalves: The floor is yours.

Officer Wielblad: Thank you. So, my name is Jhon Wielblad, born and raised in Ludlow. I bought my first house here, started my family here and just recently sold my house and bought another house. Very committed to the Town of Ludlow. Very passionate about the town. I'm a team player. In 2013 I graduated from American International College with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and I had just completed my internship here at the Ludlow Police Department. Shortly after I started working in records doing data entry, firearm licensing and finger printing. From there I progressed to becoming a dispatcher and a Special Police Officer. At the same time, I worked at the Hamden County Sheriff's Department as a Corrections Officer, and I try to excel in everything that I do. All those fields have really helped me in my current role as acting supervisor with my knowledge of how dispatch operates, working at the Sheriff's Department doing prisoner transports and intakes. At American International College, I received an award for outstanding participation in the field of CJ for my internship. At the Police Academy and Corrections Academy, I received the physical fitness award and in the Police Academy I had the opportunity to be a squad leader. At the Police Department, I received lifesaving awards. I have a heavy focus on the community, whether it's at work or outside of work. This is my third year being involved in the Police Unity Tour. It's a four-day bike ride from New Jersey to DC and it's to raise public awareness for all of the fallen police officers. I'm part of the Cares Coalition. My first time being in a cares meeting was back then with Officer DeBarge. I sat in as an intern and was really fond of what they stood for. So, when I became a full-time officer, I became the liaison officer for cares, and I currently sit on the Board for the Cares Coalition. I teach DARE to third graders. I think this is a great program. It was revamped in 2009 through 2013 and was implemented with a new curriculum that's

research based and scientific study based. So, it's a much broader application of life choices and good decision making.

Mr. Goncalves: We got certified with DARE since the last meeting, right.

Officer Wielblad: Yes, I teach, this will be my second year at St. Johns and before COVID I taught with Officer Cordero at the public schools. At our last meeting, I think I just got my master's degree in criminal justice. So, since then I've become a certified instructor, field training officer. I'm currently the acting sergeant of the overnight shifts. I help manage the Special Police division and last month I just got certified as an EMT.

Mr. DeBarge: Congratulations.

Officer Wielblad: Thank you. I think my dedication to the town and the department as a Police Officer has really molded me to a great candidate for sergeant. Currently, as an acting sergeant and hopefully as a sergeant I can help continue to mold productive and successful police officers and since becoming acting sergeant, it has really solidified that this is something that I'm like truly passionate about and I really enjoy doing it. I love it. Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you. Okay, Mr. DeBarge.

Mr. DeBarge: Alright Jhon, it's good to see you. It seems like every time we have a promotional interview you're here and that says a lot about you and a lot about your character. I want to start with your cover letter because usually I like to try to take, if I see something that catches my eye, I like to take something out of it, and you have a statement in your cover letter that I find interesting and I wouldn't mind if you expand on it just a little bit. As an acting sergeant I've honed my skills in managing and supervising a team of officers and here's the part that I like that I wish you'd expand on, resulting in a proven track record of reducing crime and maintaining public safety.

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Officer Wielblad: Okay. So, I think it is important to really engage your shifts and your officers. So, just having a simple conversation with them, letting them know that I promote proactivity. Anything they want to do to engage to be proactive and what their interests are. Sometimes at the beginning of shifts we'll just watch educational videos that go over like police work and something that can help us be better at our jobs and anything that they come to me, like questions I try to get them an answer right away and if I can't I will do the best I can to provide that information to them but I think communication and getting the training that interests them is something that helps produce very productive officers. Some things that we focus on our shift, sometimes we deal with like the car breaks, revisiting that and talking about like patrolling areas that normally we wouldn't want to patrol could be all the deterrence that we need. To see a cruiser come down that way and someone sees it, it could deter that night's break ins. So, strong communication would help reinforce that statement.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay, now that wasn't one of my questions. I have four prepared but I'm going to pick two. So, you're leading me to a question. So, with what you just said having a chance to expand on that too, what's the most challenging part of training or supervising new officers in the world that we're in now and I'm including a world of posts in Massachusetts, changing policies, all of that. Most challenging?

Officer Wielblad: It can be very challenging because of the state we are in now but it's also very rewarding because of all the say like the policies and procedures that we have in place kind of set us up for success and our current shift right now we have a very well-rounded batch of officers. We have officers with several years of experience coming from corrections in

Connecticut, coming from different departments, different agencies and new officers. So, I feel like that's a fantastic combination to really mold a great shift. In the next few months, we're going to have all new officers on that shift so that will present a new challenge and a new way of communicating with them. So, when they come on, we'll do everything we can to help them progress in the way that they want to progress in their careers. There can be a lot of challenges that you were stating but I feel like in Ludlow we are very fortunate. We have a very supportive town of our Police Department. We work well with our Fire Department. We have good connections throughout the community, our town hall. I feel like we have a good rapport with the schools, the senior center. So, I feel like all of those play a crucial role in us being successful at our job in serving the community well.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay. For my last question, how would you say your career has progressed in the time that you've been here. What do you like about its progression and is there anything that you'd change?

Officer Wielblad: I'm very happy with my career. There's a, I would say almost like a weakness, at one point I was studying for the sergeant's exam, my master's degree and my EMT cert, and I found that to be like very overwhelming and challenging and then I realized that to overcome that, I'd have to break it down into more manageable smaller chunks. Once I realized that I also that I also downloaded a software on my phone to help me prioritize my tasks and be more on top of things and I think from that experience that has made me a better candidate for this position because I've taken what I've learned from that, and I've applied that to my current role as acting sergeant. When I manage like a critical incident or something that's larger than normal, first I look at what's going on currently, what the officers on scene need, what they might need, what we're going to do if another large incident comes in or just another call for service. If we're going to need additional resources from other towns or if we are going to need to call a specialized unit in like a D.R.E. K-9 detective bureau or an SRT team. So, it helps me kind of prioritize and kind of get through it like chunks at a time. Does that answer your question okay?

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Mr. DeBarge: Yes. That's all I got. Thank you. Oh no, I'm sorry, do you mind introducing us to your,

Officer Wielblad: No, that's Smolinski's.

Mr. DeBarge: Oh, okay alright. Sorry.

Officer Wielblad: But I will next time she's with me.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Gennette.

Mr. Gennette: Well, first off Jhon that's a wonderful Brooks Brothers suit you got on there. Looks pretty tight, you're looking good. Can you describe to me what the daily activities are for the sergeant's position. What do you see is encompassing?

Officer Wielblad: So, currently on the midnight shift as a sergeant I come in an hour early than my shift. I do a brief shift change with the evening supervisor and then I see what's going on, what needs to be done and then I kind of collect the information that I need to pass on to my officers when they come in for shift. Once I do that, I see, I look at the schedule to see if there's anything that needs to be filled for the following day and I'll check my emails to see if there's any pertinent information that's relevant that I could pass on to my officers and then I just do kind of like a brief check of the building make sure dispatch is all set, their staffing is good,

make sure the booking area is all set, the cells are all set and then once they come in, I brief them. If there's anything that we have to go over, we'll go over and then start the shift.

Mr. Gennette: Have you had any work with the detective squad and task force area that kind of stuff.

Officer Wielblad: So, on the overnight shift not so much, but in communicating with the detective bureau they definitely have a lot on their plate, so they encourage officers to take all the calls that they currently have and take them as far as they can and if they need help from the detective bureau, they're very open to assisting and helping and guiding how to go further. So, if they are needed, they'll absolutely help us out or take over something that we need to pass along to them.

Mr. Gennette: And as sergeant are you responsible for who goes and does what? I don't understand how the police department works, that kind of a situation.

Officer Wielblad: So, there's no DB on the overnight shift, so patrol officers are assigned a district and it usually goes by what day they're working, staffing and everything like that. If there's say a transport then I'll call the district car in and it has to go say it's the men's jail, then that will be the district car that has that or if we have a district four car and we have to bring someone to the women's jail they'll come in and do that. So, that's kind of how I delegate something like that.

Mr. Gennette: I'm all set Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goncalves: Thanks James. Mr. Rosenblum.

Mr. Rosenblum: Good to see you again sir.

Officer Wielblad: Thanks for having me.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Derek kind of took one but I have three, so it'll whittle it down to two because it's kind of a crossover there. So, what do you believe sets you apart from other candidates?

Officer Wielblad: What sets me apart from the other candidates is my community engagement. Everything I do with the department, I try to focus on the community and since being put in this role, I've been able to take on more management positions on our community events and stuff that we're involved with, and I also have been able to involve a greater outreach of people with our events. For our food drive this year I was able to include the boys' basketball team and it was very successful and we donated all the food to our local Veterans pantry here in town. Then I organized a toy drive at Playnow here in town, toys for tots and we did kind of like a stuff the cruiser event and I was able to get a hold of the young marines. They came out, helped us out and we had the help of one of our dispatchers, which was fantastic because that's something he had done before, so he had a lot of great input and that's something that I'd like to continue to grow and involve more people in from our department and other agencies in this event because I think that's very important. I like working with the youth. I think one of my proudest achievements was being able to bring back the bike patrol program. When we started bringing it back the Chief and I were able to get two new bikes for the unit and then worked with Pioneer Valley Financial and they were able to donate another two bikes. So, we have a total of six bikes for our unit that we can use that are in great condition. I also like working with the senior citizens. I think it's important. I go out to the senior center on bike patrol. I've done talks there with the Board of Health about questions that have almost like an open Q & A on what they wanted. There was a couple of things that I wasn't aware of that they had concerns

about that I was able to address. That's almost like my niche and my big thing is the relationships that we've established with the community. I've done the community market. I've done the heroes on ice recently at the Thunderbirds game. If I'm not a part of it, I try to help guide where it goes like the tree lighting ceremony, we collected toys at the department. I was able to be there, it was a great turnout that hopefully we can do again next year and make it better. I would say my community relations really sets me apart from the other candidates.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you because you almost answered the second question too. The next question is what strategies could you use as a sergeant to improve communication with the public? So, that kind of goes with what you said but I guess I could spin that as to say what do you see on the horizon you could help, I mean you're doing a good amount with the community now, so how do think you can improve communication more? I mean this is involvement I guess I would say communications.

Officer Wielblad: I think I have two answers for you on that one. So, when I was in the academy we did a survey on what to do with a particular intersection and kind of gave like four answers and then people were able to chime in with their own answers and we just posted that on the department's Facebook page and we got an overwhelming response of just like people picking our answers and giving us feedback, but I think if you pose a question on that page and see what are your concerns or what do you think the issues are, I think we would get a really good response and we can kind of maybe just shift some resources to a different area where we were kind of missing a little bit or overlooking. We can find stuff out that way and have more of an open communication because we do a lot through social media and the Twitter account. So, the second one, this one would be more involved. So, a lot of like big cities will have like neighborhood watch units or divisions. So, I think if you wanted to start something like that, you could do like a meeting, a big meeting like at the town hall or one of the schools and see what kind outreach you get or outcome you get and then if there's enough interest, you can divide those groups into like their own little sections where they can meet monthly themselves and then like once a month or bi-monthly you could meet with them and see what their concerns are, what their issues are, what they have to bring to us. So, that would be a more open form of communication and a better way to stay in touch with the community.

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Mr. Rosenblum: No, I mean I've always with social media is I've always liked the idea of the social media especially something I think Twitter in one way, but the way that its' used it's almost like a text thread almost in the fact, I mean the State Police does it a lot. You see when the State Police puts up things because I follow theirs, accidents that happen and they give you, you know heads up on accidents of that nature. I should probably have one down in Hartford because there always seems to be one every day when I go down there, but no thank you, thank you very much.

Mr. Goncalves: All set?

Mr. Rosenblum: Yes sir.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Silva.

Mr. Silva: Yes, Jhon welcome back.

Officer Wielblad: Thank you for having me.

Mr. Silva: Overall how has your experience been since we last talked the last time you were in, how has your experience been with the Police Department over there?

Officer Wielblad: It's been great. I got to be placed in the role of acting sergeant so fulfilling that role and doing it has really solidified that it's something that I want to do and keep doing. I've been involved with a lot of community events and staying busy. I think when we last met, is just when I got my master's degree. So, that was a nice thing to accomplish. Being a certified instructor, it was a class I went and took. I took the field training officer class and I've had the opportunity to put some input on the program, which has been good. Becoming a certified EMT was not easy by any means, and it took me quite a bit to achieve that, but in January I just got certified and I'm really proud of that. That was something that I was working on for a while.

Mr. Silva: What is the one thing you would like to see implemented in the department?

Officer Wielblad: I guess I can go off of Mr. Rosenblum's answer. I think since I'm a big proponent of community policing and community relations, having that outreach with like a neighborhood watch would be fantastic. I've always brought up in the past how cyber security is something that we're going to have to focus on in the future. It's not going away. I think we do good at the detective level. All the things I brought up in the past, they seem to be on top of, but I think at a patrol level if we can get more training and information to those officers because we have a lot of people that come in who were scammed and we take the report. So, I think the more information that we can give to those people when they come in will be better. Education to the public just like what to be aware of, more like recent scams. Something that we can post on our social media, on our Twitter, on our website and we have good connections with the local papers too. So, that's something that we can get out there and have, just so everyone's more aware because like even with the car breaks, just getting out the information to lock your doors and take in your valuables. That makes a huge difference because sometimes they're just looking for the quick open door or the quick you know something valuable in the car. So, they can smash and grab.

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Mr. Silva: Do you ever see yourself ever becoming a Police Chief?

Officer Wielblad: Do I ever see myself becoming a Police Chief? That would definitely be down the road. Being in the role of sergeant is something that I find challenging but extremely rewarding. At this point, I want to become officially a sergeant and become really good at this role. I want to understand it and really support my officers, help mold productive and successful officers and I think down the road that's something I can absolutely see myself doing, but I think at this point I would just want to really hone my skills in as a sergeant and do the best that I can and continue on educating myself and improving my skills.

Mr. Silva: Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you again for coming back. The first question, all of the negativity out there about Police Officers, it seems like they're getting hammered more than praised. So, what keeps you going? What's driving you?

Officer Wielblad: Well, being born and raised in Ludlow, having the opportunity to go through the school system and then it's almost like a privilege being able to work in this community. So, I know when we respond to calls and some people are being derogatory or something along those lines, we're seeing them at their worst. So, like it's important to be professional and you know just be that positive impact on those people and sometimes when we deal with those individuals again, they remember that. They have a different outlook on how they see us. So, I think it's important to continue to spread the positivity that we do all our community relations. Just teaching DARE keeps me going. That's fantastic working with the third graders is great and then like even on bike patrol when I go down the riverwalk and I see senior citizens and I walk,

and we talk for like ten minutes but it's great. I get to learn so much about so many different people. I get to meet different businesses. Something I could never experience like a normal citizen, being a Police Officer just opens you up to so many like interesting interactions and people. I always try to stay positive.

Mr. Goncalves: You see people at their worst and at their best, right.

Officer Wielblad: Yes.

Mr. Goncalves: And what do you see is the biggest issue facing the town today? Is it drugs, is it random crime, breaking and entering. Do we have a traffic issue? Kids... What's going on out there that's really troublesome?

Officer Wielblad: I still have to say it's the opioid crisis. I was just at a training yesterday for impaired driving and I heard a statistic I think it's like four or five overdoses happen a day in Mass that result in a fatality. So, this is an issue that we've dealt with for a long time and we're continuing to deal with and it's something that expands a lot more than the Police Department. We have to do our role in you know going after the drug traffickers, the dealers and the distributors. It's very important and even the users. When I was a corrections officer sometimes, I would hear, they would say like I needed to get locked up because this was the wake-up call that I needed. Sometimes it's important to get them on that path because we meet a lot of people that have gone to rehab six, seven, eight, nine times and sometimes it's the twelfth or thirteenth time that work. So, doing what we do as police and the detective bureau is important, education is critical to partner with the town and even the schools to show the dangers of opioid misuse. Partnering with the Board of Health. A big thing that I've also seen on calls is people want to get help but there's just no beds available or it's just such a long wait for them to get help. So, we work with other agencies, other state agencies and we bring those resources to us and now we can give those resources to those individuals and hopefully they can get treatment faster. I think if we keep doing our job at the Police Department, you'll get the supply out, so the users won't have as many resources to get it. Then education and giving out the resources needed for people who want help and want to seek it. I think that's the big one and then the car breaks, they're sporadic and I feel like kind of along the same lines where you educate the public, you make sure your patrol is visible. I feel like the visible deterrence can have an impact and then just working with surrounding communities because it seems like it's not an individual but it's a group that kind of goes through different communities and they target,

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Mr. Goncalves: A traveling band, huh?

Officer Wielblad: like a traveling band and they'll target areas where people feel comfortable enough to you know leave a car open or leave a valuable and that's something I,

Mr. Goncalves: I know, and I don't want to get off subject but the Burnett Road area of Chicopee, they've got a neighborhood watch of sorts there where everybody's ring cameras are now connected to each other. So, if anything or anyone of them go off at night, between a certain time period, everyone is getting alerted. I guess it's really slowed down the cars.

Officer Wielbald: I'm glad you brought that up because we've also been exposed that but there's also like different google has Nest and there's like third party vendors. So, there's several different networks where people can communicate together but it's important for us as law enforcement to know that there's not just one network, there's more because someone on their ring camera could have like something really important, but someone's two streets over on their google Nest can also have something that pieces those two pieces together.

Mr. Goncalves: It all helps. It all works.

Officer Wielblad: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Goncalves: Okay, so closing statement from you.

Officer Wielblad: Thanks for having me. It was a pleasure interviewing again. I just want to say that studying for the sergeant's exam was extremely difficult and being able to pass on the first try was something that I'm really proud of and then sitting here in the room today with the highest score is something that I'm extremely proud of myself. Having my master's degree in criminal justice is something that shows my dedication to the department and my commitment to the field of Criminal Justice. My current role as acting sergeant has honed in that this is something that I really, I love doing it. It's something that I see myself doing. I want to continue doing it and I just want to stay with the department and help officers progress into the field and the things that they like to do. Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Perfect. Thank you. Chief.

Chief Valadas: At the end of each candidate I'm just going to state, at the Police Department we keep a responsibility and duties list. We try to assign every single member of the department some level or area of responsibility. We meet tonight for one permanent position with an anticipated two positions in the next twelve months. Acting sergeant Jhon Wielblad, he's been acting sergeant since December of 2022. He is currently as he stated, these might be reiterations, but I can't stress enough he is one of the departments DARE officer, he assists with the social media, the Twitter account. He is the CARES Coalition liaison; he is a bicycle patrol supervisor. He handles the maintenance and the procurement when it comes to the equipment. He is one of the officers that handles the message board outside. He's also the SIMS coordinator or assists with the SIMS program. There's multiple officers that do that but that handles the tracking of the overdoses. He's also a participant, he's Dart officer trained, which means it's a reaction team trained for harm reduction to meet with people in crisis, from substance abuse. He's part of the HCAT team, which is the district attorney's team to help out with the harm reduction programs, outreach programs. He assists with the special police. He was a special police officer. He is in charge of booking and holding cell inspections. He's also one of the, I designated him as a fitness coordinator. He is an MPTC certified instructor and has participated in the police academy with physical training as well as with applied patrol procedures. He's a part of the community liaison team and part of the bicycle patrol. I want to stress all of those different areas of responsibility.

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Mr. Goncalves: Perfect. Alright, thank you.

Officer Wielblad: Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Good luck to you Jhon.

6:15 p.m. - Brandon Vigneault

Officer Vigneault: Good evening gentlemen. How are you?

Mr. Goncalves: Good, how are you?

Officer Vigneault: Good, good.

Mr. Goncalves: So, thank you again for your interest. We're going to have you start with an

opening comments, remarks. We'll go around, everybody will ask you a question and then we'll give you an opportunity for a final statement or remarks.

Officer Vigneault: Sounds good.

Mr. Goncalves: The floor is yours.

Officer Vigneault: Alright. Good evening gentlemen. So, I know I've seen you guys a couple of times in the past few months or years I should say, but in case anyone forgot, Brandon Vigneault. Born and raised here in Ludlow. I graduated from Ludlow High School in 2006 and from there I went there I went to Westfield State, graduated from Westfield State in 2010 with a bachelor's in criminal justice and a minor in sociology. After living in Westfield for a few semesters, I moved back to the bubble of Ludlow, which you know is, I think is a good thing; moved back in with the parents and stayed with them for a little bit. Speaking of my parents, my father, my parents are both longtime residents of Ludlow. They lived here their entire lives as well. My father was a police officer for about 27ish years, give or take a couple of lapses in employment for a bit. So, about 27 years. My mom worked down at the Hampden County, I'm sorry the Springfield Juvenile Court and I had a couple of uncles, my uncle Rainee and uncle Kenny who were part time police officers here in Ludlow. So, I come from a law enforcement family. I'm very proud of that. Again, back to my personal situation I also live in Ludlow here with my wife and my two little kids. We built a house here in town and so my two little boys keep me busy, but I wouldn't have it any other way. So, professionally, like I said I graduated from Westfield State in 2010 in the spring or fall of 2010 I was hired by the Hampden County Sheriff's Department as a correctional officer, kind of beginning my law enforcement career. In 2013, February 2013, I was hired by the Ludlow Police Department and began the academy. After completion of the academy I went to patrol, midnight shift patrol. For about two years I was midnights, two years four to twelve, two years on the day shift. On patrol I saw all different shifts. You'd see different things on every shift to be honest with you. Every shift is very different. In 2019, I was fortunate to be appointed to a position in the detective bureau, which I'm very proud of. I was a narcotics investigator along side detective Riccardi at that time detective Riccardi since then promoted to Sergeant Riccardi. Again, I'm very proud of that position and I held that position for a little under three years, up until this July. July 1st I was appointed acting sergeant by Chief Valadas and I've been acting sergeant since. I did, I was back on midnights, so first shift back to second then back to midnights as a sergeant and I'm actually now back on four to twelves as a sergeant, acting sergeant now assuming all those roles. That's basically my little spiel about where I've been and what I've done. Ready to rock.

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Mr. Goncalves: Good deal. Thank you. Mr. Silva.

Mr. Silva: Yes, welcome.

Officer Vigneault: Mr. Silva, how are you?

Mr. Silva: I am good. How is your overall experience been while in the Police Department?

Officer Vigneault: I'd say a good experience. I've enjoyed my time there. You know I've seen a lot of different things, again I know I revert back to my father being a police officer, I knew what I was getting myself into. I have no regrets about what I do and I'm proud of it. Now the experience in Ludlow you know I enjoy it. I never had any real aspirations to leave Ludlow for State Police or Federal. I don't know, it just never really was part of my thing. So, I've always enjoyed the town. I've enjoyed the Police Department. Right now, if I was still patrol if I wasn't selected as an acting, I'd be badge nine and I have just over ten years actually my anniversary

was February 4th. So, Derek can attest to that. It's absolutely unbelievable the amount of turnover we've had in the ten years, and I know most of you guys know that because you do the interviews right. So, you know that experience has been pretty incredible, and you know it speaks as how I've done so much in such a short time. Seeing all the different positions and such and to be honest with you the beat goes on. We're still struggling to keep people, but yes so.

Mr. Silva: What's the one thing you would like or would want to see implemented in the department?

Officer Vigneault: Well, you know what if you wanted to, if you went towards a community relations aspect, I'd say maybe do a implementing a citizen's academy maybe something like that would be a good program. It's tough to get up and running and you need to, the big thing is you need to have people who want to do it, but if people were willing to do it, I think that would be a great program to do and one that's feasible. It's not a crazy ask. It's something that could, I think could actually be done.

Mr. Silva: And do you see yourself ever becoming Chief?

Officer Vigneault: You know let's start with this, I never saw myself becoming sergeant, you know what I mean. So, to say me becoming Chief maybe, maybe someday you never know. You know things change as your career progresses. I now am, I'm proud to be a sergeant, acting sergeant. I'm proud to have the opportunity to come before you guys tonight. So, you know stuff changes and as I get older and my career progresses and you know I see more stuff and I continue to experience and learn, I don't see why not sir. I don't see why not, someday.

Mr. Silva: Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Alright, Mr. Rosenblum.

Mr. Rosenblum: Welcome back.

Officer Vigneault: Mr. Rosenblum, how are you?

Mr. Rosenblum: Good, how are you?

Officer Vigneault: Good.

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Mr. Rosenblum: What do you believe sets you apart from the other candidates?

Officer Vigneault: I think it's a combination of a couple of things. I have, I feel adequate time now. I've had ten years on the job, and I think it's my experience in those ten years and you know I forgot to mention this in the beginning of my whole entire spiel here, but I completely left off the SRT portion, I apologize for that. I'm going to try and revert back to it because I think this is part of the reason that sets me apart. I was appointed or given the opportunity to work with the SRT team in Ludlow in 2016. That's the Special Response Team. We respond to the most critical incidents typically involving guns or weapons. So, in 2016 I went to the basic swat school and joined up here in Ludlow. In 2019 that team transitioned to a county wide team. I don't know if you've heard about it or not, but we take care of all of Hampden County. It consists of about seven departments with people from all ranks from someone who's got three years of experience all the way up to Lieutenants and Captains and now the Chief of Chicopee, he was Captain, or he was Captain Major is now Chief Major he was kind of heading it up as well. So, in that role I'm now, when we transitioned over to Hampden County Special

Response Team I was appointed as assistant team leader of red team, which is approximately twelve to fifteen people. Through attrition I was appointed team leader of that team and most recently I've been in December, I was appointed assistant commander of the entire Hampden County Special Response Team just underneath Sergeant Sean Knox here in town. So, with that being said and I apologize I meant to bring that up in my opening comments, but with that being said I feel like that has lent itself in my favor and I've been in a leadership role for years at this point with them and dealing with again some of the most critical and volatile situations. I believe that you know that gives me an upper hand. I also believe that my just adversity overall. Like I've already said in my opening statement, the course of my career and you know the path it took from midnights to day shift to very willing to go back to four to twelve in the detective bureau then back to midnights now back to four to twelve as a supervisor. You know I feel like that experience in those ten years is greater than the other candidates.

Mr. Rosenblum: Okay thank you and what strategies would you use as a sergeant to improve communication with the public.

Officer Vigneault: Well, we have an open forum now where, we have a Facebook account and Twitter account that's 2023 right, everybody's on their phone. So, that seems to be the best form of communication that I can see right now. You know, you go out to dinner and everyone's on the phone.

Mr. Goncalves: As long as they're not driving right.

Officer Vigneault: Yes, yes, no one texts and drives, right. But you know it's kind of disturbing sometimes you go out and you see people out and they're all on their phone. So, it's probably the best way to reach people so we continue with those methods. As time evolves or as time goes on everything evolves. I think that's the best way we can keep up with it. I think reaching out and you doing an open house like we have right now is a great thing. We get mostly younger kids, between the ages of five and twelve or something like that, but you know it gets exposure and we need exposure, and we need little kids to want to be cops nowadays. So, a program like that. We also have the golf tournament. I'm also the secretary, I was the secretary, I'm now the treasurer of the Ludlow Police Association and myself I started off saying Chief Madera was still chief at the time and he didn't think we could pull it off, but we pulled off the golf tournament and it's an awesome community event now. We have so many people come out and participate in the golf tournament and it's a great way for us to you know actually see people and talk to people outside of work and that in turn I feel like we're bringing them more willingly involved with us and the Police Department.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you. I'm all set.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Gennette.

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Vigneault, how are you?

Officer Vigneault: Good sir, yourself?

Mr. Gennette: I'm doing well, thank you. In layman's terms can you describe what you believe the job entails for sergeant. The one you're applying for?

Officer Vigneault: In layman's terms, supervising and being a leader of the patrolmen. You have to be able; you have to instill confidence in them. I feel it is very important and I feel that you have to have a very open and good relationship with them. You know I think a boss that just goes in there and wants to shut his door and wait for stuff to happen and not have an open

forum if you will, isn't very conducive to a healthy work environment. So, I think there needs to be a line drawn too, but I feel like I'd have no problem drawing that line, I already do. I think that the most important thing, quality leadership being self-aware, being humble and most importantly being confident. I feel like that's what a leader does when someone looks to you for answers you have them and if you don't, know that you don't and be willing to find them because there's a lot of laws out there and a lot of different things and if anyone tells you they know everything, that's crazy. Be self-aware, be humble enough to look for the answers if you don't have them. The Chief tells us to call him if we need to in the middle of the night and I have. That's part of the job because you don't know everything. That's my opinion of a good leader.

Mr. Gennette: Excellent. So, my next couple of questions, you kind of touched on a bit already. So, part of the supervisory role, some of the stuff that you've been doing already, can you just explain some of that again.

Officer Vigneault: So, you're the shift supervisor, you run the shift. Any issues that arise, the officers come back to you. Logistically, you're correcting reports, making sure,

Mr. Gennette: Yes, but I mean filling in for Sergeant and stuff like that, the actual roles that you've taken that you filled in for. The positions that you've taken into supervisory roles.

Officer Vigneault: Oh, do you mean like not just sergeant you're saying?

Mr. Gennette: Yes, what have you actually participated in as a supervisor?

Officer Vigneault: Okay, since I've been appointed, I'm now the building maintenance supervisor. So, I take care of anything that goes on in the building. They look to me for whatever needs to go on inside the building and I take care of it. So, that's a new role that I have. I'm also just recently the vehicle maintenance supervisor. I haven't gotten into it too much; it's only been seven months since I've been appointed. So, being acting I haven't actually been given a plethora of side jobs.

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Mr. Gennette: So, acting sergeant, how long have you been doing that?

Officer Vigneault: Seven months.

Mr. Gennette: Seven months you've been doing acting sergeant.

Officer Vigneault: July 1, 2022, was when I was appointed acting sergeant.

Mr. Gennette: Can you expand on your service with the detective department and task force.

Officer Vigneault: Absolutely. I was never part of the task force. I do know if you see or read in my cover letter I was offered, so, we will do this chronologically. I was appointed to the detective bureau in 2019, I believe it was in the fall, maybe October. I was primarily, I was assigned as a narcotics investigator and that was my primary role. However, at the Ludlow Police Department, it's a small detective bureau and we take on the role of every other detective. We wear different hats. So, I've done investigations to include larceny, home invasion, breaking and entering, along with the narcotics investigations. So, I've written a number of search warrants, which can be pretty extensive and that's basically been my role with the detective bureau.

Mr. Gennette: What about with the SRT?

Officer Vigneault: Okay, so SRT if you want to get a little more detail I can,

Mr. Gennette: How long have you been doing,

Officer Vigneault: So, 2016 I joined up the Ludlow Special Response Team. I was just a regular operator, that's what were called just the standard position. When we transferred over to a regional team, that's when I was appointed assistant team leader. So, I was in control of like I said twelve to fifteen guys. Basically, we make the plans on whether we're going to have to serve a warrant or anything like that. We conduct trainings. We organize trainings. We make sure that there's a lesson plan, a training report after the lesson plan. We take attendance, all of the logistical kind of stuff like that. So, that's just kind of progressed from just being the commanding officer of twelve to fifteen guys to now it's up to like fifty-four. It's above fifty people that includes a MERT team, which is a medical emergency response team that comes out with us on call. So, they're typically firefighters and paramedics that come out and if there's any injuries or issues that arise, they take care of that along with a C.N. T. team, which is a crisis negotiation, negotiators, which I don't know the exact number on them, but they also fall under our umbrella.

Mr. Gennette: And that's a Hampden County position?

Officer Vigneault: Yes, that's Hampden County that's, we serve county wide.

Mr. Gennette: So, I lead you into a question here, do you have enough time for your sergeant's position or do you,

Officer Vigneault: Absolutely, yes, I do. It is a lot of time with the SRT Team but I absolutely, one hundred percent have enough time for sergeant.

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Mr. Gennette: Perfect, thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. DeBarge.

Mr. DeBarge: Hey, how are you?

Officer Vigneault: How are you sir?

Mr. DeBarge: Nice to hear your answers again, you've done a lot in ten years. There's no doubt about that.

Officer Vigneault: Yes, I moved around a lot, sir.

Mr. DeBarge: It's nice to wear a lot of hats, isn't it? Keeps you busy.

Officer Vigneault: It is. It keeps you busy and nothing gets stale.

Mr. DeBarge: Idle hands do what? You know what that saying is? Forget it. Okay, most challenging part of training new officers especially in an environment that we're in in Massachusetts post new policies, ever changing training? What's the most challenging for your new officers? You have a whole new shift coming on, right?

Officer Vigneault: Oh, yes, we do. We have five new guys. There's four in FTO right now and the fifth one will be out of the academy shortly. You know these kids are young, so that lends itself to be beneficial for us in some ways because their moldable. So, I guess that's a good

thing. A challenge, if they have pre-existing notions or thoughts about what we do as police officers that could be challenging to change the way they think. Again, most of these guys come out and they're solid, they're good. They get what we do and it's not like the movies, you know what I mean. They understand that. It could be challenging if a new officer picks up maybe bad habits from a stale guy that's been around a long time. That could be an issue that you got to work through.

Mr. Goncalves: We have those?

Officer Vigneault: No, not in the Ludlow Police Department. Like I said I'm L-9 so I'm almost one of those stale guys now. So, I'd say that's probably could be the most challenging things with the new guys.

Mr. DeBarge: My next question is about your career progression, which we pretty much went over with a slew of questions. So, my question is pretty simple, how has your career progressed and what do you like about that progression and is there anything you would change? If there's anything you would change about your career progression feel free, you don't have to get into everything that you did already.

Office Vigneault: Yes, absolutely I won't. There's really nothing that I would change. I'm happy with the way it went, the way it's going I should say. I just wanted to get into a little bit about, during the detective bureau I was offered a spot with CINRET it's a sought-after spot, not many people have the opportunity to go there. It's a task force with the State Police and they do like if you see a drug bust on TV it's going to be them, almost a hundred percent of the time. It's a great, great spot. I was offered that spot and I forget exactly when it was, maybe a year ago and you know I really had to sit back and think about what I wanted to do to be honest and I did, and I feel like I made the right choice coming here and taking on this acting sergeant role. I have absolutely no regrets and I'm proud to be a sergeant and I feel like I'm at the point in my career where I can really help the department grow and I can help new guys and not only new guys but guys who have been there a long time. I can help them and be a great leader for them. I feel like, just for whatever reason people naturally follow me. I feel like I'm a good leader. I might not be the most boisterous leader that like to yell, I just feel like I have that thing. I could be wrong but that's just the way I feel.

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Mr. DeBarge: Alright. That's all I got. I appreciate it.

Officer Vigneault: Yes sir.

Mr. Goncalves: Alright Brandon. Thank you. So, with all the negativity around police officers all over the country and everything going on, what drives you to want to stay here and do what you do?

Officer Vigneault: I think it was just instilled in me from my childhood. Like I mentioned during my opening statement, I come from a law enforcement family. During the last interview I remember some of you guys asked well if you weren't a cop what could you see yourself doing and I said banging nails joking around but no I really, I couldn't see myself doing anything else. That's what was ingrained in me just from being a little kid, my dad coming home working all kinds of crazy hours too, but I didn't care I knew what I wanted to do, and I think that's what drives me. Trying to keep bettering myself, my family and making my parents proud.

Mr. Goncalves: Thanks. So, what do you see as the biggest issue facing the town of Ludlow right now? Drugs, the other crime and what do you think we need to do to saddle it?

Officer Vigneault: Well, drugs is always the easy answer. It's always a problem, it's always been. I don't know is there an end in sight, I don't know. It's a real tough thing to battle. So, I think that's the drug addiction itself is probably the, you know one of the worst things. Is it as bad as Springfield or Holyoke, no, but it's still here. We're still responding at least once a month to drug overdoses where poor kids are passing away on us and it's tough to watch, it's tough to see. Realistically that's probably the worst, that's probably the hardest thing to deal with, just seeing it constantly, over and over again. We got our rations of B and E's, in the cars and people stealing catalytic converters. Of course, that's an issue but,

Mr. Goncalves: But is that all to feed the drugs.

Officer Vigneault: Sure, sure. I don't think it's people in town doing most of that stuff. I think most, ninety nine percent of drugs are coming from out of town, Holyoke or Springfield. It's tough to keep it out unless we set up some kind of checkpoints, but you know what I mean. So, it's just tough, like I said it's a tough thing to watch. I think the best way to combat that is really early intervention you know. I mean these are young people most, it doesn't pick and choose, it's across the board, but I think the best thing is to get kids into programs early to understand like drugs are bad. It's easy to say but get them exposed to it and let them know that it's bad. Education, early intervention.

Mr. Goncalves: Good. Closing remarks.

Officer Vigneault: Yes, so once again I'd like to say thank you very much for the opportunity tonight. I really appreciate it; I appreciate you guys taking your time here tonight. So, I'd like to leave you with this. I spoke a lot over the course of these interviews of the importance of humility, being self-aware and having self-confidence and I feel like all that's very important and being a leader, being a supervisor and a person in general. I also remember at the last interview; I had mentioned to you gentleman that I thought that Sgt. Tierney had done a great job and put himself in the best position to be selected that night and I knew that and I also remember telling you that if and when you see my name come in front of your desk again that I hope you consider me for the position. So, tonight is obviously that night and I hope that you choose me tonight. I feel that my choices and my decisions over the course of my career have made me the best candidate tonight and I say that with confidence and not with arrogance. I feel like my time, experience, all the different roles that I've taken, my well roundedness and diversity I guess lends me to be the best candidate tonight. So, with that, thank you very much and have a great night.

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Mr. Gennette: Thank you Brandon.

Mr. Rosenblum: Thank you.
Mr. Goncalves: Chief.

Chief Valadas: I'll reiterate some of what acting sergeant Vigneault said as part of his responsibilities list. He is an acting patrol shift sergeant. He has a myriad of different detective trainings that he went to. We have a training process, so it's like sexual assault investigator, he was trained in crime processing, he also did background investigations and as he stated a lot of the generalist duties that you have as a detective. You have to get certified in all of these things. It's a long process, but he accomplished that, and he completed that. As he mentioned he has been assigned to the fleet maintenance assistance as well as the radar certifications. He's the facilities manager for our Police Department. He is very knowledgeable in that type of aspect. Traffic enforcer and safety supervisor, he recently was also put on as co-support on that. He mentioned the regional special response team, as he stated, he was elevated from a

team leader to the assistant commander and he's also a bicycle patrol officer. So, again those are areas of responsibility for acting sergeant.

Mr. Goncalves: Good deal. Thank you.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you.

Officer Vigneault: Thank you.

6:30 p.m. – Derek Smolinski

Mr. Goncalves: How are you, come on up.

Officer Smolinski: How are you?

Mr. Goncalves: Alright, we are going to start off and allow you an opening statement, the board will ask you a series of questions, we'll allow you a closing statement. The Chief will say a little something and we'll be all set. Go ahead, the floor is yours.

Officer Smolinski: Sounds easy but, I'm Derek Smolinski born in Ludlow, MA. I've been with the Ludlow Police Department for 19 years. I'm currently on the day shift. I've been on the day shift for 8 years. I actually took over Derek's spot on the days. I first started at the Ludlow Police Department as a dispatcher and then Special Police Officer and then got hired as a full-time officer. Within the town I did 8 years of Safety Committee Member. I was one of the first field training officers at the Police Department. I did that for 10 years. I'm currently the manager and I run the Facebook page of the Ludlow Police Department. I am also the administrator and I run the vehicle maintenance at the Ludlow Police Department. Take care of all the vehicles, all of the laptop computers inside of them, the radar systems. That's about it. I'm really, really nervous.

Mr. Goncalves: Don't be nervous.

Mr. Gennette: Yes, don't be nervous.

Mr. Silva: You haven't been here enough?

Officer Smolinski: This is actually, I haven't interviewed here since I got hired as a patrolman.

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Mr. Silva: Oh, really. I thought you were here before.

Mr. Goncalves: You have to watch some tapes of earlier ones you know.

Officer Smolinski: I have.

Mr. Goncalves: Alright. James.

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Smolinski, welcome again. So, what do you see the sergeant's job as? What are the duties of a sergeant's job? Layman's terms please.

Officer Smolinski: The sergeant's job is administrative. We're responsible to follow policy and procedure making sure our officers are following policy and procedure. I think my main goal being that I've been at the Police Department for 19 years, is to pass on stuff I have learned throughout my years through training and through different calls I've been to and experienced,

again just passing it onto the new guys. I would be very helpful.

Mr. Gennette: So, have you had any supervisory roles before, you know like a fill in sergeant on different shifts that kind of thing?

Officer Smolinski: Yes, throughout the years I have sometimes filled in as a supervisor once in a while.

Mr. Gennette: Do you have any, I'm sorry are you all set with that?

Officer Smolinski: Yes.

Mr. Gennette: What kind of a, do you have any connection with the detectives? Do you have any task force experience or anything along those lines?

Officer Smolinski: No, I don't have any task force experience.

Mr. Gennette: No. What about any correlation with detective's department?

Officer Smolinski: I don't work in the detective bureau, but I work with, everyone works with the detectives.

Mr. Gennette: Oh, yeah, they do. Alright, I'm all set Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you. Mr. Silva.

Mr. Silva: Yes. How has your overall experience been since you've been on the department?

Officer Smolinski: It's been great. It's a wonderful department, very respectful department. We are fortunate to have a town that respects police officers and they're behind us, but our Police Department is just amazing.

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Mr. Silva: Good. What is the one thing you would like to see implemented for the department?

Officer Smolinski: I think that we should get back to having school resource officers back in schools and I believe not just one but have multiple, two possibly three. I believe that the school system is in dire need of having that in regard to students now a days with Facebook and social media and everything they have to deal with these days. I believe that a presence in the schools would help vastly.

Mr. Silva: Okay. Do you ever see yourself becoming Chief?

Officer Smolinski: No, I don't.

Mr. Silva: That's it.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. DeBarge.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay. It's tough for me to be totally professional and say Mr. Smolinski, I mean I've known him for a long time and worked together. Well, Derek congratulations for making it in the room.

Officer Smolinski: Thank you.

Mr. DeBarge: I know the test is,

Officer Smolinski: The test is a very hard test. Rumors are they say that it's a seventy percent fail rate for the test. That's what they say.

Mr. DeBarge: I don't deny that percentage.

Officer Smolinski: I'm happy I passed the test. I've very happy to be in front of you right now.

Mr. DeBarge: I don't deny that percentage. Okay. Can you tell me what you think the most challenging part of training or supervising new officers especially in the world that we're in now with Massachusetts post being involved with a lot of policies and procedures now? New officers coming on, we just got how many out of the academy?

Officer Smolinski: Four right now.

Mr. DeBarge: So, four like yesterday. So, what do you think the most challenging part of training new officers is?

Officer Smolinski: I think the most challenging part of training new officers personally with the Police Department right now is getting them to learn the software systems in our Police Department. That's one of the challenges. The second is to be professional all the time. I'll be honest with you, I'm the type of person who doesn't give out a lot of speeding tickets to our citizens. That being because I live in the town, I know how hard it is for people to pay for tickets and stuff like that. I try to tell the officers that hey you live in town you got to be compassionate towards the citizens of Ludlow.

Mr. DeBarge: I get your point and I was like you with tickets as well. I think I averaged about thirty-five tickets a year because it was the interaction that was more important to me than the monetary citations.

Officer Smolinski: Correct. Yes, more interaction and more teaching of the driver than actually giving out tickets.

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Mr. DeBarge: And by the way, my first interview with the Board of Selectmen, I was like this, and I turned my head like a clock answering. I was rigid and you're doing fine. You're doing great.

Officer Smolinski: Yes, I'm so nervous.

Mr. Goncalves: I think James is more nervous than you are.

Mr. DeBarge: I have one more question for you if James would stop interrupting. How has your career progressed in the time that you've been here? What do you like about the progression of your career and is there anything you would have changed?

Officer Smolinski: No, I think my career progressed really well, five years on midnight shift, one year on second shift and the rest I was on days. I had some opportunities to become in other positions. I did not take those opportunities. I'm a huge family guy, I like staying on day shift. I think becoming a supervisor and going to midnights shows my commitment to becoming a great supervisor in this town.

Mr. DeBarge: Good enough man. You did great. Thanks. That's all I got.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Rosenblum.

Mr. Rosenblum: First of all don't be nervous because I remember one of my first times that I sat here and we had to do interviews as a Selectmen and we were interviewing for Chief and you want to talk about having to be nervous as someone that's been in a couple of months and you sit down and you have to interview one of the top positions in the town. So, you're doing fine, don't worry about it.

Officer Smolinski: Thanks.

Mr. Rosenblum: What do you believe sets you apart from other candidates?

Officer Smolinski: I believe with my experience as a police officer, 19 years, I've seen a lot of things and I've dealt with a lot of people, a lot of heartache. I mean you're responding to calls where people need you for something and you're talking to people supposedly or might be in their worst day that they're having. I mean I've seen everything, dealt with everything. I still have nightmares about some calls I've gone to. I think the experience of being with the town at the police department for 19 years,

Mr. Rosenblum: Okay, I have one more. Thank you. What strategies as a Sergeant can you use to improve communication with the public?

Officer Smolinski: I think we are doing a good job, or a great job right now with communications with the public through Twitter and Facebook. I think throughout the career of Chief Valadas, and I think a little bit of Chief Madera, we've been posting arrest records and stuff like that on Facebook, getting the town involved, saying hey this is what's going on in town, this is all our arrests and stuff. I think I wouldn't change much of what we're doing already with Facebook, with Twitter. There's only so much you can put out there.

Mr. Rosenblum: No, I mean that's great because I'm big in the social media. I work with the social media where I work and things. I think Twitter is almost, like I was saying before, a mass text thing. If you get enough people subscribed to it, it's kind of like...in golf you know. If you pop it out on Twitter and you have a ton of subscribers, they know hey we've got a frost layer or anything of that effect.

Officer Smolinski: I know at some point we had Instagram before with one of our DARE officers who left. I think that was a good think with putting pictures and stuff like that, but I think we're invested with Twitter and Facebook. I don't think we should go anywhere else right now, as far as social media, any other social media platforms or anything.

Mr. Rosenblum: And what shift do you work again?

Officer Smolinski: I work days.

Mr. Rosenblum: Perfect, I'll make a note of that when I'm speeding through town. I'm all set, thanks. Sorry.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you for your interest. Along that line, I mean, Facebook every social media platform is hammering police officers. All that negative press out there, what drives you to want to stay as a cop because it's not the money.

Officer Smolinski: It's not the money, it's the passion of helping people. I wake up every morning wanting to go to my job. I don't wake up not wanting to go to my job. People

thanking me every day for doing this or doing that and I just say hey, that's part of my job. It's what I do. Sometimes it can be frustrating, but we just got to go on and do your job.

Mr. Goncalves: Still like getting up in the morning and going, that's great. What do you see as the biggest problem facing the town right now and what's your idea to combat it?

Officer Smolinski: It's the children, the youth, suicide, depression, anxiety, mental health. If that wasn't the case, I would say the second issue would be drugs, marijuana, but I think the biggest thing that people are not focusing on and forget is mental health, depression, anxiety with our youth. I thought about this question a lot and I really don't know how we could handle fixing the issue.

Mr. Goncalves: Probably education.

Officer Smolinski: You got education, you got counselors, but there are only so many children counselors that are out there and a huge demand right now to get hired as a counselor for children and not many people are going into that field.

Mr. Goncalves: It pays worse than police officers?

Officer Smolinski: I don't know, but,

Mr. Goncalves: I want to tell you as many interviews that I've done in the time that I've been here, you're the only person that's ever and I ask every person that same question. So, everybody out there listening when you come in, you'll know what I'm going to ask you and you're the first person that's ever answered like that.

Officer Smolinski: I really think the town should really look into their children with depression and anxiety and suicide. It's just, it's crazy.

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Mr. Goncalves: You guys see it, I'm sure. Alright, closing remarks, statement.

Officer Smolinski: thank you guys for the time and that's it. Oh, yes, I have my family here, my wife Melissa, son Owen, eight years old and then my son Tyler is one.

Mr. Goncalves: Hi guys.

Mr. Rosenblum: Owen, do you play hockey?

Owen: Yes.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do you play in Ludlow, Ludlow hockey?

Owen: Yes.

Mr. Rosenblum: What are you, about U8, U10 I mean?

Ms. Smolinski: U8, he's n mights right now.

Mr. Rosenblum: There's a hockey coach right there, keeping an eye on you.

Officer Smolinski: Still nervous by the way.

Officer Smolinski: Still nervous by the way.

Mr. Goncalves: All set with comments?

Officer Smolinski: All set. Thank you guys, I appreciate it.

Chief Valadas: Officer Smolinski's roles as I've reiterated, he did mention some. Again, day shift patrol officer. He does handle, he's our Facebook administrator. Derek's always doing

something around the station. He's excellent with that. As part of that, he's the primary fleet maintenance officer and including doing some hands-on stuff,

Officer Smolinski: Which alone is a part time job in the department. It's crazy.

Chief Valadas: Yes, I mean he is awesome as stuff. Radar calibration assistant. He recently was, he availed himself to, we lost an officer that was an assistant in court an evidence officer, very important position. He backs up both of those officers. He agreed to do that, I was very appreciative of that. As he stated, he was an original field training officer, as well as being an EMT. So, I just wanted to...his areas of responsibility.

Mr. Goncalves: Great.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you.

Mr. Silva: Thank you.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you. Nice to see you.

Officer Smolinski: Thank you very much.

Mr. Goncalves: We will deliberate this afterwards.

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Chief Valadas: Yes, good evening again gentlemen. I will make this very brief because I know your time is something that you need here. So, I guess it's my task when I review the candidates when we have these types of interviews, especially for supervisors, I stressed to you in the past how important supervisors are. The Sergeant is the most valuable position in the police department and that goes without saying when it comes to doing the work and I guess my position is to try to give you the things that I can give you outside of what's in front of you and what they told you tonight. So, I'll go right through the interview order with you. So, acting Sergeant Jhon Wielblad again, I felt it important to put acting Sergeant Wielblad in that position. He certainly deserved it because he is motivated, he volunteers for things, he is certainly a community-oriented police officer and he certainly needed to be in that supervisory role. If there was something that he needed, was to assume that leadership. Acting Sergeant Brandon Vigneault is an officer that is a natural leader. The officers, he said it and it is true, he has that certain ability to command the respect which he showed you when he talked about being part of a regional team with officers from other police departments and they pick him as a natural leader. He has the most diverse experience of all the candidates. So, he's had that rare opportunity where, again you know these things weren't, they were given to him, but he also had to perform in those levels. So, he was a patrolman and then he gets to go out for the tactical team and then he gets to you know he goes in for the detective bureau and he goes through all of that training and he's successful. He ran drug operations. You have to run your affidavits, goes to the DA's office, you work with outside agencies. A lot of pressure in that. You're going into somebody's home and that takes a tremendous amount of responsibility

okay. Then he gladly assumed to take the role as an acting Sergeant and then I'm going to go to officer Smolinski. So, officer Smolinski is the most senior as far as time, of all the officers. He

literally started as an intern, so did Officer Wielblad and then basically just progressed on, literally holding different positions and Officer Smolinski has always been that quiet steady dutiful officer. He said it, when he said I still want to go to work every day, I mean that's the kind of guy he is. Recently, like I said he actually, he's always buzzing around doing stuff around the station and recently he says you know I'll help you out with that position as far as court and evidence and a lot of officers wouldn't even think about doing that because it's all paperwork and its all just logistical stuff and he's willing to do it. So, I also want to point out the fact that

I'm in an enviable position, all of these officers in front of you today, any chief, any agency would love to have these three because they're just, they all have their assets. They all have their qualities. Town residents, all of them. These are people that, as you saw, he's a family man, all fathers, live and work in town. They're vested in the community. They all spoke about that. These three are emblematic of that without a doubt. This might sound cliché, but they serve with pride, they serve with integrity, they serve with honor. I can trust these men with anything, and I take a lot of pride in that. So, there are differences, the police sergeant is the, I always like to say that when they're on duty, it's their show. It's their show in town. If there's a Fire Captain on or a fire...on, but the police supervisor, it's their show. They bring in the help when they need it and I'm not there, the Lieutenants aren't there, they're there. So, that's very important because when somebody needs help in our community as with many others, most of the communities or every other community when they need help it's the police, and this position, this patrol supervisor's position is that. You have to be able to handle all situations, be able to deal with what you have to deal with and you almost feel sometimes like you're on an island because there's help you can get, there's State Police, there's you know other higher ranking officers, me, whatever, but it's going to take some time, but in it it's you. So, just understand the brevity of that position, again I can't stress it enough. There are differences in each candidate. You have three different candidates here. I'm going to have two more openings within a year. So, just know that.

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Mr. Goncalves: This test good?

Chief Valadas: It may be, but there will be another testing period without a doubt. So, there will be the state has basically said whatever came down with the Tatum decision, there will be a process. There has to be because there's going to be hundreds of openings across the state. So, there has to be a process they're starting to allude to that. We'll have the two openings as well as the Lieutenant coming up. So, these are positions that will be available. So, the testing process as they alluded to, these officers passed the exam and that takes a lot just to do that. So, that shows a level of commitment and I give them credit for wanting to do that. I'm proud to serve with all of them, that's my two cents. If you have any questions, I'll try to help you see what I see every day.

Mr. Goncalves: Okay, comments, questions?

Mr. Silva: Sorry, did I miss your recommendation?

Mr. Goncalves: Yes.

Chief Valadas: Sir, I won't give a recommendation. I usually don't. I try to state to you that what the little intangibles that each one of them has and I think I've already done that. As far as you know, this position and being someone that people gravitate to and follow, you have a candidate there who's a natural leader and you have another one who's an up and comer.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goncalves: Yes, Mr. DeBarge.

Mr. DeBarge: Let me say this about the three of them and I hope that everybody that's listening understands something about these three candidates. You have two that started here interning, dispatching, special police, full time police and now here for a sergeant and then you have another one, born and raised, father on the PD most of his professional career, family involved, uncles involved with special police. You have three outstanding candidates that have shown their, well for lack of a better word, their loyalty to the community by way of the

department. The questions asked tonight and the answers for starting with Jhon Wielblad, he has impressed me from the minute I met him as both a policeman and while interviewing him. Very well spoken, he is, listen I try to get out and do as much as I can as a Selectman and usually at the events that I'm at if there's a police tent, Ludlow police tent there, it's usually Jhon that's there with the group. The list of acumen that he has with the police department is not just a list on paper, which you can become certified in anything in the police department and not do that job, but we have candidates that take on responsibilities in the police department and do those above and beyond their original responsibility, which is to protect and serve. So, great answers by Jhon. Brandon Vigneault, again seeing him again and knowing him, the answers that he gave as were Jhon Wielblads honest, you can tell the integrity is there and what I like the most is that they think about the answers rather than just belting them out. I did like how Brandon Vigneault said well the easy answer is drugs when asked what the biggest problem in town because you're right it is the easy answer, but also getting around that answer is what I liked as well. I thought Derek Smolinski knocked that answer out of the park with children. I've never heard that answer as you said before, listen as an interviewer and as somebody who sat on the other side of that table in that uniform wondering what this board is thinking while I'm giving answers, that was a fantastic answer and the best part about it is it was 100% true. So, I think there's assets from all three of them but there has to be one. I think with all of the intangibles, with everything that you add into this again I'll use the law enforcement term of totality of circumstances with everything that I've seen, my vote for a permanent promotion for tonight will be for Brandon Vigneault. That's all I have.

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Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goncalves: Yes, Mr. Rosenblum.

Mr. Rosenblum: That's bold letters on my pad is the answer that Patrolman Smolinski had to what's the biggest problem in this town. The conversation that's always in our house is about how the kids over the last three years have been, I mean it's no fault of anybody's, but they've been damaged and I'm sure that you know, I have kids that are school age, one that's in college and one that's in seventh grade. I've seen it with them. I've seen what the last few years has done to them, and we read about it, we hear about it, the instances that have been going on 100% that answer was probably the best answer I've heard of anybody that's interviewed because it's always drugs and it's very true the easy answer can be drugs. It's not to say that those kids are not taking drugs either so SRO's you know, the intervention, the education, things of that nature just it was a great answer. When he said it, I was just like bang someone said it. With Acting Sergeant Wielblad, he's involved with everything like you said, you've got three people here that could very easily be the next Sergeant full time, not acting, but I would also agree too that Brandon Vigneault, he brings the thing he brings that I like is just that his climb through leadership and really, is it CINRET, is that how you say it?

Chief Valadas: I offered him a CINRET position and that's not easy to be offered to.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, knowing that a commitment to Ludlow in an instant like that to me says a lot.

Chief Valadas: Yes, turned it down.

Mr. Rosenblum: Turned it down. You know, detective bureau, Hampden County SRT, and now he's a team leader. He's overseeing, went from ten to fifteen to sixty people. I just always see and the biggest thing I noticed and now that we've seen these people coming through recurring and we see the good candidates, is that Acting Sergeant Vigneault in his last interview was honest and knew that he wasn't the one and he probably wouldn't be the one. He was honest

in this time in saying that I am the one and I like the fact that he's had so much leadership in the fact that I can see it in him. He seems like a great individual, someone that I would love to go out and have a beer with, in the same sense, but you can still see the determination in the leadership and that would be my choice. Thank you.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you Mr. Rosenblum. Mr. Gennette, Mr. Silva.

Mr. Gennette: Mr. Chairman. So, I wanted to point out with Derek Smolinski, his ten years FTO, nineteen years on the service, he's not short of experience on the job and justifiably sitting in the seat in front of us you know going into tonight because I know well I don't know but because he's been sitting here before, Jhon Wielblad and Mr. Vigneault, but I got to tell you, Wielblad is a very intelligent human being. I mean beyond the normal you know, he's hitting on all cylinders and then on top with Vigneault he just has that drive, he has the assertiveness, he has a presence. You sit here in front of him, and you can see he's a leader. So, you know I kind of look at Wielblad and I say you know he kind of reminds me of Erwin and I look at Vigneault and I kind of see Riccardi. You know what I mean and when I look at these guys, I can't see how we wouldn't put Brandon Vigneault in that leadership position. He sat here and he exuded it; I think the other gentlemen fit that mold, but they don't quite fit it as well as Vigneault does. So, my vote is for Vigneault. My second is for Wielblad and my third is for Smolinski if we decide to carry this past the vote for today.

Mr. Silva: They're all great. We've known them for a long time and I was probably the one that voted to hire them and I'm...like the Chief and I love when the department director, whatever, I mean they work, he works with them, he knows what they do and I love when they give recommendations because to me that's huge and I understand your position, it's difficult to do something like that when you like them all. So, it's very difficult and I'm in the same boat I mean, I like them all. They were just good. The one thing that I liked was both of like you said my top candidate, both of them would be chief and I really like that. I like to promote within, so you move on, and it was considerably quite a task, it is quite a task to hire a chief, but if we have somebody within that's wants to be chief, that's worked for it, I like that. So, I don't disagree I could put either one first or second. Mr. Wielblad or Brandon Vigneault, I mean I could do either one as well so.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you. This is a tough one. We're very fortunate to have these guys and I hope they hang in there and if there's another test that we get them back in. Mr. Wielblad definitely has shown how much he loves this business I guess, right, with a master's degree, he hasn't stopped and getting his EMT and everything else. Mr. Vigneault, he's just done it all and the idea that he's worked all three shifts, he's on that task force and they made him assistant commander, which is great for Sean Knox too. Did I pick that up, he's the commander?

Chief Valadas: He is.

Mr. Goncalves: It's great to have two guys from Ludlow. With everything they done and Derek, I mean, not you, L6 he's been around a long time. He's badge number six; I don't think he mentioned that. I mean Mr. Vigneault mentioned he was badge nine. We had a badge six in here too. It's kind of funny and I don't want to create a talking point beyond this, but if the three of them were doctors, you know Wielblad would be the heart surgeon, Smolinski would be the primary care physician and I think Vigneault is going to be the emergency room doctor. He's the go to for anything, whatever happens you know, he's the guy that you want driving behind you if you have a bad car accident. He can do a little bit of everything, and he's done it all well. So, I think at this point, if we had two positions, there's no questions it would be Vigneault and Wielblad, but in this particular case my tendency would vote with Mr. Vigneault.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to appoint Acting Sergeant Brandon Vigneault as the next Sergeant effective at 12:00 a.m. this evening, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Mr. Goncalves: Discussion, and I think in this particular case guys and I could be wrong, should we say something to the reasoning or is the reasoning because we are skipping over the number one choice,

Mr. DeBarge: We did in the...

Mr. Goncalves: it was and I'm aware of how the order was and I just think that the interview and the overall experience to give Mr. Vigneault the nod this time is sufficient.

Mr. Rosenblum: Now, we have in the past done like one, two afterwards, but it doesn't you said there's probably going to be another test.

Chief Valadas: Yes, so basically what we have to do now is I have to have an open budget position and I don't. If I had an open position, I could have Ms. Ribeiro call HRD to see if we could function on or go with the two-person, two candidate list, but since that's going to be months down the road, I can fully expect that,

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Mr. Goncalves: You don't think they'll be just may a continuation of the old list for now while they iron all that out?

Chief Valadas: they have allowed the old list to stay active, that was the same list that was involved in the litigation. What they did, which I don't think was right, was they didn't score the last exam, which was a travesty for people who spent money and spent hours studying and then they just said well here's your $100 back and we're not going to even tell you how you did. That would just be enough, it certainly befuddles these guys and they're all upset and that's statewide, but I'm telling you that there are Chief's clamoring, going you must come up with a process or we will move this to something else because we can't without these positions.

Mr. Goncalves: So, what's the movement and I know I was reading something about it when we had gotten that memo.

Chief Valadas: In the Superior Court decision, the Superior Court Judge said that basically the exam is skewed racially. So, there has to be a remedy.

Mr. Goncalves: Right, but how do we get around that? If they don't come up with a reason and they tell us that exam is not good and we get two openings, what do we do?

Chief Valadas: Well, there was a 20% T&E component, what I understand now there is going to be some type of objective assessment to training, but it's going to be, they're going to look at each candidate and go okay you're going to be given so much for your level of experience and what you bring to the table. So, without it being just here, read these eight textbooks and then take this exam. They're going to go past that. The problem is going to be coming up with the mechanism. So, for the city of Boston, for the city of Worcester,

Mr. Goncalves: If they take that long and the unions get involved and stuff starts happening.

Mr. DeBarge: The remedy is simple; you leave civil service.

Mr. Silva: Where are we with that? I thought we like had discussions that possibly,

Mr. DeBarge: That's getting into another thing, but that's how you remedy that, you leave civil service.

Chief Valadas: That's state law too. Thank you, gentlemen, for your time.

Mr. DeBarge: Thank you Chief.

Mr. Gennette: Thanks Chief.

7:00 p.m. - Westover Golf Commission – indirect costs from FY08-FY23

Moved by Mr. McBride to open the Westover Golf Commission meeting at 7:25 p.m.

Mr. McBride wanted to give a quick update on the golf course. They closed out the first half of the season from July 1 to December 6, they are at $545,380.00. This is an 8% increase over last year. It is about a $40,000 increase of last year's numbers. They're hoping to continue to see that rate of increase in the upcoming season. At their next meeting, they will be discussing a rate increase. They should continue to see a deposit into the enterprise fund, which was about $140 or $150,000 this year.

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Mr. Goncalves asked with the weather the way it's been, what the Superintendent's biggest concern is with the course?

Mr. Linton explained that there hasn't been any ice or snow and ice is usually the issue. Right now, the biggest concern is crown hydration. On Friday it's going to be 58 degrees and what can happen is the turf can break dormancy and it sucks in the moisture and then if there is a cold snap following that, it can freeze and rupture the cells in the plant, which can cause desiccation to the turf. Unfortunately, there's not much that you can do to prevent it. Snow usually insulates everything, but ice is a concern.

Mr. McBride explained that they would love to see an early spring, in order to get those $140,000 deposits, it's essential they are open from early March until after Thanksgiving and into December.

Mr. Silva stated that he has been golfing all season and Cedar Knob is always open and it's in great shape. He would like to know why they can do it, but Westover and others cannot.

Mr. McBride explained that they have some restrictions as far as Westover's well permit. It's a seasonal well permit and they have to shut down for eight weeks out of the year. They try to

shut down during January and February. They also close down the building and winterize it and it saves a ton of money. Typically, propane will cost them $3,500-$4,000 per month in the winter and they won't make that kind of money back in the winter months.

Mr. Rosenblum explained that Cedar Knob is a private golf course. The facility he works for just received a bill for $2,900 for propane and they're closed. The costs for everything used to run the facility are through the roof right now.

Mr. McBride stated that he has been on this board for over 23 years in some capacity and he has asked several Town Administrators and Town Accountants to explain to him how these indirect costs are calculated, what formula they are using, and no one has ever been able to give him that. The town does not have a policy right now on how they determine indirect costs and they're supposed to. During the first phase of this budget, the Town Accountant told the Golf Commission that they were to expect that the indirect costs would be $50,000 this year

and that's a 25% increase. We're told every year that the only thing going up is the 1 ½% personnel and everything's level funded. They would tend to think from that point of view that the indirect costs would only go up 1 ½%, but they go up 25%. There's no rationale behind it. There needs to be a policy in place so that future board have an idea of what these costs are and how much they're going to go up and they can budget when setting costs. Some of the costs look a little high to him. He also is questioning the costs for shared employees such as Accounting and the Treasurer. Once a policy is set, that will provide each department with an expectation of where they need to be. The additional money would also help with either equipment that is needed or additional staffing for the golf course.

Mr. Silva stated that several years ago enterprises did not have these costs. Then DLS came in and said these enterprises are going to have to pay for indirect costs. In order to do this the town has to come up with how long it takes for the different departments to work on this stuff and what costs are attributed to that. This has to be done every year.

Mr. McBride stated that he understands that, but it is very vague on how the town determines what the indirect costs are and how they determine what the policies are.

Mr. Linton stated that the health insurance, life insurance, FICA and pension are all coming out of the operating budget now.

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Mr. Gennette agrees there should be a policy in place, however, a lot of these are variable expenses. He was not a proponent of the golf course initially, but he is very impressed with how far they've come and turned things around.

Mr. Goncalves stated that this is something they will have to review another night.

Mr. McBride understands that they will not be able to get an answer tonight but thinks there is enough time between now and Town Meeting to go over this and come up with a policy that makes sense.

Mr. Lupa asked about the town possibly getting a Grants Writer on a contractual basis, maybe a one-year contract.

Mr. Goncalves stated that a facilities manager was hired, and the golf course should utilize him accordingly. He also stated that they are always looking for grants and Pioneer Valley Planning is always out there looking for the town as well.

Mr. Gennette also stated that there was an ad for a procurement officer/grant writer, and they were unable to find a grant writer. However, the procurement officer has some grant writing ability, and you can reach out to her or Marc if there is something they are interested in pursuing.

Mr. Rosenblum told Mr. McBride to look into DECD, department of economic and community development as well. He just received one in Hartford for $3 million for a cart path project. Anything to do with open space.

Moved by Mr. McBride to adjourn the Westover Golf Commission meeting at 7:50 p.m. All in favor.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

LHS Sports Complex Project: Mott MacDonald is working with the Conservation Commission and MassDEP on a mitigation plan. Essentially, since some of the work will be completed within 200 feet of a riverfront area, we need to find other areas along the same riverfront to replicate riverfront conditions that will be displaced or disturbed by the sport's complex construction. Mott MacDonald has a plan that they will be presenting to ConCom for their review and approval. In terms of the project schedule, we are still on track for substantial by the end of this year.

- Permitting Phase: October 2022 – March 2023
- Final Bid Documents: March 2023
- Bid Phase: April – May 2023
- Bid Award: June 2023
- Construction (6 months): July – Dec. 2023

Mass Municipal Association (MMA) Annual Conference: I attended the annual MMA Conference in Boston on January 20-21. It's a great event for networking and generating new ideas that might work here in Ludlow. Most of our consultants and vendors were there, including our attorneys, accounting consultants, Munis reps, Collins Center and others. One potential project that we may want to look at in the coming year is evaluating the value of buying the town's streetlights from Eversource. The upfront cost is significant but would be offset by energy and maintenance fee-cost savings.

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Economic Development Planning Kickoff: We are meeting with consultants from the Collins Center and Barrett Planning Group tomorrow morning to discuss goals for the town's economic development plan, which is being funded by the state's Community Compact grant program. One main goal for this process is to identify projects or programs that can complement the upcoming developments at Ludlow Mills.

Accounting Department Update: We have hired Clifton Larsen & Allen (CLA) on a part-time basis to provide support to the Assistant Town Accountant and Admin Assistant. Early impressions are positive. We are also close to finalizing a contract with a new Town Accountant.

Health Insurance Increase: At the MMA Conference, MIIA revealed that the average increase in medical insurance costs would be 5.86% across its member towns. Since we have a 3% increase budgeted for FY24 that was not welcome news but could have been worse. Fortunately, though, we received notification today that, because our loss runs are below average, our medical insurance was increasing by 3.58%. In addition, we have an Insurance Advisory Committee meeting next week to vote on whether to add dental and vision to our MIIA insurance portfolio. If so, we will receive a .5% discount on that 3.58% rate.

Mr. Goncalves asked if the dental and vision would be 100% employee paid.

Mr. Strange explained that the vision is 100% employee paid and the dental has a higher and lower tier through BC/BS, and he believes that is also 100% employee paid.

Ribbon Cutting Friday @ 10:30AM: The ERC5 is hosting a ribbon cutting on Friday at 10:30 for *Outside the Box Gift Shop*, which is located at 314 Sewall Street.

Assessors Meeting: At the tax classification hearing there was discussion about the tardiness from our Assessing Consultant over the past few years. The contract between the Consultant and the Town was sent to Town Counsel and they determined that the contract was unenforceable for two reasons. One, the services were not properly procured. Two was the Board of Assessors signed the contract and they do not have independent authority to bind the town through a contract. They are currently working on an RFP and are hoping to get other competitive bids from other consultants. Some of the work that the consultants were doing is now going to be brought in house for the Assessing Department to do. This will save the town some money as well.

CORRESPONDENCE:

8. Manuel D. Silva and Joao Silva Petition for a Zone Change from Residential B to Industrial A located on 0 Russell Street.

   Moved by Mr. DeBarge to file, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 4-0-1. One Abstention.

9. Eversource informing the Board of Vegetation Work to be performed on Alden Street.

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

10. Bernard (Butch) Regnier informing the Board of his resignation from the 250th Semi-Quincentennial Celebration Committee effective immediately.

    Moved by Mr. DeBarge to accept the resignation of Butch Regnier from the 250th, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

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11. James R. Carvalho – Casa Pizzeria, LLC, dba as Casa Pizzeria Application for an All Alcoholic Beverage License. Board to Schedule a Public Hearing.

    Moved by Mr. Silva to schedule a public hearing on March 7, 2023, for the Application of James R. Carvalho for Casa Pizzeria at 325 East Street, seconded by Mr. DeBarge. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

12. FY21 Melanson management letter with recommendations for town audit.

    Moved by Mr. Gennette to table the Melanson report, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

UNFINISHED BUINESS

Moved by Mr. DeBarge to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of January 9, 2023, with all members present, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge to approve and sign Executive Session Minutes of December 20, 2022, with all members present, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

Board to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Firefighter as a result of an incident that occurred on January 21, 2023.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Firefighter as a result of an incident that occurred on January 21, 2023, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to request that the Division of Local Services create a financial forecast for the Town.

Mr. Strange explained that he recently did a webinar with people from the state and one of services that this division provides and one of them is creating a financial forecast.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum that we request the Division of Local Service to create a financial forecast for the Town, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to approve and sign ten copies for the call of the election for the March 27, 2023, Town Election.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge to approve and sign ten copies for the call of the election for the March 27, 2023, Town Election, seconded by Mr. Silva. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to sign lease for Veterans Center.

Mr. Silva asked where the money is coming from for the Veterans lease?

Mr. DeBarge stated that it went to Town Meeting to increase the Veterans budget.

Mr. Strange explained that the current lease is for three years and then at the next Town Meeting they are going to request that it be increased to ten years in order to lower the cost. The rent is locked in for five years, but the lease is actually for three years.

Mr. DeBarge stated that several buildings were looked at but this one agreed to design the building as the Veterans Services wanted it.

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Mr. Strange also pointed out that moving the Veterans Services out of Town Hall will also help with office space because currently they are utilizing one of the hearing rooms as the food pantry and the Animal Control Officer is utilizing the other hearing room, which can be a problem. Now the Animal Control Officer will move into the Veterans Services office and that will free up those two hearing rooms for other things.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge to sign the least for the Veterans Center, seconded by Mr. Rosenblum. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to sign municipal aggregation consulting agreement with MassPowerChoice.

Mr. Gennette explained this was approved at Town Meeting also and there is no cost to the Town.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum to approve and sign the municipal aggregation consulting agreement with MassPowerChoice, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to appoint Leslie Ward Building Commissioner to the Bylaw Committee and the Safety Committee.

Moved by Mr. DeBarge to appoint Leslie Ward Building Commissioner to the Bylaw Committee and the Safety Committee, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Police Officer as a result of an incident that occurred on January 24, 2023.

Moved by Mr. Gennette to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Police Officer as a result of an incident that occurred on January 24, 2023, seconded by Mr. DeBarge. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Board to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Firefighter as a result of an incident that occurred on February 1, 2023.

Moved by Mr. Gennette to approve a request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a Firefighter as a result of an incident that occurred on February 1, 2023, seconded by Mr. DeBarge. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

BOARD UPDATES/MISC.

Mr. Gennette explained that the aggregate electric is an opportunity for people to save on their electric bills. He understands that a lot of residents are getting hit pretty hard with those bills. This will take a while to go through, but he plans on having some public meetings about it.

Mr. Rosenblum also stated that he just locked in his rate with a supplier for .1597 cents and the going rate is about .22 cents. He believes we have at least two more years of this due to the current administration. Go to energyswitchma.gov and that's to shop for the electric suppliers. Also, be sure that you check the contracts to be sure it's free cancelation if necessary.

Mr. Silva hates the way everything is going in this world with going online to do everything. The elderly have a very difficult time with this. He also asked about interviews and whether or not some of the boards could review them in advance and make suggestions.

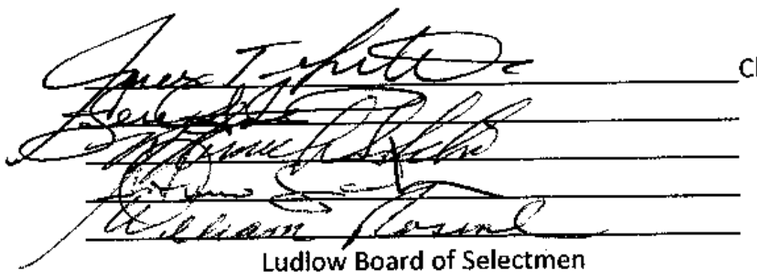
Mr. Goncalves thanked the three officers that came in for interview and thanked them for their dedication to the town. The town is very lucky that we have these types of officers. He congratulated the Ludlow High School Wrestling because they won their division tonight.

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CLOSING COMMENTS

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, to adjourn this meeting at 8:44 p.m., not return to open session, and to enter into Executive Session for the purposes of discussing strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation, seconded by Mr. Gennette. Vote 5-0. All in favor.

Mr. Rosenblum – yes, Mr. Gennette - yes, Mr. DeBarge – yes, Mr. Silva – yes, Mr. Goncalves – yes.



Chairman

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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