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

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

Members Absent: James Gennette

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

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VISITATIONS

5:30 p.m. – Tax Classification Hearing

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to open the tax classification hearing at 5:30 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. Rosa: 2024 is an interim year update. All the work has been completed and approved by the Department of Revenue. Last Friday it was finally approved. Thanks to everyone who pulled it together last minute. Marc was kind of involved in that as well so thank you. FY2024 values are as of January 1, 2023, and are based on sales between January 1, 2021-December 31, 2022. Our current assessment level is approximately 95%. The DOR allows assessment levels between 90-110%. Values have increased by approximately 9-14%. The total valuation of the town increased by 13.5%. New growth increased by approximately 80% from $527,172 last year to $946,700 for FY2024. Much of that increase was attributed to the industrial class where 2 new solar installations added 19.1 million dollars to the town's value. The minimum residential factor is 81.3578. The tax levy has increased by $2,606,674, which is a 5.3% increase from FY2023, which was $49,325,464 to $51,928,939 for FY2024 which was the maximum allowable limit. The tax rate at 100% will be $18.09 compared to last year's $19.51, which is a decrease of $1.42, or 7.3%. Under the current classification rate of 100%, the average single family tax bill will increase by $263, which is a 4.9% increase from $5,363 last year to $5,626 this year. The average commercial tax bill will increase by $1,029, which is a 9.1% increase from $11,386 last year to $12,415 this year. Any attempt to shift more of a tax burden from the residential to the commercial industrial classes would result in a significant increase in those taxes, since this class comprises only 20.2% of the total value of the town. The impact of the further shift is illustrated on the back of that table you should all have, tables 2 & 3. Due to the disproportionate and substantial increases by imposing a split tax rate, the Assessor's office is recommending that we keep the classification rate at 100%.

Mr. Goncalves: Last year's growth of $527 to this year's $946 is about $419,000 more. I see the 19 million came on with the 2 solars. At the $18 rate it's about $350,000. Is there anything else significant that you're aware of in town that came in?

Mr. Rosa: Maria would probably know more about that than I would. Typically, new construction is the main driver. I think this fiscal year was those 2 big solar plants.

Mr. Goncalves: Did anything big come on at the mills?

Ms. Fernandes: Not yet. They're still in construction.

Mr. Goncalves: That's good. That number is probably a little bit low so we're not going to see that year after year.

Mr. Rosa: I've noticed that if you drive through they're doing a lot of construction. I think next fiscal year we should start picking up a lot of that.

Ms. Fernandes: The sales.

Mr. Goncalves: I know there's a building directly behind the senior center that there's a 2-million-dollar renovation going on that just started. A food distributor.

Mr. Rosa: Obviously that helps the residential end of keeping the tax rate low.

Mr. Silva: I don't have questions. I'm worried at what we're doing. We are leaving $20 in excess levy capacity. I just did one in Southbridge and we're leaving 1.4 million dollars in excess levy. Each and every year we're taxing to the brink. I've been speaking about it for years. We just keep taxing our residents day in and day out an awful lot of money. We overlook what's happening. It's another $263 in taxes the average. The average is just a moderate home. The average these days the way the sales are, it's a ranch style home, 5 rooms, and its amazing to me how we just keep doing it year in and year out. It's going to get to a breaking point. We need to somehow figure out what we can do and start tightening our belts. As we're talking, we've got growth excess, $900,000 in growth to help alleviate the taxes; however, it really didn't because we are taxing to the full levy. Did it help? No. I do have questions but since our Assessor is not here, he's more affluent on what went on.

Mr. Rosa: Do you have an idea as far as how do we attack that? There's 2 solutions. We either cut back on spending or split the tax rate. Those are the only 2 solutions I see.

Mr. Silva: Splitting the tax rate is not going to help. It's going to help the residents but it's not going to help commercial property. I've never been a fan of robbing Peter to pay Paul. When we voted for proposition 2 ½, at the time I think that was one of the votes that I actually got to vote in, we voted for equalized valuations, suddenly legislations has come up and let's see if we can pull from this, you can do this and that. To me, it's very unfair.

Mr. Rosa: I was asking because I didn't know where you stood on that. I think it's unfair too. For those of you who aren't sure, at the back of the table you can see the disproportionate amount. If you were to shift some of that burden to the industrial class, how much of a difference that is. You're really whacking the commercial/industrial side of things. If it got to the point and I know I can go to Chicopee or another town to open my business because they have a more favorable tax rate then certainly I would do that. I agree. I think the fairest way to do it is to keep it a single tax rate. You're paying taxes on what your assessment is. If your business is worth more money then your business is worth more money. You can sell it for more money. It's the best way to do it.

Mr. Goncalves: 70-80% of our business owners live in town so they're going to get hit either way. For everybody listening, that's about a 2.6 million dollar increase in the budget. The school department has asked us for 2 ½ million increase over last year. We're not talking about contractual obligations with employment, insurance benefits are going up. Our hands are a little bit tied on the let's not spend it because everybody is coming at us from all directions.

Mr. Rosa: Even if there was no new government development, that's always going to go up. People's salaries, health insurance is always going to go up. I don't ever see it going down. It's always going to go up, it's just a matter of how much it's going to go up.

Mr. DeBarge: Contracts, salaries, services go up and I'd say this board has been pretty progressive in trying to get salaries up to the level they need to be and for a lot of departments and a lot of our employees I think we've done a bad job in Ludlow and its history of keeping paid positions up to a level that are equal to what this community is. We have worked diligently trying to do that because you need to pay the good people that want to be here. That is always a factor in it. I was talking off camera with Marc about valuations of the homes and that's not my forte. I always defer to Mr. Silva or Joe on that, but you would think with the interest rates going up the valuations of the homes would go down but nothing has gone down. It seems valuations of homes continue to go up. I don't know how the property taxes levels itself off.

Mr. Goncalves: It has no choice. We've got to collect X amount of dollars then divvy it up amongst everyone in town. If the value comes down the rate is going to go up significantly. We've got to get to that 80 million.

Ms. Forker: My name is Theresa Forker, I live at 376 Woodland Circle. How many bonds are coming forth this year with the high school, middle school, and numerous other buildings, including the Boys and Girls Club? I think that is where we run into a lot of trouble in this town. We pull too many bonds, give away too much stuff. The Unity Club we lease to the United Way for $1/year. We pay for the electricity, the building, they pay no property taxes, etc.

Mr. Goncalves: You're talking about Randall Boys and Girls Club?

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Ms. Forker: Yes. We've become a dumping ground for utilities. We have the gas company, electric company. We have more stuff in this town that we get no income from. I know we get some stipend from them initially but other than that they're not paying their taxes. They're utilizing property, taking property. I work with the elderly. The people in this town are hurting. Numerous of you up here are over 65 years old. They cannot keep getting hit on a fixed income. I know you give a stipend for people that like to work off of their property taxes, but this is getting out of hand. There has to be some fiscal responsibility from each one of you that is going to help the people and taxpayers of this town. We have an assessor and realtor, I'm not sure what everyone else does. We have a lot of stuff going on. People that have some really good business sense. You need to come up with some type of creative program to help it ease the tax burden on people of this town. Food, health insurance, everything is going up but some places it's got to stop. I'm asking you guys to please stop this. Please look at the numbers and give some type of fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers.

Mr. Montagna: Alex Montagna. I live at 33 Higher Street. Owning a business is a privilege. Most citizens in this town do not own a business so they're not worried about that. A moderate split rate tax rate would benefit the majority of the taxpayers in this town. I'm not suggesting it be enough to put small businesses out of business.

Mr. Robar: Mr. Robar, 31 Edgewood Road. Hopefully you saw my email. I sent it late today to all the select board members. I think that sums it up. My mother's one prescription went up 104%. If you guys would let me bring in one of the top finance people and a CPA, would you let me audit the books? Because I'll find the money. You guys just have to stop. This is government speak, this is stuff I hear at the school committee. It's all nonsense. We have bills in the town but your number 1 responsibility is what Mr. Silva said. I'll be working on his re-election campaign. That guy has sense. It has to stop. My mother gets 1 little social security check. No pension from my Dad. Once he died that was the end of that. She can't afford to continue to live in Ludlow. She's been here since 1960. She's not the only one. I'm here for many people. It has to stop. Government spending is out of control. You're the last line of defense. You can't control the Federal or State government. We are in a state that has a state income tax, 6 ¼ % sales tax, some of the highest gas taxes in the nation. Unfortunately, S-H-I-T flows downhill and you guys are in the valley. It's a tough job to be a selectman in this town. Your number 1 job is to say to all the departments that the taxpayer comes first. That's what your job should be in my opinion. You don't have an easy job. She can't afford a $237 increase in her real estate taxes. She doesn't live on Cislak Drive. She doesn't live in a 2-income family with 1 or 2 children. The town will self-destruct if we don't come to a point and say that's it. I understand. I worked in government for 15 years. 80% of it is salaries and benefits. It may or may not be true, it's probably somewhere in that ballpark. If people don't like it, it's about the residents and taxpayers. We might not be able to build the pickleball courts. The point is we don't have extra money. We don't have money. We have to take care of our people. Do you want to go knock on doors with me and listen to the people who are barely affording to live right now in the town of Ludlow. That's the reality. You just said the tax rate is going down to $18.09 from $19 something but her tax bill is going up. Why are we assessing her house more? It's worth less. It's like a car. They go down in value. The house needs repairs. How can you tell me the house is worth more? She's going to get taxed more? Why? Where's the Assessor?

Mr. Rosa: Starting in January, January 1st if you think your mom is being over assessed, file an abatement. That's the best way to do it. We can take a look at it. I'll get involved because I have valuation experience. If she deserves an abatement I'll make sure she gets an abatement.

Mr. Robar: How often is the assessment? Every year is the assessment going up on the values of our homes?

Mr. Rosa: The last 2 years, yes.

Mr. Goncalves: If it doesn't go up in value then the rate is going to have to go up. We've got to raise that money.

Mr. Robar: When you say you have to raise the 80 million, you have to run the town. What was the 19 million you mentioned? Was that money we were taking in?

Mr. Rosa: That's assessed value. We're taxing them on 19 million.

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Mr. Goncalves: Which gave us about $400,000.

Mr. Robar: I'm no town official. People come to me and say here's what I don't understand. I said I don't either so I'll ask. We're building all these big houses. Those have high real estate taxes. They don't have a lot of children so not a ton of services. So how come my bill, in an average little ranch like my mother, what's the answer to them. I'm not being a wise guy. We've got a lot of building of new houses. They're worth some good money. They must pay some substantial taxes. So that's more taxes but we still have to increase everybody else's. What do you say when somebody says that to you?

Mr. Goncalves: If one of those houses has 1 child they're breaking even. It's about $17,000 to educate somebody in Ludlow and they're paying $15,000-$17,000 for taxes for a new construction off of Parker Lane.

Mr. Robar: We've got some tough sledding ahead. What do you do with these people? We have a lot of them in town. I'm not saying it's easy. Stuff flows downhill and at the municipal level we're in the valley. We can't control federal and state taxes but we're in a very high tax state. We pay a lot of extra fees. When you get to the town level you have to be so fiscally conservative or what are we going to do with these people. Should she be forced to move out of town.

Mr. DeBarge: I hope not.

Mr. Silva: We also have been working with our state legislators. We've discussed this issue with them to see if there's anything they can bring down to us. We all heard the state was surplus this, surplus that. We've discussed it with representatives to see if we can come up with something that will give us some influx of money from the state and bring it down to our level. I see it myself. I'm going up a lot more than $263. That's each year. I'm retired and still working somewhere to keep going. I'm with you. Whatever it is we can do I'm certainly on board to...my colleagues know that. I've always mentioned that. I've tried to curtail a few things but it's difficult. I work in this. I work in different communities and everybody's got the same problem. It's an answer that nobody has really got other than start cutting.

Mr. Robar: That's what government has to do. Unfortunately, at your level you're at the bottom. That's not for this meeting but it can't continue at the local, state, and federal level.

Mr. Rosenblum: You're absolutely right. We're in a tough situation right now. In the same sense, we're in a catch 22. A lot of people are. We sit here and we talk about a school department that continuously wants 3%. That's compounded. They get 3% this year you compound 3% on top of the 3% we gave them. The same thing with all the salaries we have in town also. Many of the unions are getting 2-3% every year. That's something we have to look at too. Do we go harder on the negotiations with them? To Mr. DeBarge's point, we're trying to get a lot of our departments, because even town hall a lot of the unions even LATOSS, they've been woefully underpaid for years and people are asking us we need to pay our people otherwise we're going to lose these people. The same thing goes with the schools. Last year they wanted 9.8%. They got 4.73 and they're saying they lost a lot of positions, which they didn't, they repurposed them. They won't tell you that. We're at a position where if we go ahead and cut then everyone looks at us and says you're killing the people in the town. The people that work and live here. We get it. Mr. Silva's right. If there's a way we can do it. I've said it before. We've done some spending with positions in town. New positions. I've said this coming year in general we can't build out any new positions. We can't do anything like that. We have to keep that at a flat rate right now. The discussion before was pickleball courts. We have over here now that Vet's Park is gone everybody is saying let's go ahead and build it. Now we've got to find the money for it. My whole idea is that goes to Conservation then it comes back to the town. We've talked about it. I love the idea of soccer fields, baseball fields, pickleball, even putting a Rec Department right there. Bathrooms and things like that. It's a ton of money. We'd love to do it but we understand that maybe we can't. Even repurposing the tennis courts at Whitney Park. That was like $50,000. We want to clean up Whitney Park.

Mr. Goncalves: We only raise 50-51 million from taxes. There's another 30 million coming in from state aid and enterprise funds, etc. We're not even close to raising all the money we need to run the town. We are getting a tremendous amount of outside money. That growth situation. We've talked about it with planning and we'd love for them to concentrate on rezoning and repurposing

some property. Maybe we could do a couple more over 55 condominium projects. The proof is in the pudding where something like Paradise Creek on Miller and East it's about $750,000 of taxes without a single kid in school. Across the street from Haviland Pond on Ideal there's about 50 units paying about $12-$14,000 and from my understanding there's 1 kid school age. I'm not saying build more hotels but that hotel pays total revenue between room tax and property tax about $200,000/year in taxes. Those are great. Everybody hates the solar now. They're going up all over the place. That's over $400,000 this year in additional revenue. Those are great ones coming in. They help quite a bit because we can't escape a ton of it unfortunately.

Ms. Forker: How close are we getting to 2 ½?

Ms. Goncalves: To the limit every time. That's what Manny just said. We have $20 left in levy.

Ms. Forker: Anything you guys are going to be asking for you're going to have to go to town meeting with and hopefully have the right budget and numbers for town meeting members that you didn't have last year and go forth and you're going to have to get an approval. You do know that most people in this town are not going to vote for that.

Mr. DeBarge: We've never. We know the personality of our precinct members.

Mr. Rosenblum: We sat there and we debated a $25,000 lot or something to that effect for 25 minutes but we blew through an 80-million-dollar budget in 10 minutes and no one said boo.

Mr. Silva: We haven't discussed the small commercial exemptions or the residential exemptions. In a nutshell, do you want to discuss or explain the small commercial exemptions?

Mr. Rosa: I haven't even looked at it to be honest with you.

Mr. Silva: There's 3 options we have before us. One we just went over extensively. Two is the small commercial exemption whereby we could actually give small commercial properties a 10% exemption if they have under 10 employees. That comes from the labor state offices. You have to qualify and give them an exemption. The value gets prorated and switched to the ones that do not get this exemption. All it is is a shift within the commercial. It does nothing for the residential, by the way, it just shifts the monies in the commercial properties themselves. This would benefit the smaller commercial, usually mom and pops. They would benefit a little bit from that; whereby the larger commercial would pay for that. That's another option we have. There's advantages and disadvantages. The 3rd option we have is a residential exemption. In a residential exemption the state has increased that exemption to allow up to 35% of shifting. That will shift taxes only in the residential. The residential lower end properties will get a tax reduction and as you get up to the higher end bracket, usually where your average is it will increase so that the higher end will pay for those that get the break on it. It's another mechanism that legislators, rather than giving seniors a nice exemption, which they do allow us to give an exemption of $750, rather than doing it on their own they're just making other residents pay for some other residents. They come up with these things to appease some people but it's not the right way. They should really come up with an elderly exemption that benefits the elderly because it's crazy.

Mr. Rosa: If they were to do some kind of exemption it should be by age, because if you shift now the people that are in the middle higher end are paying a disproportionate amount to the people that are on the lower end and vice versa. Same thing on the commercial. A small business is now going to get a tax break and the medium and large business is going to pay a higher rate. The disproportionate is not a fair way to do it. I think historically that's why we haven't done that.

Mr. Silva: Most communities do not do those. Some do shift and you get to the Boston areas and they do shift some of the residentials and they also have split tax rates but they also have such a big influx of commercial properties that by shifting its only a small amount that they actually burden the commercial with. When you have such a disparity and just a few people paying for a lot it doesn't work.

Mr. Rosa: It sounds like to me you're against it as well.

Mr. Silva: Unfortunately, until we get up into the commercial properties 30% of the Town that would be an OK thing to do. At this time with such a low commercial base it's not advisable.

There's a lot of disadvantages to it. It doesn't work in our situation. As much as what I've been saying about giving residents some break this way doesn't benefit them.

Mr. Rosa: These are all basically approved by the state as far as what we can do. Can the town do something without the state's approval or does it have to be approved by the state?

Mr. Silva: You can request to get special legislation from the Department of Revenue to do something and see if you can get it passed.

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Mr. Rosa: What I'm getting at is potentially saying someone gets to a certain age you want to give them a bigger break.

Mr. Silva: The only thing you can do is look at the limits the state brings forth and set limits each and every year. 41C and 41C ½ which allows you to increase your exemption you give out by that amount. 49 ½ I believe you can do the regular exemption plus COLA. Whatever the COLA is you can add that exemption as well. Again, that has to be adopted at times and that's what we have town meeting for.

Mr. Rosa: That's something we could potentially look into.

Mr. Silva: Look into all the exemptions and see what their maxes are. They change their maxes sometimes to the age and as you know the income level. Some of those exemptions, if you were to know the limits, it's ludacris. They're so low. When I was doing them 3 years ago some people were making $12,000/year.

Mr. Rosa: That's below poverty.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to not adopt any residential exemptions. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Silva to not adopt the 10% small business exemption. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Silva to keep the minimal residential factor at one, which will value everyone at the same rate. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. Silva: Tax rate, by the way, those of you that are going with the tax rate of $18.09, it may not be the $18.09. The Department of Revenue has to look at all these numbers. We have to submit all kinds of forms to them. They look at everything, all the enterprise funds, everything. If they find anything that's not kosher they bring it back and we have to adjust values. The rate could change. Many times, it does. It could go down; it could go up a little. That is not approved. Our values are approved and the tax rate recap is not approved. You have to sign on the dotted line. In speaking with Joe, our Assessor, he says the accounting numbers are not all finalized.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the tax classification hearing at 6:08 p.m. **Mr. Rosenblum second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

6:00 p.m. – Matt Fuller, Technician Eversource – Public Hearing petition for two (2) utility poles on Lyon Street.

Mr. Ferreira: Matt couldn't be here. I'm Jason Ferreira. Eversource has requested permission to install two 40' utility poles to be numbered 129/55 and 129/56 with anchoring along Lyon Street extending facilities from our last existing pole, which is 129/54 to the Granby/Ludlow town border. The poles will be on the westerly side of the road approximately 20' from the road center line. Pole 129/55 will be approximately 200' northwest of pole 129/54 and pole 129/56 to be approximately 150' north of pole 129/55.

Mr. Cardona: Jamie Cardona, 1384 Lyon Street.

Mr. Silva: We do have a lot of complaints coming forth with these poles and moving and fixing. I'm sure you've heard them. Some residents even come in displeased with the location and how

they're doing it. Is the power company looking at this and making sure it is far enough from their driveway and their visual?

Mr. Ferreira: These poles will be owned by us fully. Most of the poles in your town are owned by Verizon. We don't get to pick and choose where they go. When we do choose a new pole line we do try to stay on property borders. I wouldn't want to pull in front of my house. Off to the side. Away from a driveway or mailbox. We try to do that whenever we can. We have span lengths we have to meet. Guide requirements to keep the pole safe.

Mr. Silva: Do you notify that resident you're going to be putting up a pole there if they have any issues?

Mr. Ferreira: Normally just this way. If we were adding poles it's normally for somebody there.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to start the Eversource hearing for the petition for 2 poles near 1396 Lyon Street at 6:12 p.m. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Mr. DeBarge: We had some issues with a family that had a bad situation with some invasive poles and a box that was attached to a pole that was right next to a mailbox.

Mr. Ferreira: A recloser that was put up.

Mr. DeBarge: We're concerned about that.

Mr. Cardona: We just finished building a new home and we're needing telephone service, cable and internet and until those poles go up...

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Mr. Goncalves: So, you're in favor. Are there any other houses around you?

Mr. Cardona: There's a total of 5 brand new houses being built in that section.

Mr. Ferreira: Normally these would be petitioned through Verizon but because their facilities aren't on them we're trying to move this process forward.

Mr. Goncalves: Normally I would have requested to go out there and take a look in lieu of everything that's happened but if the abutters are OK with this we're not going to hold them up any further.

Mr. Ferreira: They are staked and they have been for a while.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve pole #'s 129/55 & 129/56 near 1396 Lyon Street. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to close the pole hearing at 6:15 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

CORRESPONDENCE

159. Margaret (Petty) Bernard requesting the Board appoint her to the Ludlow Cultural Council.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve Peggy Bernard to be a member of the Ludlow Cultural Council. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

160. Lieutenant Michael N. Brennan, Ludlow Police Department, seeing approval from the Board to hold the Annual Sgt. Joshua D. Desforges Walk/Run Challenge on Saturday April 27, 2024, and to use any Town owned parking lots, facilities and roadways as needed.

Mr. Silva: This is an annual event and it's well run. No issues.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to approve item 160 as read. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

161. Nick Morin, Iron Duke Brewing requesting to change their hours on Sundays to open at 10:00 a.m. in order to serve brunch.

Mr. Rosenblum: Marc, there's no issue with that is there?

Mr. Strange: No.

Mr. Silva: Our licenses on Sunday for alcohol is still 12:00?

Mr. Strange: No. 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Silva: I remember it was an issue all the time. 12:00 was kind of late.

Mr. Goncalves: They used to run with the blue laws.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve Iron Duke's request to open at 10:00 a.m. on Sundays in order to serve alcohol and brunch. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

UNFINISHED BUISNESS

Board to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of November 7, 2023.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of November 7, 2023, with all members present. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of November 21, 2023.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign Selectmen Meeting Minutes of November 21, 2023. Absent, Derek DeBarge. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

NEW BUSINESS

Board to discuss and possibly vote to authorize $2,550 from the Building Infrastructure fund to get the Board of Selectmen conference room and Board of Selectmen's office painted.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve $2,550 from the Building Infrastructure fund for the purpose of painting the Selectmen's conference room and office. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

Board to discuss options for 63 Chestnut and 54 Winsor Street buildings.

Mr. Strange: To refresh everyone's memory, 63 Chestnut and 54 Winsor Street buildings were previously owned by the school department. They came into the town's control last year and we've been trying to figure out a reuse for those 2 buildings. Right now, they're vacant. We met with Ludlow Housing Authority multiple times about potentially packaging those 2 buildings with their building and trying to find a buyer or developer that would refurbish those 2 buildings along with the Housing Authority's buildings and we couldn't get that done. We then asked WestMass to come through and do a tour of the buildings and give us an idea what they thought was the best use for it. And also, to see if they're interested in purchasing the buildings themselves. They were also not interested. Both of the buildings are old. There's some speculation that some of the tiles might contain asbestos and there's no heating source to those 2 buildings right now. There are challenges. We wanted to come to the Board and see what your favored course of action is. I have a few ideas that I'll throw out there. We're paying to insure those buildings and there's no heating source. We drained the buildings of all the water so we're hoping it will be ok this winter, but the more winters we go through the more the buildings are going to deteriorate. We could do an RFP for a specific use, a RFP for residential use, a RFP for office space, a mixed-use RFP, a RFP for a collaborate work space so people that work from home or are solo-practitioners but want to have a working environment where they can do some networking. That's a new use that presented itself over the past few years. We could use it as storage space for the town. We could look at potentially moving town operations there or we could demolish them. Those are a few ideas I had but at this point we're really looking for some direction from the board as to what we want to do.

Mr. DeBarge: I have sat in the meetings with our housing authority with the opportunity to refurbish those buildings and turn them into what you see at the mills. 55 and over and all of that. As Marc said, unfortunately we couldn't come to any type of agreement enough to move forward, which is unfortunate because it's a unique area there. It's a unique space to…I don't know how easy it's going to be with the buildings being the way they're situated. We have another unique thing in that area with Exit 7 Theater. We'd all like to see that used even more. And that whole area not so much be a blight when you come over the bridge and see everything. You want to see those buildings on the hill shining. I was kind of hoping we could get something going with that but we're going to have to decide to do something.

Mr. Goncalves: The idea when we were talking about it a couple years ago with the Housing Authority or seniors with Robin, it would have been fantastic to do a conversion and take the older portion, the old junior high and old senior center, along with those 2 buildings and provided some nice housing like was being done at the mills or done at the Boys & Girls Club. It doesn't look like there's going to be any cooperation from that end and it's a shame. I think before we do anything like we get rid of those buildings that we should take a hard look and planning if we would ever need to expand there for any reason. Whether it be this building we outgrow, police and fire we outgrow. Anything along that line. We don't have Vets anymore so that's out of the question. It's nice to have something available rather than go out and buy something. Maybe create some kind of committee to start looking at that and what the potential is down the road. And how fast are we outgrowing this. What are we doing for storage? What's it costing us? I know we're going to discuss it here very shortly for archiving. That stuff has got to go somewhere. We already have stuff offsite, no?

Mr. Strange: No. We just have the sheds.

Mr. Silva: What's the zoning on those parcels?

Mr. Strange: I'd have to look. My guess is it's commercial because there's a commercial right across the street.

Mr. Silva: That could be a hinderance. The thing to do probably is go to an auction. Can we put a limit on them?

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Mr. Strange: We can say minimum bid.

Mr. Silva: I would put it in auction and if it goes it goes and if it doesn't…

Mr. Strange: Then we wouldn't have to…

Mr. Silva: Before we do that auction, I would like to petition at town meeting to change the zoning. If it's a restrictive zoning there maybe change the zoning and we might get a couple other people that might be interested. Let's say somebody wanted to put a restaurant. If we could put mixed use so they could have a small restaurant or café. If it was zoned commercial I think there would probably be some interest.

Mr. Rosenblum: You stole my thunder. You just used the word mixed-use. You've seen years ago when you would go to Northampton, Thorne's market, different eclectic stores in it. Restaurant. I think that would kind of add on to what's going to be happening at the mills. And it's on the bus route. The thing I see down there that's kind of a hindrance is the parking. We've got the park there. Very limited parking to the side. A park in front where the gazebo is. We could use some of the parking that comes in.

Mr. Goncalves: It's residence A.

Mr. Silva: Terrible zoning for that piece of property. That's something that's been overlooked and should have been changed a long time ago.

Mr. Goncalves: You can do schools and any type of education in any zone in town.

Mr. Silva: I think we should start looking or have Planning Board possibly looking at changing zoning over there if we decide we're going to sell it.

Mr. Rosenblum: My other point would also be like when we were talking about the time we were thinking about repurposing Vet's. We'd have to probably assess the buildings if there's asbestos or things of that nature. There's nothing with a change of business or anything that you'd have to bring it up to code.

Mr. Silva: If you're marketing you're marketing as is.

Mr. Rosenblum: If you're auctioning it it's as is. If someone comes in and they want to rent part of it I don't know. I just remember when we were talking about Vet's maybe State Police using it for training they were using it as classroom; therefore, you didn't have to bring it up to code. If someone came in and wanted to change the use of the building then it was millions of dollars for abating the asbestos, boiler, in ground tanks.

Mr. DeBarge: Do we want to send a letter to the Planning Board to see if they can change the zoning and move forward with the auction?

Mr. Silva: At least that front building; we could parcel that front building out and keep the other. The front building would be of interest to some people.

Mr. DeBarge: Are you here for something?

Grandmother: My granddaughter is taking journalism.

Mr. Rosenblum: Do you have any questions for us?

Student: What's your thoughts on doing this for your job?

Mr. Rosenblum: If it was a job we're not getting paid enough.

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Mr. Silva: Don't think about making your livelihood on becoming a Selectman. It doesn't pay.

Mr. Rosenblum: You came in at probably the perfect meeting because it's usually about the most amount of people we have when we're doing tax classification hearings. It affects 21,000. The people that are in here are passionate about their taxes and lifestyle. Our goal is to do the best we can inside of the constraints of what we have. Unions we have to take care of and other things like that. It's difficult. Were they right in what they were saying? Yes. Mr. Silva is always stomping on that one. You saw a perfect example of what it's like and we all have other jobs too.

Mr. DeBarge: You have to want to be involved with your community to do this. You have to understand not only your community but each pocket of your community. It has different clicks here. You have to see and know what's going on. I don't understand a lot of stuff with tax classifications or assessments. I'm a retired policeman. We have a good mix of people on the board that allows me to understand something I'm not privy to or well versed in but you have to want to be involved in the community. That's the most important part.

Mr. Strange: So, we're requesting the Planning Board look at a zone change? Do we want to suggest a particular zone?

Mr. Silva: I think they should look at that whole area there. If the senior center is on residence A they're operating on a non-conforming lot. It should be an easy thing to bring up.

Board to discuss and possibly vote to retain Napoli Shkolnick to represent the town's interest in a class action lawsuit regarding PFAS levels.

Mr. Strange: As you all know, we get these notifications quite often from Springfield Water & Sewer that PFAS levels have increased in the drinking water. This problem persists in a lot of different areas. There are law firms that are engaging cities and towns to participate in a litigation. This particular firm was vetted through Meade, Talerman, & Costa, who is our town counsel. They've been recommending for any towns that are interested this particular law firm. We did have a call with them to get some more information. Essentially, there's no cost or risk to the town. If we choose to opt in, because we get our water from Springfield Water & Sewer Commission, it's essentially a security blanket for any future potential liabilities that the town might have. This

would cover us in some capacity moving forward. There's no risk to the town. I asked Brian, our town counsel, and there's no reason not to get involved in it. There's only upside.

Mr. Silva: Is the Springfield Water Commission going to be incurring a lot of costs with these people? There's no suits?

Mr. Goncalves: I'm sure there will. It's not going to make a difference though. It's the same amount of work.

Mr. Silva: It's great to do this stuff but we're kind of biting the hand that feeds us. Water already is expensive. I remember working with a town engineer and he said water bills are going to be the highest utility. They're getting up there. If we're going to incur more costs for Springfield Water & Sewer to bring us their product.

Mr. Goncalves: Our getting involved is not going to change the way they go about anything.

Mr. Silva: I don't understand some of these things. If we have to protect ourselves then we have to protect ourselves.

Mr. DeBarge: You and I agreed on the opioid litigation because I was against it. I didn't see a point in staying in it. I didn't think we were going to get anything and I was 100% wrong. We're getting a lot more money than I anticipated. This is kind of the same thing. There's no hurt to us if we end up getting something from it if that helps the water treatment. How many letters did we get? We get letters all the time about our water being over contaminated and the letters say the same thing. You have to drink a ton of it but if this helps correct some of it then I would say it's our responsibility to be in this. I thought it was interesting though. What I did see was the judge's comments on those who were considering opting out. His comments were actually endorsing groups/municipalities to opt out because of how much time it would take for the litigants to get through and the appeals.

Mr. Goncalves: 6 million documents.

Mr. DeBarge: That emboldened my position to stay in it because he's trying to talk us into getting out.

Mr. Silva: Like I always say, yes we got some money, but who got money? The lawyers make all the money.

Mr. DeBarge: The opioid money we're going to be able to put to good use.

Mr. Silva: I agree. Opioid is a little different. This is a water supply we need.

Mr. DeBarge: Maybe it makes them do something.

Mr. Silva: I would rather see them do something like monitor this and keep it clean, rather than going after the city. I sure hope that's not it.

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Mr. Goncalves: There's no money in there for attorneys. 37.4 million pages of documents.

Mr. Rosenblum: I think I was chairman when we came up with this opioid thing and I said let it ride. Worst case scenario is we get zero.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to retain Napoli Shkolnick to represent the town's interest in a class action lawsuit regarding PFAS levels. **Mr. Goncalves second. Motion passed 3-1.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to appropriate $6,940 in 40R funds to archive documents at Town Hall.

Mr. Strange: We do this every year. We hire a company that comes in and goes through all of our documents and there's a retention schedule that the secretary of state puts out and they make sure whatever documents we need to keep are kept and whatever extraneous paper we have gets recycled. It clears up storage space for our vaults downstairs. The accounting office, which is the

former collector's office, and the procurement office, which is the former accounting office, both of those vaults have a ton of paper that needs to be gone through and either recycled or archived.

Mr. Silva: There's many records that have to be kept but there's a lot of records that are just nonsense so hopefully we're going to go through those and not spend the money to archive that.

Mr. Strange: Definitely. We have to create more space.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to appropriate $6,940 in 40R funds to archive documents at Town Hall. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

BOARD UPDATES/MISC

Event Calendar:

Thursday, December 21, 2023 – Town Hall will be closed from 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.
Monday, December 25, 2023 – Town Hall will be closed for Christmas Holiday

Mr. Silva: Do we need a motion to close the Town Hall at those times?

Mr. Strange: December 25th is Christmas. The 21st you should. The 21st we're doing a holiday party for town employees and of course the board is invited. So, the answer is yes.

Mr. Silva: I think the Board should close the Town Hall. Not that I wouldn't, I think it should be brought so no one says…

Mr. Strange: I agree.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to close Town Hall for a holiday luncheon on Thursday December 21, 2023, between 12:00 – 2:00 p.m. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**

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

Mr. Strange: For the next meeting on the 19th, we have a little bit of a log jam. The school committee is coming in for their quarterly joint meeting, but we also have the new jobs, positions, and classifications for you guys to consider so department heads will be in making their pitches. We should probably start a little earlier, like 5:00 so I didn't know if you guys were willing or interested in doing that.

Mr. Goncalves: Let's go 5:00 then. I'd like to shout out to the 250th again for a great event. The pancake breakfast. There was some people there that didn't think there was enough pancakes and sausage but they're never happy with the amount they get on their plate and they hope their wives don't eat all of theirs. Great job. They're nonstop those people.

Mr. Silva: To the people that were out there, it seems to be the same half a dozen people all the time.

Mr. Goncalves: It's 3 dozen people.

Mr. Silva: Understood. But I'm talking about each event you see the same faces so it would be nice to see a little more involved out there.

Mr. Goncalves: That committee is available to as many people who want to get involved. I don't think we have a set limit. The more the merrier. Congratulations to the girl's soccer team. They had a great season. They made it to the state tournament and had an abrupt end. The boys again made it Western mass Champs 3 years in a row. Made it to the elite 8 and lost a very controversial game in Weymouth. Same team that beat them last year. Special recognition to 3 boys on the team that were all region and all western mass. Thomas Wadas was voted by all the coaches in the league as the most valuable player, which was great. I think he's all New England recognition. Enzo will be playing at Bentley. Good luck to those guys and congratulations to the team.

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Mr. Rosenblum: It popped up a couple times. I saw it where I work also. This time of year, now that you turn your heat on. Be careful where you place your tree. Make sure your smoke detectors are working. Your carbon monoxide detectors. You're supposed to keep 3' away from your baseboards. Be careful this time of year because there's a lot of decorations in your house. Again, wintertime, check on your neighbors. Keep an eye on anyone elderly. Lastly, the Pond Committee, you'll notice when you drive by Haviland Pond this year you'll see 4 trees and a new sign. I mentioned to them, because I'm a liaison to them, I was hoping they would take that by the horn and try to make it a little bit bigger. The trees were sponsored by Legacy Fire Protection, which is across the street from the pond, Randall's Farm, Ellison Farms Beef, and the Ludlow Fire Department Social Club. This past Sunday I stopped by with an extra strand of lights. The Morton's were out there, Julie, Andrea's mother-in-law who lives on the pond and is on the Pond Committee. They decorated the trees. Buddy Ellison was kind enough. The Social Club helped put stakes in the beach to hold the trees up in case it gets windy and run the power for it. Just so you know they're on timers so they're not on all the time. Thank you to the Pond Committee. It's kind of nice. Year one it was on the island and you couldn't even see it and now hoping in general we have the tree lighting here. We've talked about the streetlamps and maybe getting some wreaths up or lighting during the holidays. The goal is for the Pond Committee to next year if anybody is listening, any business, group or anyone that wants to sponsor a tree maybe next year we have 15 trees. Thank you to the Pond Committee for doing that. Thursday at 6:00 we have another Charter Commission meeting here in the Selectmen's room. There's a portion of the agenda that's open for public comment for anyone that has any questions or suggestions.

Mr. Silva: Shout out to the people that braved the weather Sunday to come to our tree lighting ceremony. It was very nice even though it was raining and cold. Nice job by the chorus. Santa did a marvelous job and plenty of toys were collected. Probably not as much as we would have if the weather was good. Thank you for attending and supporting that.

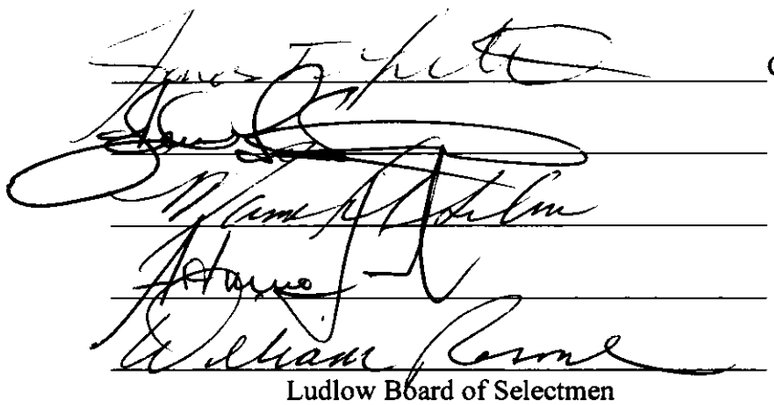
Mr. DeBarge: From the Vet Center and Wreaths Across America, we're doing wreaths on our veteran's graves, as we do every year. It's my favorite event. Saturday, December 16th. We're changing things up this year. The ceremony is going to be first and then we're going to put the wreaths on our veteran's stones so we can keep the group there for the ceremony. The ceremony starts at noon and the wreaths will be placed after. The pancake breakfast was a lot better than I had anticipated. I was fortunate enough to be able to work it. We had such a great time and was happy to see quite a few people come out. It was at the same time St. John was doing theirs as well and we had good numbers. Cindy Cabral, the manager of the kitchen staff at Harris Brook, without her there. We had 10-15 guys from the free masons Brigham Lodge that helped serve. Cindy was the general of the kitchen. We wouldn't have been able to do it without her. Tony Curto, thank you for all you do. You know what I'm talking about. As far as the tree lighting goes, I'd like to see more lights. Driving through Palmer & Ware at night, I think we can do better without a massive expenditure of money, especially as we're coming over the bridge. We should be turning on to East Street you should be able to see lights on the roadways, you should be able to see the light poles with all of that stuff. It's almost like when you drive through and you see the dark East Street, the area where we should be lighting up. The gazebo area and all of that. It doesn't look the way our community is. I think we need to do a much better job at that.

Mr. Silva: I was going through Warren and they have the exact same gazebo that we have and they did lights on it and made it absolutely gorgeous. That would be something that we could doctor that up.

Mr. DeBarge: The DPW did a heck of a job helping me out with putting the lights up and the design they did. The tree and all of that. Our director, Jamie, agrees. We have some plans to make next year bigger and better.

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Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the Selectmen's meeting at 6:53 p.m. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0.**



Chairman

Ludlow Board of Selectmen

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