The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Tuesday, December 19, 2023, began at 5:00 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen's Conference Room.

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TOWN OF LUDLOW

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

Members Absent: None

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

VISITATIONS

5:00 p.m. – DPW – To discuss requested positions (PW1 & PW2)

Mr. Tomas: I'm here today requesting 2 additional positions for FY2024 due to increased workload and rapid growth of the Town. With the rapidly increasing developments and subdivisions, infrastructure maintenance has drastically increased. This includes street sweeping, snow plowing, tree maintenance, etc. We're also trying to make drastic improvements to our parks and recreation facilities and that includes playground upgrades and proper field maintenance. And I stress proper field maintenance. All the new growth also puts a strain on the Town's sewer department with an increase in sewer maintenance, including preventative maintenance, jetting sewer lines routinely; weekly, monthly, daily if we could. Root control and treatments on a monthly basis. Also, with the addition of the new Reservoir Cemetery additional employees will be needed for burials, cemetery maintenance. Historically, I went back a little bit with some statistics, 30 years ago we had 30 employees at the DPW. 20 years ago, we had 25 employees at the DPW. 10 years ago, we had 18 employees. Today we have 16 employees. That poses a problem for a lot of different things. We lack in a lot of different areas in Town. I'd like to see the number get back to at least 18-20. The winter operation, obviously we haven't had any snow yet, but it's becoming more difficult due to the hired contractors are less and less. Extra staff would be great. Parks are being neglected because on a daily basis we only have an average of 2 employees in our parks. We should realistically have 4 considering we maintain and mow 11 parks and fields, 6 cemeteries and the riverwalk and that includes the gazebo and any fields we may mow. We realistically can't be proactive with 16 employees; we're being more reactive when we get a work order in because we're trying to shuffle 16 employees around Town. It's a challenge for us at the DPW. Again, I'd like to request 2 employees, a PW1 which is entry level and would help out big time in the parks and PW2 which is the next step up. The PW2 requires a CDL and driver's license and that would help us out drastically in the wintertime. Having another CDL employee we can put in the sander in the absence of employees and vacations.

Mr. Gennette: Do you have any positions that are not filled that exist or funded?

Mr. Tomas: We have 2 that we're putting out to fill after January 1. We will be posting those positions. Those 2 will bring us up to 18. They are a PW1 and PW2 also. It seems like 20 employees is the number where it's beneficial to the Town and the DPW when it comes to the maintenance and putting people in mowers and plowing.

Mr. DeBarge: What will be the added responsibility when the new field goes online?

Mr. Tomas: There's still maintenance there. We'll be mowing the perimeter and baseball diamond. That's all going to be natural turf. We will be maintaining that on a weekly and daily basis. We maintain 8 baseball diamonds in Town on a daily basis. It's been tough with the lack of employees but we try to keep up with all of that stuff.

Mr. Goncalves: Do we have a dollar amount on that Jamie? $90,000. For our viewing audience, those jobs start at $23-$24/hour, right?

Mr. Tomas: The PW1 is roughly $21 and PW2 is roughly $23.

Mr. Gennette: Marc, do you have a recommendation at this time?

Mr. Strange: Not at this time.

Mr. Gennette: The only other question I have is why not move an existing PW1 into a PW2 position? Is that better for you to do that?

Mr. Tomas: We like to have PW1's so we can put them more into the park because you don't need a CDL or hoisting license for that. We tend to like to have the PW1's for that reason. Odds and ends stuff that we can't get to. And to promote as we can. We just don't have the positions now to do that.

Mr. Gennette: I'm all set. We're not going to make any final decisions tonight. We're going to take everything under advisement and go from there. Thank you for your time coming in and explaining it.

Mr. DeBarge: Great job on the monument. The monument on Church and Center was moved by the DPW crew.

Mr. Gennette: I'm getting a lot of good feedback from the community too.

5:10 p.m. – Library – To discuss requested position (Library Technician)

Ms. Rickson: I'm Melissa Rickson, the interim director at the library and this is July Siebecker, the youth services department head. Thank you for hearing our request. We're looking for a full-time L2 position to replace a part-time youth services assistant position. Beyond that we've been very busy in the youth room and seeing a huge increase in number. We are understaffed in comparison to other libraries in the area and of similar size as you can see in the attached materials. I can have July elaborate more on how busy our program has been.

Ms. Siebecker: I think the numbers for how severely understaffed we are definitely speak to themselves in the graph, so I won't touch that. I wrote up a few comments about how busy we are in the youth room and the history of it. We have good news and bad news. We've bounced back from the Covid 19 shutdown. We're bigger and busier than we've ever been. The youth room has always been a popular place. Since recovering from the shutdown, the Ludlow community has shown up to use their library in record and unprecedented numbers. The youth room is rarely without patrons in it. We're hosting more programs for children, teens, and families than we ever have before. Attendance has been a record high and some of our programs during the summer have seen hundreds of people at it. Our ed con this spring had 500 people there and that was run by 1 person. Although the number of programs has continued to rise over the years, the number of staff who are planning and promoting these programs has not. We've had the same number of staff for over 20 years. One full-time youth services librarian and one part-time person with no professional degree and no benefits. We've been trying to meet the needs of the Ludlow community in the 21st century but we're doing it as if we're staffed in 2001. To put it in perspective, the last time we had an increase in youth room staff you guys were all being savvy by borrowing VHS cassettes from the library instead of Blockbuster. We had just stopped using the card catalog. The price of gas was a little over $1 and most of you didn't have cell phones. We have statistics in a graph that will show you an increase in attendance. Twenty-two years ago when the part-time position was added to keep up with the needs of the community, we were during the summer which is our busiest time, able to host 88 programs during the summer of 2001 with 1,091 people participating. Fast forward to 5 years ago right before Covid struck with the same number of staff we were hosting more than double the number of programs, 196, with a third more participants. Last year after we recovered we had the summer of where everybody comes to everything all the time with nearly a hundred more programs than we had been hosting during the same months of 2001, more than 500 people coming to those programs just since Covid. This last year we responded to the increased desire for more programs and hosted the most we ever had, 219 programs in 3 months, which was attended by a whopping 5,287 participants. That's about one and a half people doing about two and a half times the number of programs and way more participants than back in 2001. While we pull it off we were stretched thin almost every day and we gave the summer the title this is definitely not sustainable. We have had the same duties since 2001 but now a lot more have been added on with more complexity, more steps. We have a constant stream of new technology to keep up with. For instance, in advertising it used to be just a newsletter. Now it's graphic design, digital marketing, website management and social media staffed according to before we even had social media. It's also worth noticing that the cost of relying on part-time, unbenefited employees for coverage is going to be greater turnover. Every time an assistant leaves for a better position we have to re-train and re-orient, which happens every couple of years at best. Even when we're fully staffed there's

only 1 person staffing the youth room, which means anytime that person needs to go out and run one of these programs or attend a meeting or go visit one of the schools, the room is left unattended. That was fine in 2001 when there was not nearly as many people using the library, but now there's almost never a time when there isn't somebody in the youth room. It is just not safe to not have that coverage. It is important for us to regularly challenge ourselves and we always strive to improve, but there is a limit as to how much one and half people can do. We reached it quite a while ago and even though community interest and demand can continue to rise. The high-quality standards we are known for are in jeopardy and something has to give and we would like it not to be the program and services that our community really loves.

Mr. Goncalves: A full-time employee is $20,000 and a part time is only $700-$800 less, is that a type-o? You're $20,300 plus benefits for the full timer, and $19,600 for a part-timer.

Ms. Rickson: The full time should be $39,370.

Ms. Ribeiro: That's actually taking into consideration that you have part-time funds for that position now. $19,000 is if the full-time position is not approved they would be requesting a part-time position at $19,000 additional with no benefits.

Mr. Goncalves: And to do both positions with benefits it's about $65,000.

Ms. Rickson: We're only asking for one. Either one full time position or two full time.

Mr. Silva: This graph is eye popping. Without looking at this, a lot of the programs are comparable to the other communities.

Ms. Siebecker: No. We do a lot more than everybody else.

Mr. Silva: It doesn't make sense.

Ms. Siebecker: We're tired. We do a lot more because we know the community wants it. We're really good at time management. We have a wonderful teen volunteer group that helps us with a lot of the prep, but we are beyond our ability to keep at it. We do a lot more than everybody else because the community wants it.

Ms. Rickson: These times when there's 300-500 people, July is staying beyond her 40-hour work week to get it done.

Mr. Gennette: I'm all set. We're not going to be voting on anything tonight but we'll take it under advisement and go from there.

5:20 p.m. – Town Clerk – To discuss requested position (Asst Town Clerk)

Ms. Batista: Kim Batista, Town Clerk. I'm looking for an assistant Town Clerk. The person I have now is an administrative assistant. According to Mass General Law she's not able to sign when I'm out so I really need an assistant Town Clerk.

Mr. Goncalves: This money is to promote her?

Ms. Batista: Yes. As you can see, an assistant Town Clerk changing from an administrative to assistant Town Clerk it would be a salary position, which will save the Town money on overtime because now we have early voting. The State mandates 2 weeks of early voting before the State election and a week before all primaries. It's going to save us a lot more money.

Mr. Silva: This community has run without an assistant Town Clerk? Just an administrator?

Ms. Batista: I haven't been out that often, but yes.

Mr. Silva: She wouldn't be able to go into the recap and sign off on any of the forms or anything?

Ms. Batista: No. I've been doing it all.

Mr. Silva: Good job.

Ms. Batista: Thank you.

5:30 p.m. – HR – To discuss requested position (HR Specialist)

Ms. Ribeiro: This is a reclassification for the HR Specialist position. You have the sheet in front of you. It would be a promotion for this individual. The increase, with a 3% COLA would be $2,800. The reason for this change is since July 1 of this year as I have taken on the role of Assistant Town Administrator that's pulling me away from some of the duties I'm responsible for and it naturally is shifting over to the HR specialist position. We now have a full-time admin in the office so the HR specialist is able to shift some of her responsibilities over to the admin, which entails the HR specialist to take over some of the responsibilities. She's been taking on all the leave management. She's responsible for hiring from posting vacancies to onboarding. I have very little…I obviously look at applicants and make job offers and I'm still interviewing some of the higher-level positions but she would be transitioning into taking care of all the interviewing, including the civil service process. We have a couple requisitions that we're going to be asking for and she will also be responsible for that process from start to finish. It's a natural progression of myself as the HR Director taking on more responsibilities and pulled in different directions with the additional responsibilities that I have. At this point I am requesting a reclassification for the HR specialist from an M1 to an M2.

Mr. Goncalves: Going from an M1 to an M2, is there a reason we're going right to step 2 and not step 1?

Ms. Ribeiro: It would actually be step 4 because this individual is maxed out at step 6 right now with the M1. If you look at the scale, the M2 is $59,090 to $81,259 in order to give her an increase. The next step with an increase would be step 4.

Mr. Gennette: We're all set. Thank you.

Mr. Gennette: I don't see the building inspector so we might as well jump right to Police.

6:00 p.m. – Police/Dispatch – To discuss requested positions (Det Sergeant & Dispatch Supervisor)

Chief Valadas: I brought Detective Lieutenant Kornacki with me specifically to discuss the Detective Sergeant's position. I'll start with the civilian position. Essentially what I've prepared for you is a short version. Since 2021 I've asked for both of these positions, specifically the dispatch supervisor as a civilian and the Detective Sergeant. We have 9 dispatchers. When the unit was created 9 dispatchers covered 2 PSAP's, which is what E91 allots for Ludlow's population and Ludlow's call volume, so there's 2 people sitting at those stations 24-7 and the 9 people just covers that. We maintain a part-timer that does 15 hours of auditing and we have 2 per diem dispatchers that fill in as needed. The dispatcher supervisors' position would be a brand-new position at basically top step dispatcher plus 25% which is what we factor the Sargent in, which is patrolman at 25%. The dispatch supervisor would immediately assume duties that are currently being performed by a sworn police officer. Basically, the dispatch is run by a Lieutenant, operations Lieutenant on second shift, and then by a Sargeant on the day shift. That entails all the grant writing, all the scheduling, processing of time, personnel issues that arise, as well as logistical issues, software, or hardware. Anything that might have to do with those stations. Currently our dispatch is set up where you have the 2 primary PSAP's and then you have a third one in the front. There's another station that was set up to either have a spill over dispatch or if Ludlow went to a 3rd PSAP. I don't see that at least in the near future even with our population growth and healthy levels I don't think E91 is going to make us add a 3rd station or 3rd PSAP to the police station or central dispatch, which now covers ALS, Police and Fire altogether. This manager would assume all the duties and be responsible for all the grants, all the scheduling, all the personnel days off, everything that happens right now with a Lieutenant and Sargeant. That frees a Lieutenant and Sargeant to take on the duties we've taken on in the past few years, which is basically increased training, POST reform requirements and our impact recertification, along with other things such as licensing and day-to-day operations of police work. It solidifies that dispatch. I feel that by adding this full timer, it's a 10th full time position. You wouldn't have to do anything, as I stated because in my opinion being there in 33 years, we're not going to grow in 10 years for them to

mandate us another PSAP. I just don't see that call growth. This manager handles this unit and it solidifies its own running identity. There's a fire captain on and police supervisor on 24-7 so that would handle any type of liaison between what's happening with Fire and what's happening with Police and they get assistance but just so the public knows and I know you gentlemen know, firefighters and police officers can't sit at those stations because we're not certified in all the different software systems. The best we can do is go to the front station and grab the landline phone and start taking landline calls as spillover. Any 9-1-1 calls will spill over to other PSAP's. Our back up is predominately Wilbraham. Or Springfield or the State Police. We can't assume their duties. Dispatch was created because our police officers no longer wanted to do the desk because it was getting too involved. It's pretty much the end factor. You won't have to do anything more with dispatch. Maybe if a part-timer leaves, but it's tough to fill part-time. With that said, I did have some quick stats. I'm sure you're aware, in Ludlow you're looking at 4 Western Mass counties. We're the 10th largest. It's a pretty good size but we're not going to go to a third. PSAP. Is there any questions specifically on the dispatch position? It's roughly $26 for a top step dispatcher and you add on 25% you're looking at about $70,000.

Mr. Rosenblum: Right now, would that be additional grant writing on top of? I know in the past it was Lt. Brennan or Lt. Irwin. Would this be additional grant writing specific to this position or the entire police department?

Chief Valadas: The grants are specific to 9-1-1. We get about $80,000. It does cover a lot of training. There's other grants we can apply for. There's other infrastructure grants we can apply for too. Lt. Irwin, and before him it was myself, that administered the grants. I would expect dispatch to assume all of the grant writing. They would have a template to follow because they have the police officers that have been doing it. The police officers are managing a unit of civilians that they don't do that they don't do that job. Lt. Kornacki and I are the last 2 of the people that actually had to work the desk and we could answer 9-1-1. We can no longer do that. We're managing people that we don't do their job.

Mr. DeBarge: I want to make sure I understood. If one of the dispatchers that you have now becomes a dispatch supervisor are you saying you won't need to fill that position?

Chief Valadas: We will need to fill. This is a 10th position. There's 9 to cover 3 shifts at 2 people in a chair and this is the 10th.

Mr. DeBarge: Same amount of dispatchers but this is brand new. $92,000 with benefits.

Chief Valadas: The Detective Sargeant. This is the same position I've been looking for since 2021. This position would be not that I take the new Sargeant and put him into the Detective Bureau but it would allow me to take an existing Sargeant and move him into the second shift Detective Bureau and you're giving me a replacement for them in the patrol. It's the 9th Sargeant but this specific role would allow me to put a Sargeant into the Detective Bureau with all Detective Bureau activities happening mostly at night. Our highest call volume administratively is during the day but our highest activity is in the evenings. The Detective Sergeants I want them to focus on narcotics but it's a general-purpose detective. Everything that goes along with that. Unattended deaths, everything that was listed in Detective Kornacki's investigative breakdown. Everything that goes along with that they would be responsible for. They're not going to just be focused on narcotics; however, I do think it's the most impactful factor in the community. Not only are they providing the follow-up and investigative services at night but you'd have a second supervisor in the span of control of that unit, which is incredibly important. I was talking to Chief Gillis the other day of the Agawam Police Department. Agawam is larger than us by about 5,000-6,000 and they have 10 detectives. Two Sergeants and a Lieutenant Detective. We currently have 4. Just to give you a scope of what's falling into the hands of a very adept, experienced Detective Lieutenant who is handling quite a bit. I do think this is the most impactful single position that you could give me. I would make a commitment to you that in the next 3-5 years you won't have to add another Sargeant. There won't be a need. On top of that, I know it's only one position but if you could think of the backfill. You give me the position and it's a full police officer. Now I get to fill the vacancy in the patrol because that experienced Sargeant went to the DB, then the patrolman that got bumped up I get to fill his position too. It's a backfill and I know it's only a gain of 1 but it's an important net gain. It would bring us to 43 police officers. I've been Chief almost 4 years and we started with 42 and we remain at 42. The workload has not decreased.

Lt. Detective Kornacki: I prepared the document that you have had the opportunity to read. When you created the Lt. position, which I appreciate, I've been holding that position for a year and half in acting capacity. Since that's happened, as part of the growth of the detective bureau we've talked about adding responsibilities to our detective bureau that we never handled before. That includes our school resource officers overseen by the detective bureau which involves the ALICE program which has grown to all the schools and the town and has even gone into private areas in the community. We're also in the process of developing a response team at the school as it relates to behavioral health issues. We're doing that community wide. In that process we've been able to get the services of a CHD clinician through negotiating with CHD, which began in January. In September we were able to get them to provide us with a clinician one day a week. That has grown to 2 days a week since the influx of references and referrals we have given to them has grown. The reason the detective bureau oversees that is because it relates to suicide calls, self-harm calls, drug dependency and drug addiction, which I feel is the responsibility of the detective bureau to manage not only the investigation but how do we deal with the community at large that is suffering from these kinds of issues. A kind of global way of addressing the drug problem we have. We have taken on a number of responsibilities since the position of Lieutenant has been added to the detective bureau. I work the day shift and I find myself sticking around almost every day to give some input to the 4-12 guys. We give a guy to the State Police. I'm hearing it all night. Everybody is doing as much as they can with the little that they have. I'm not coming to you in a vacuum. I understand that times are tight and money is tight but I guarantee you there is not a detective bureau that does more than our detective bureau does with the small numbers that we have.

Mr. Goncalves: Overall, what does this do for overtime?

Chief Valadas: The only thing an executive can do with attrition or increase personnel is you hope for healthy personnel, that you're not going to be paying for salaries for people to be staying home. The second thing is the more people you have, for instance you have a shift where you have 2 sergeants or 4 patrol officers that is normally staffed by 6 you can account for a sick or a day off. It should impact in some form or another. You need a little bit of luck with that. At one point in time this year for half the year we had 2 sergeants out. The Town pays to replace that. That's a direct cost and there's nothing I can do about it because I've got to have this staff there.

Mr. Goncalves: Once upon a time you said this, if you've got 4 officers anywhere they need a supervisor.

Chief Valadas: In the contract what it comes to is security detail, crowd control details, by collective bargaining if you assign 4 officers you would have to have a supervisor there. It doesn't necessarily mean a sergeant; it could be a lieutenant. That's for collective bargaining. That was established 2 contracts ago. It does make sense because these events that we're holding they're costly. The parade block party would be in the thousands. Thinking in terms of staff mental health, we haven't grown. You have to build from your supervisors up. I thank you that you gave me a sergeant 3 years ago, a lieutenant 2 years ago.

Lt. Detective Kornacki: You did add a lieutenant position but that was not replaced by a sergeant. It was changing of a sergeant position to a lieutenant position. It was a zero-gain head count in the detective bureau. In terms of overtime, I do find myself working far more overtime than I'd like to. I think having a 4-12 detective sergeant would alleviate a lot of that overtime. In terms of the span of control, the question you asked the Chief, the complexity of a detective investigation is also what is managed by a supervisor, not just overseeing officers it's overseeing cases, case management, working with the District Attorney's office to ensure cases are prosecuted properly. There's a myriad of things that come along with the management of cases that doesn't necessarily involve the management of manpower. Search warrants. The things we are engaged in now are not what they were 5-10 years ago. These cases are very time-consuming and arduous.

Chief Valadas: And extra jurisdiction. Anytime the DA jumps in on something, an unattended death or motor vehicle fatality or any type of serious violent offense when that detective trooper shows up we're expected to have, you can have a patrolman there but if there's emergencies going on or call volume and there's only 3 officers to begin with, or 4 max on the 2nd shift, they can't stay there. They've got to go. We're 9-1-1 dependent. To pull a sergeant from the station to go to the scene he left his responsibilities of managing the police department. It's almost expected that we're going to have a detective 24-7 available 365. They have to. The DA expects it. Especially

for a community our size. You'll find the detective lieutenant goes out a lot because he feels like he has to because of that direct relationship that we have.

Lt. Detective Kornacki: I'm right down the road. I know there was a mention in the agenda that there could be future conversation. I'm available every day. I'm available 24-7 so if anybody wants to call me I'd be happy to clarify anything anytime.

5:40 p.m. – Building – To discuss requested position (F/T Local Inspector)

Ms. Ward: We're looking at a request for a full-time local inspector to alleviate the workload. Last year I was authorized a part-time inspector. I asked for a full-time, but you gave me a part time. That was helpful; however, my part time inspector unfortunately cannot work the 19 part time hours that was authorized. He can only work 13 hours.

Mr. Gennette: Did he decide that?

Ms. Ward: He's got a cap because he has social security. He's got a cap of hours that he's able to work. He's working right now (3) four-hour days and (1) 2-hour day. It's tough for me. Although I have delegated as much as I could to him, he is now overloaded with permit applications as well. He is exceeding his timeline just like I am. Permit applications, it's difficult to get to them when we have citizens who are asking us questions. It's a constant stream of requests that come in. Inspections have to happen first. I'm working 10–11-hour days to try to keep up and I'm still not able to keep up. I don't like that I get complaints for the timing of my permit applications. I guarantee you that if I were to be given a full-time inspector those types of complaints would go away. You're always going to get complaints about a building department from certain sectors, certain types of people that don't necessarily like the code changes that are coming down the line but the speed of permit applications processing and that sort of thing would go away. Since I was given a part-time inspector I'm sure you've stopped getting complaints about not being able to get inspections. That is true, you can get inspections now. Contractors are getting them in a timely basis. Processing the permit applications is still difficult. Keeping to that 30-day timeline is tough. Things have gotten better but they haven't gotten better enough. What I find that I am doing is working long hours and taking very few days off. As a matter of fact, I'm probably going to be giving back some vacation time that I haven't been able to take because I've been too busy to justify in my own mind taking time off when there's such a backlog. It just doesn't sit well with me. If you look at the permit fees that we are bringing in I think you'll agree especially comparing it to municipalities such as Wilbraham and Chicopee especially in 2021 and 2022 that we actually exceed those municipalities. Wilbraham, although they have 1 inspector, we are almost double what they make in permit fees. In Chicopee they have 5 full-time inspector positions and we are almost at Chicopee's level. The money is there as far as what we are bringing in and I would like to be able to do some things with this department. I don't want to have to shut the door on constituents because I don't have time to meet with them and answer their questions. That's the thing I would really like to avoid. I want to be able to have some time to develop the website. I want to have time to convert our computer system to an online permitting software, which I haven't been able to do because I'm still struggling with trying to get the data corrected that I'm left with so that I can convert over. I find that I'm just treading water trying to keep up with administrative duties of what I've got in front of me.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm glad that you were able to put this together.

Ms. Ward: It took quite a bit because I had a lot of help from HR with getting information from other municipalities but trying to get the information out of our system was interesting to say the least. It was very labor intensive.

Mr. Silva: This inspector. What credentials does he need to do and what inspections is he going to be doing? There's a lot of inspections that I'm sure if you get someone that's not qualified with certain credentials he can't do them. Am I to assume that or no?

Ms. Ward: I would train this person. I would also have my part time local inspector train this person. There's going to be an interview process. I'm going to be making sure and vetting this person to make sure they're qualified. Theoretically I'd like to have someone that actually has inspections experience. In an ideal world I'd like to have someone that's already certified. That is

sometimes difficult to find unless they come from another municipality. I would certainly train that person depending on their level of expertise.

Mr. Silva: You at least need a contractor's license.

Ms. Ward: 780CMR says that they have to meet certain criteria. They have to have been in the construction field for at least 5 years leading crews in a supervisory capacity or a comparable level of architectural or construction industry education, preferably a bachelor's degree or some combination thereof. This individual will have to be vetted through the BBRS who will approve or deny a certification request if they are not already approved to be a conditional local inspector. The same process I went through in the very beginning. It's not just me that would be vetting this person and HR, it would be the BBRS. They would authorize this person.

Mr. Goncalves: In your case, because you came out of Holyoke, the BBRS certification was easy because you came out of Holyoke.

Ms. Ward: I went through that process over there.

Mr. Goncalves: When you came here you didn't have to do that again?

Ms. Ward: No, but that was for a local inspector, which is the position you have in front of you.

Mr. Goncalves: I was reading something in that CMR about an apprenticeship.

Ms. Ward: Possibly. 780CMR has quite a bit of language that a certain combination of various different things. A, B, C, D.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm glad you gave me this. Anybody that knows me knows that I've been asking for this for about 6 years before I was a Selectman.

Ms. Ward: I am very willing to give you any information that I have available to me that will help you make decisions to help me. Help me to help you.

5:50 p.m. – Fire – To discuss requested positions (FF/Paramedic, Clerk)

Chief Pease: You have seen these statistics before but they're updated now. Just to touch on a position you talked about earlier that jointly impacts both the Police and Fire departments is a dispatch supervisor. I echo Chief Valadas' remarks and I strongly recommend that you consider that position for the public safety complex. It's imperative that we have one person in charge of that entity that both Police and Fire can communicate with and work with. That is a dispatcher or truly knows the dispatch and can do the supervisory role at the same time. I think it would be a great step forward for that entity for all our public safety to have 1 person in charge of our dispatch. I didn't get to speak about it earlier, but if you have any questions I'm here to answer any on that. I want you to know where I stand. The first one I'll talk about is the additional firefighter/paramedic position. I provided you with some statistics over the years. Just to recap them I came to you guys in 2021 with a plan to put another mid-level supervisor, which was a lieutenant. We made firefighters lieutenants who were already there. We did not create new positions we just promoted within in anticipation that we could add our shift strength where it should be. My four-year plan at that point was to add 1 firefighter per shift per year to have all 4 shifts with an additional firefighter, which would bring them up to a staffing of 9 per shift. Currently right now we are funded staffing of 9 for 2 shifts and 8 for 2 shifts. To continue with this plan to bring everybody up to the same level I'm asking to bring another additional firefighter on this year which will bring 3 at shifts of 9, that's when we're fully staffed, and 1 would be at a shift of 8 when fully staffed. This is keeping up with my staffing plan that was presented a little over 2 years ago. Just to show you the statistics, call volume keeps rising. We operate 3 transporting ambulances, which if you take the 6 gentlemen that are on duty and put them all on an ambulance at the same time, which believe it or not it happens quite often now, we're left with 2 at the station if we start at 8. We don't start at 8, our minimum is 6. As you can see if we're not filling it with people from home we can't get all these ambulances. Like I explained to you in the past, we operate like a semi call department. For all that staffing we have to fill in from home. Over the years and changes in the work force, we're not filling a lot of that coverage because we can't mandate people come in when they're off duty to come back for the ambulance. We're doing

the best we can. We have pretty good success during the day to get people coming back but at night and weekends people are busy too. In an effort to prepare for the future to have enough people to respond when there's a medical need or God forbid a fire in Town, to keep our staffing levels where we are we're trying to get every crew up to that level. If you look down below, I did staffing comparisons for different communities around us with populations and did a ration of citizens per firefighter. Even with the 2 new positions that we added, you can see with Ludlow's population that we serve and the amount of firefighters that we have we certainly are not overstaffed in comparison to any of these surrounding communities. With the infrastructure that we are challenged to protect, we have I90, we have a jail in Town, many rehab facilities, there's certainly a lot of risk that Ludlow protects and certainly an increase in call volume over time, as you can see. Since the year 2000 we've had 177% increase to our medical calls and 122% of annual call volume. I'd say it's pretty consistent of 3-7% over the years in increase of medical call volume, which again brings revenue back to the Town. If you look at the other handout I gave you, I went back to fiscal year 16 up to fiscal year 23 and you can see just last year alone we had an increase of $177,959 to our ambulance revenue. It was a pretty significant increase. We raised our rates last year so we did see an increase. The CPE program that we participated in since 2019, we've seen an increase in that revenue coming back. If you look at the projected for FY24, I did a 3% increase to the ambulance revenue and that $128,000 is what the Town is scheduled to receive from that program this year. Next year we should probably break the 2-million-dollar mark in ambulance revenue. I'm trying to keep these ambulances moving not to just raise revenue but so our citizens when they call and they need an ambulance that all 3 of them will be operational. Of course, we have a 4th engine that is the paramedic level, which you need at least 2 guys to offer that service to the Town, let alone providing fire coverage. We do it with the skin of our teeth so everybody here knows. Those are the statistics. My ask is for another position and my goal is to bring every crew up to 9. I'm only asking for 1. Two positions would bring me up to 9; however, filling positions is not an easy thing to do these days with qualified candidates. Last year we were able to fill it with a transfer from another department which was excellent. He's worked out great. Hopefully in the future we can attract new candidates and we're doing our best to do that. My other request was for a reclassification for one of our secretaries from a LATOSS 3 to a LATOSS 4.

Mr. Goncalves: The 2nd one is great. I love those 4-digit positions. The 128 is what's coming back into the general fund estimated for next year.

Chief Pease: All of this goes to the general fund.

Mr. Goncalves: What's the 128?

Chief Pease: That's a newer program that I started participating in with the Town. It started in 18 but we didn't receive money until fiscal 19. The State offers a program where Medicaid will only pay a certain amount of your bill which isn't even close to what we charge; however, they pay that amount because it's a state program. They created another program to help reimburse ambulance services for lost revenue that they were unable to collect through the Medicaid reimbursement. You fill out a bunch of paperwork with the cost to run your service and they give you a fraction of that money back for your Medicaid only calls. That money will go into the general ambulance revenue just like the other column does.

Mr. Goncalves: Next year you'll get over the 2 million with the estimated.

Chief Pease: That's estimated with a 3% growth on what we received this last fiscal year. With the call increases it's typically 3%. That's a pretty conservative figure for next year which will leave you an $80,000 increase over last year's revenue, which was a little higher than the year before. I'm also asking for a reclassification. We have 2 admins in the department. One admin primarily does a lot of the fire stuff; however, their jobs both intertwine. At this point in time, they can both do each other's jobs. That wasn't always the case in the fire department. We have cross trained them both to operate in both their capacity. What I'm asking to do is to make them as an equal classification because they can each do each other's job. I think it's very important to have some redundancy. God knows something could happen tomorrow and somebody else needs to take their job. For a period of time years ago, one of them couldn't even take a Monday off because she was the only one who could do payroll. Don't ask me why but that was a different time. They both can do each other's jobs. They're both trained in the same expertise level. You have made this change throughout many offices in this building already so I'm asking for a little parity. They can both do each other's jobs so I think it's warranted at this point.

Mr. Silva: If they're doing the same job…

Chief Pease: They're not doing the same job daily, they're able to complete each other's tasks if one of them needs help or one is absent. They spend no idle time there. Julie primarily focuses on the ambulance service. Originally that was a lot of billing stuff and she does verify all the billing stuff before it goes to our agency that does the collection. She spends a lot of time verifying all the information that goes over there so we get the maximum of our return back. She also manages the subscription program, all of our licensure. We're in a big Medicare audit right now, which there's a substantial amount of work that she's doing for that right now. Both of them are busy all day. Their capacity has reached the same level so I don't see why one should get more than the other just because the jobs were originally created like that. It helps the department through Covid and all the other stuff we've been through to have some redundancy for somebody to be able to step into that position and do it without skipping a beat is something that we've never had before. And the parity with everybody else around Town.

Mr. Gennette: Thank you for the information and we'll take it into advisement.

Chief Pease: If you need any more information or statistics or have any questions I'm available at any time.

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6:10 p.m. – Veterans – To discuss requested position (Admin)

Mr. Segundo: I'm looking to obtain a full-time person to assist me at the Veterans Center. Currently, right now I have a part time 18-hour person coming in 3 days a week at 6 hours. That leaves me 2 days by myself at the center. In preparing for this, the telephone log system that we have from October 22 to present the call center had 3,299 calls, which 1,200 of them were voicemails. On an average day we have 37 calls, as well as the food pantry. Everything I'm going to tell you right now I'm not complaining. I love what I do. I love the support that's out there that we continue to give to veterans and I'm willing to give more of myself to make it happen but I need some help. For the food pantry we went from 30 families downstairs and we're serving 360 families. We get over 200 people through the veterans center a week through the food pantry. We started the veteran's dental clinic, we've got the veterans lunches, even something as simple as cleaning. We don't have a custodian so the cleaning and the bathrooms and trash all falls on us to do. Me and the part timer. The main problem is when I'm sitting with a client doing a veterans claim or intake process and someone comes in through the door I have to stop what I'm doing to go answer the door. In addition to the State Chapter 115 program which I administer, we currently have an average of 36 clients, these are case management cases, not just benefits, programs, certifications and monthly entering the bills to get them paid each month. In addition to that we do VA Federal claims. So far I have done 65 Federal claims. Each claim can take anywhere from 45 minutes to 2 hours to do. That doesn't include the additional uploading paperwork. I asked for a veteran's center and I'm ok but I think the need is there now that I need someone to help me out at least with the day to day in the center and answering the phones. We have our own separate website. We had 1,300 visits in the last 30 days just on the website alone. From that leads to a phone call which leads to an appointment which leads to a lot of work. That's where I'm at. To add to that, our center closes at 12:00 on Fridays. Since April when we opened I have not left that center at 12:00. We stay open to catch up on the work. I'm there some Saturdays and Sundays.

Mr. Silva: What you're doing is tremendous. Are we taking veterans from all the areas around and that is why the load is really getting tremendous? If that's the case is there any kind of revenue we can get from elsewhere? Whether it be the Veterans Administration to accommodate some of this?

Mr. Segundo: When we opened the center we don't turn any veteran away, and the food pantry we are signed up with the food bank which 99% of the food is absolutely free but with that we cannot restrict certain people from coming to the center. When we did open that did happen. We were able to get State grant funding. This year we got $50,000 from Senator Oliveira's office. We're hoping to get that increased now that we have actual numbers to show that. That was just support for the new center. Now we're hoping to get more State funding for that. A lot of the claim funding stuff that we do is local veterans, all Ludlow stuff. I don't turn any veteran away needing help. We try to accommodate as much as we can. I don't put non-residents in front of a Ludlow resident. Ludlow residents always have first priority on what I do. We're hoping in the future with State monies will support us and I think having the numbers that we have over just the last 6 months supports that. I'll ask you as well to make that phone call to the Senator and the State Rep.

Mr. DeBarge: I said at the Town meeting when the precinct members voted to approve this that I was optimistic that we would have an annual earmark from the State. During the meeting, I didn't know Senator Oliveira was in the back of the meeting and he was texting me saying that he put it in so we have that. I'll just say this. I'm optimistic. It doesn't mean it's going to happen. I'm optimistic that the numbers, if you just go by there the numbers that will show we'll get more from the State. You can't be a Senator and State Rep going around calling a center regional without supporting that financially better than just $50,000 annually. We're hoping that happens.

Mr. Gennette: When people come in from outside the community and they need some assistance and they know that you are, Springfield must have veteran's services, Chicopee must have veteran's services, do we say you've got to check with those guys first?

Mr. Segundo: A lot of the benefits that they seek are municipal funded or municipal services so they have to go to them to get those services. When it comes to the food pantry, when it comes to connecting them to the VA to get them enrolled in a VA facility or claims assistance we'll help them as much as we can. We don't turn them away but again a lot of this stuff gets referred out. Then we become a handoff to the VSO of that community whereas the veteran just walking into their office.

Mr. Gennette: That's what I expected. I was just jumping off of Mr. Silva's question.

Mr. Segundo: You'd be surprised. Mr. DeBarge has been there. We have veterans that lived here all their lives that are now just coming because there's a veteran's center. They come in and say they've never gotten any benefits over the last 30 years. I've lived here all my life. It's opening up where people are seeking the services they've never seeked before. VA benefits in this Town is almost at $700,000 that comes back into the community. The more claims we do and more compensation on the Federal level that's more money that comes into the veterans that then spend it.

6:20 p.m. – COA – To discuss requested positions (Admin Asst & Asst Director, Clerk & Dispatcher)

Ms. Zepke: I gave you guys the job descriptions for 2 different positions and then I gave you a packet of information. On the front it explains the things that I've asked for and then there's the backup information of why. I'm asking for a reclassification of the clerk position from a LATOSS 2 to a LATOSS 3. This should have been done last year and it wasn't. I was more concerned about getting more hours for this position so I'm just trying to bring it up to where it should be. The second one is a reclassification for the dispatch position from a LATOSS 2 to a LATOSS 3. This position in the new building has exploded with responsibilities. This position now does so much more than in the old building. Transportation has exploded as well; therefore, he is doing more with the schedules, pitches in driving and does a lot of the hands-on stuff in the Senior Center.

Mr. Goncalves: So, we're reclassifying the clerk even though it's costing us $1,000 in salary, why are we now picking up benefits? She's benefited already? So that's out?

Ms. Zepke: So, it's an increase of $1,000 a year?

Mr. Goncalves: $1,096.

Ms. Zepke: My 3rd request is to un-fund the program coordinator position and to create and fund an assistant director position. The program coordinator now is pretty much the assistant director. Most centers don't have an activities assistant and a program coordinator. They're kind of the same person so just trying to turn that person into the assistant director. In the new building a lot more supervisory stuff. She knows all the stuff that I know, how to take care of the building, does all of the facilities stuff and we're just trying to create a succession plan to follow along with the Town's succession planning. I know we're not supposed to talk about people, it's about the position, but that person in that position has brought us a tremendous amount of grant money as well. We're really lucky to have that person. My final request is to create and fund, I have administrative assistant here, it's listed as a senior clerk, I don't really know the name for it. Basically, I need someone to run my front desk full time. Right now, we have a 25-hour a week part-time and a whole host of volunteers who are all fantastic but we need some continuity at the front desk. We have 400 people coming through the doors before noon and I have 1 person and a volunteer trying

to service all these people. We don't have computers at the front desk right now. We need to modernize and computerize our front desk and I need somebody full-time in order to do that. From all the different graphs, as you can see, the growth, the first graph was Covid but you can see the growth in all the different areas of the senior center. If you look at the events sign in you have the old building vs. the new building. When the building opened within 6 months we had almost 1,600 different people come through our doors. You have 40,000 sign ins within 6 months. Right now, we are ahead of last year's numbers so we are an extremely busy place.

Mr. Goncalves: You've done almost as much through 10 months this year as all of last year.

Ms. Zepke: I put the calendars in here just so you can see the differences in the years. If you look at 2018 and 2023 you can see the differences in the amount of activity that we have going on at the center. I have added (1) 19-hour a week position to help out. We are doing 125% increase in everything that we're doing.

Mr. DeBarge: The person in front now is paid by…?

Ms. Zepke: It's paid for by a formula grant which is from the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

Mr. DeBarge: So, you'd keep that position as the 2nd person with this new position?

Ms. Zepke: I would keep that person until that person is ready to leave us. I wouldn't have to replace that. I could use volunteers after. I wouldn't be coming back looking for a 2nd person.

Resident 1: Think about how many people go through that building on a daily basis. I've always said it's the most active building in the entire Town.

Resident 2: In addition to that, I've been on the COA for the last few years and I've visited all the senior centers in the area and nobody compares to ours. As far as the activity level, participation level and the lunches. Chicopee on a good day has 130. We on a good day have 249.

Ms. Zepke: Chicopee has 31 staff at their senior center. I have 12.

Resident 3: Without computerizing the scheduling it's really difficult for people that attend. We have a lot of people that are standing there in line. You could really improve the accuracy and streamline things. We have these paper books that people are writing their names in and erasing. It could be so much more streamlined and efficient by having somebody computerize and you can't do that with a lot of different volunteers. You could have 1 person to organize and oversee it and we could probably train some people but it's really difficult communicating and making sure the same message gets out to people when you have different people every day. It gets hectic at that front desk with that many people.

Mr. Goncalves: Better than half our population is over 50 years old.

Ms. Zepke: The thing to remember at the senior center is that most of my budget is staff. In FY24, our general expenses were $103,000. That's nothing. Basically, what that pays for is $75,000 of that is food for the nutrition program. Gas is my 2nd largest item. Every program and activity in that senior center is not paid for by the Town. It is paid for by grants, donations, volunteers, the Friends subsidizes a lot of our classes as well. We really do a lot with nothing. I'm super proud of that but I'm also super proud of the fact that the Town has invested in the senior center because it's doing exactly what we hoped it would. We're so busy.

Mr. Gennette: I liked your request for a van at Capital Planning. You were looking for a van with a lift and it was going to be $130,000 but you guys were going to cover $90,000 of it. It's kind of hard for the Town to not pony up 25% of the cost if the senior center is going to come up with the other 75%. That's pretty unbelievable.

Ms. Zepke: We did not get a $25,000 grant, so it would have been $5,000 for the Town but unfortunately it's going to be about $30-$35,000.

Mr. Gennette: I think we're going to be able to make that work.

Mr. DeBarge: Out of all the departments it is one of the most efficient departments I've seen with the amount of traffic through that building. Sometimes I get to do the coffee hour but I did get to sit the desk the other day. I was strictly told you don't touch phones, you have this clipboard, you sign people in and be quiet except the greeting part.

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Ms. Zepke: I am super lucky that I have fantastic staff. I don't know why they come to work every day. There are some days they are amazing. I have amazing volunteers. We have 130 volunteers. We couldn't do it without them.

6:30 p.m. – Joint BOS/School Committee – FY25 Budget Updates

Mr. Gennette: We decided a little while ago to do quarterly meetings. This is that meeting. We have had the Chairman of the Board meetings. I have been meeting with Mr. Laing and Marc has been in, FinCom has been in, Mr. Tiano has been in so some of this stuff is already known to me.

Mr. Strange: What we did was try to put together a high-level summary of what our numbers look like after the level 1's have been submitted. The level 1's are essentially all the requests from all the departments. What you're seeing here is raw data from all the requests from our Town departments. As a quick primer, in terms of how much revenue, how much the budget can increase year to year we're really limited by prop 2 ½. Prop 2 ½ says you take the prior year levy limit, which for fiscal 25 is $49,887,699 and you multiply that by 2 ½ %. That's your limit as to how much you can increase the tax revenue. That amount for fiscal 25 is 1.25 million or so. In addition to that you can tack on new growth. Last year's fiscal 24 new growth was actually quite high, $946,700. That's because we had 2 large solar arrays come online, which helped us. That's a little bit of an anomaly over the past 5 years. What we've done is taken the 5-year average of new growth and that's the number you see there, $571,395 for a total of 1.8 million. The other 2 potential sources of revenue that could increase is local receipts and State aid. We took a look at the trend in our local receipts and the increases year over year have not been that big so we decided to keep the level funds in terms of this evaluation. Also, if we increased that estimate we're going to be decreasing our free cash that's available for fiscal 25 and as you know we use free cash to fund our capital program. Lastly, our state aid has been increased about 1% a year on average over the past 5 years, so kind of the same approach; estimating a level fund for State aid. We're assuming we'll get more State aid this year than we did in fiscal 24 but typically those funds will drop into free cash. At least that's the plan. At any time, interrupt me. I do not like to drone on. I'm better at answering questions so if you have any questions please feel free to interrupt me at any time. In addition to the 1.8 million dollars, what we're looking at in terms of how much the budget can increase we took a snap shot of the big cost centers for the Town and that is our retirement contributions for both the Town and school and our Treasurer/Collector used a 5-year average to determine how much the increases are going to be for both the Town and school and you'll see that's a $200,000 increase for both sides. We've also estimated a 10% or so increase in health insurance premiums. Our broker is MIIA and they came in early in the fall and told us that their average increase they're anticipating for fiscal 25 is 8-9%. Last year it was 6%. The way it works is if your loss runs are below average then your increase is below average. If your loss runs are above average obviously your increase is above average. At that point we were running above our loss runs, which means we had people out with surgeries or illnesses to cover the health insurance. We think that 10% is a worst-case scenario for the health insurance. We're hoping that it comes in at 8%, which would free up about $200,000, which is still not that much in terms of where we are but it would certainly help. The same thing with the retirement contributions. We're hoping that comes in less than that. Even if it does that was certainly help but that won't get us to where we need to be. In addition to retirement and health insurance, our trash contract is the next lowest hanging fruit in terms of contractual obligations that we have. Our trash service is going to be increasing by $143,573 this year. That's contractual. There's not much we can do about that. Then our contractual town salary increases are about $377,000. If you add up those 3 cost centers we're already over the 1.8 million dollars that we can go up in our budget. We put together a side by side of fiscal years 24 and 25 to show the total town budget with enterprise funds and the increased town budget with the general fund and the overall increase for the full town budget. In fiscal 24 it was 4.4%, fiscal 25 is 6.1 obviously with the excess capacity number that I'll go over in a minute. We're going to have to bring that down. There's no question about it. School budget for fiscal 24 was $35,949,944, which was about 46% of the total town budget and for fiscal 25 we're looking at $37,028,442 and that represents a 3% increase. Right now, it's 45% of our town budget. That number will likely increase once we decrease the total budget, which we're going to have to do because as you can see we are 2.6 million dollars over our capacity at this point. That

includes all the town's new positions and reclassifications. All those expenses are in that figure. Obviously we're going to have to make some decisions on those requests. That's certainly one place where we'll be able to lower that number. We can hope for lower retirement contribution and health insurance increases than the ones that we just went over. We'll know those at the end of January. These are brainstorming options that I wanted to put down and offer for everybody's consideration. Increasing user fees. We've talked about internally with departments about increasing our fees for permits and certificates, trash, recycling center stickers, pretty much anywhere we could potentially raise a little bit more revenue without totally harming users. If we look at how our fees compare to other towns that will certainly inform whatever decisions we make in terms of the user fees. Lastly, we're going to have to go back through all of the departmental budgets on the town side and wherever possible have those departments' level funded on all non-contractual line items. That's a high level, quick overview. I tried to make it as simple as possible so it was digestible. At this point I would certainly open it up for questions, comments, concerns and happy to answer any questions from the Board or School Committee.

Mr. Gennette: As far as contractual obligations, this is a level budget considering contractual obligations?

Mr. DeBarge: No, the new positions are in there too.

Mr. Strange: That's everything that every department requested.

Mr. Dias: Is that 2.5% increase against the tax rate or revenue?

Mr. Strange: Revenue. Every year there's a levy limit. You basically take whatever the levy was from the previous year and add 2 ½ % to that. There's 2 larger provisions in prop 2 ½ and that's the one that impacts us year to year. You cannot raise the tax revenue more than 2 ½ percent.

Mr. Goncalves: Without an override at Town meeting.

Mr. Dias: I'm familiar with that part. I thought it was just the rate.

Mr. Goncalves: It's the total levy increases and then it trickles down through the collections and some homes will increase in value, some will lower in value. Amongst the whole base it's got to add up to that amount. You could have a home that goes up 3-4-5% and you could have others that decrease. It's the total levy that 2 ½ % max.

Mr. Tiano: Very similar to Marc Strange we put some numbers in front of you hopefully in an easy-to-read fashion. Our attempt here as well is to address some questions that this board has had in the past and also at your request at the end we put in school funds that have been turned back to the town. The first graph has to do with our enrollment. You can see through years 2020 through 2024 this is pulled right from our student database from our person in IT who does the State reporting. Our projections as of right now for our grade level students for next year. I note at the bottom this is before the school committee has voted on going forward on school choice. These are our numbers as we are taking our students from grade 3 and projecting them to grade 4 and so forth and so on. Our projected enrollment for right now is 2,185 students. On the bottom left where is says per pupil expenditure, this is the latest data from the department of elementary and secondary education website 2021. We've talked here in the past about our per pupil expenditure and I've matched that along with the state and it seems this town has been below the state average in terms of per pupil expenditure at least going back to 2017-2021. The last time we were at this table we also spoke about school choice students and these are the current number of students the school committee has voted and allows up to 107 students per school year. As you folks know, school choice is the allowance of a student from one town to go to school in another town. The receiving town has to vote to participate in that program. The money received by the receiving town is done through the Cherry Sheets. It's $5,000/student. I note here that school choice seats are never approved at grade levels where we would have to add teachers and I think that has come up in conversation. The example I've given recently is if we have 17 students in our third-grade classes and we add 5 students and we have 6 classrooms, you'll have 5 classrooms of 18 and 1 class of 17, not an additional teacher. In talking with other folks, they were looking at the per pupil expenditure and subtracting the $5,000 that we receive it looks like a loss of $13,000, which is not the case. I just wanted to be able to share that with you as well.

Mr. Gennette: If you have 89 students that are school choice going to other towns does that mean we're taking in 89 students.

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Mr. Tiano: No, these are the kids that are coming in.

Mr. Gennette: How many are we sending out?

Mr. Tiano: I don't have that number. I believe it evens out but Sue may not have that at the top of her head. The next chart is questions that we have had at this table and looking at the percent of the town budget. We calculated rounding up to 47% currently for FY24, Mr. Strange had 46%, and that's appropriate for the size of our district. In terms of some surrounding towns, I pulled a few and averaged them out. I took the town budget from Agawam and divided by the school budget. When we talk about increases and dollar amounts and the school is 47%, it's within range there. The next section looking at funding percent increases for both the school and the town what I did was took the town meeting vote, the final approved budget and looked at the percent by all the town departments where the schools are 47% the town as a whole is 53% and on average the school increase over the last 5 years has been 2.88%, on average 53% of the budget has been 4.33%. By department, for our own curiosity looking at some of the major departments there, I didn't include police dispatchers but just looking at the increases over the last 5 years, and this will be relevant when we come to the next page, has averaged about 2.88%. On the 2nd page, as you were discussing the town budget you were talking about level service contractual obligations as well as additions. For the schools right here, you have broken out the general fund appropriation, as you know that's a combination of the town's share vs Chapter 70 state aid. For several years, our increase in state aid was .003% and last year that bumped up to .3%. The changes going across the bottom averages 2.88%. When you look at the maroon number, that's the number that's below level service budget for the following fiscal year. As you folks know, level service, we share this with the committee all the time, if we were to bring back all of our staff, all of our programming, no changes, not going forward but just to stay the same, we turn that over and there are fixed costs, contractual obligations and when you are below that level service budget you are reducing. As you can see, going from year to year that compounds. When you look at FY23 the school committee, instead of reducing positions, and you'll see this right below, decided to use one-time funds to back fill and make up for that delta between level service and the actual appropriation. Recent school reductions, again just sharing numbers with you, FY23 14 positions were reduced and 9 were added back specifically around requirements or mandated positions and the committee used one-time funds. Last year for FY24 as we built the budget for this current year's budget we were 1.5 million below level service budget and that equated to 20.7 positions. On the 3rd page you see every single one of those positions. Going forward, we're looking at our estimated fixed costs. With our salaries, we have 6 collective bargaining agreements and a variety of individual contracts and each one has their own nuances to them. As teachers move through the salary scale if they're a 2nd year teacher they can go to a step to a 3rd year teacher. We have columns for master's degree and so forth. Kathy and her team have painstakingly looked at what each staff member from custodian and kitchen workers to teachers would be next year including ones who are expected to earn another graduate degree and move into those lanes. Right now, she is still moving through those with a couple of bargaining units right now and it's 1.7 million dollars. Out of district tuition, we're estimating is $192,000. If you recall last year, the state, the OSD, sets the rate that private tuition schools can raise their price and last year was over 14%, whereas the previous decade had been no more than 2%. They brought it down to 4.2%, which still hurts but it's better than the 14% last year. As we've talked in the past, for out of district tuition this is a fluid number in terms of students. We may pull back in the district and save that money or other students may require services outside of our immediate school district. Transportation, we're estimating about $224,000. This includes not only our big yellow buses but this is also our special education transportation and our homeless transportation and our transportation for Smith Vocational and putting all those pieces together. This is also the last year of moving the ESSR funds, the grant funding one-time funds into our operating budget so we'll start -$400,000 next year in terms of when you take away that $400,000 that is baked into our budget. Right now, our total estimated FY25 increases for a level service budget is 2.5 million. This is just contractual obligations and not the kitchen sink. When we work with our administrators, and again we reduced thoroughly and skillfully our school department last year by 20 positions, we focused our strategic planning on where we're going to allocate our human resources for next year. Our administrators, as they build the budget they are playing defense. They're trying not to go backwards as opposed to putting together plans to really take our schools to the next level for our students and parents. The last block, Kathy Demetrius, our business manager worked closely with Shawn, your town accountant, to go back, they could

only go back 3 years and I know the request from the Board was 5 years of money turned back to the town. You can see there FY21, $23,000 last year $300,000. I know some school districts spend that down to the penny. As we've talked before it's a lot of money as we forecast where we need to be it's difficult because you're building it now for a year and a half from now. We froze our budget last year in November because as Kathy and I transitioned from the outsourced business department we wanted to make sure that we weren't overspending. We adjusted all of our lines and reconfigured those. There was a savings there and so we turned it back to the town. Those are the numbers.

Mr. Goncalves: Thank you this is great information. Looking at the 2nd page on top the budget comparison, 21-22 and 22-23, how much of that bottom maroon line is ESSR money that didn't exist in 20 or 21? How many millions off the top of your head? It's kind of unfair where you want us to keep a level service budget going forward those 2-3 years when we're competing with a pot of 4-5-6 million that was dropped in your lap and now we've somehow got to make up for that as we're going along.

Mr. Tiano: From my research and having not been here, as that money had come in a lot of it went into operating budget, so there wasn't a huge influx of hiring 30 people because we have a pot of money, it was staff that initially when Covid first came for the cleaners and additional cafeteria workers and we had this conversation the last time, there's a group of people that were hired with this money and now they're able to be let go. That's not the case. In terms of coming short of a level service budget my predecessors I'm assuming…

Mr. Goncalves: I don't know. Maybe the ESSR money is not in here because I'm not seeing it. You've got the town share, then Chapter 70 and the general fund appropriation, the ESSR would be above and beyond that. Where we look like we were short 1.1 million we actually had 2-3 million of ESSR money.

Mr. Tiano: Our overall operating budget is general fund plus additional funding like circuit breaker, school choice, grants, title 1, title 2 and so forth. In terms of the ESSR funds being used during that time, Kathy and I can find in terms of what they were used for. I know as I had gone back through presentations and still even with the ESSR funds looking at some reductions for parts of the school department. Again, this is my archaeological digging.

Mr. Goncalves: This is all early in the process just things to think about.

Ms. Demetrius: These grants that he's talking about, all of our titles and the ESSR, those are funds in addition to the general fund.

Mr. Goncalves: For instance, in 22 it looked like we were 1.1 million short of staying level but in all actuality there was 2-3 million coming in from other sources or ESSR money available?

Ms. Demetrius: They're earmarked for very specific things.

Mr. Goncalves: Not in the budget?

Ms. Demetrius: Our actual budget last year was 34 million of general fund appropriation but our actual budget and need is closer to 39 million. It's a completely different number. We know that we're going to get funds from title. I don't know the numbers from the previous years off the top of my head but the $400,000 that he talks about below is because that's what we are using in addition to the general fund appropriation that we won't have next year. We'll still have the titles. The other thing I would add is I came in as the assistant business manager in the early start of the ESSR and I remember a lot of the funds were used for things that wouldn't be needed another year. We did a lot of HVAC upgrades to the middle school. That type of expenditure.

Mr. Goncalves: We did hire how many people?

Ms. Demetrius: I don't know that off the top of my head.

Mr. Tiano: For a concrete example, including the $400,000 of ESSR money built into this current FY24 operating budget we were still 1.5 million from level service. That includes that $400,000 in there.

Mr. Goncalves: Maybe you can get it over to Marc and he can share it with us. In addition to the Chapter 70, can you get us all the other money that's coming in? Federal money coming in? One and 2? Just so we can get an idea what that bottom number actually looks like.

Mr. Tiano: Absolutely. Do we have this year's numbers online for them?

Ms. Demetrius: The total number is. It's not broken down. If you go on the website it has all of our line items and at the bottom it will tell you, there's 3 columns for FY24 and one of them is what is our need. The big number is the need. What are we going to get from the town and what are we going to use for grants and ESSR? A few of our revolving accounts. We bring in money for pre-k for example so we'll use a little bit of that to pay for part of a teacher's salary. That's in the 3rd column.

Mr. Goncalves: Anything else that is income.

Mr. Tiano: Absolutely. On our budget page on our website, you'll be able to find a summary of the proposed FY24 budget and when you look at the alternative funding you'll be able to see exactly the list and what it would be used for and traditionally what it's been used for.

Mr. DeBarge: I appreciate the graph. It's great information. To the lay person, I am very confused about some of this, to the lay person looking at the numbers, 2.88% on an average for an increase each year, average being now Ludlow schools would be 47%, 47% is the average according to your graph, here's the thing I don't understand. If the 2.88% is generally average, the 47% is generally average because we couldn't do 5% every year right?

Mr. Tiano: Are you saying that 2.88 is average for the town?

Mr. DeBarge: Average increase for the school.

Mr. Tiano: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: 2.88% average increase, 47% which shows it's the average among the communities that you gave us yet the catch phrase that I have a problem with is last year we need 1.9 million dollars to be level service. Now you're up to last year 4.3% and your ask was 1.5 million and you got 4.3%. This is the part I don't understand. If police and fire or council on aging came in…let's say police. If Chief Valadas came in and said based on the need, we need 1.5 million dollars because the need for Ludlow is 10 detectives, 30 sergeants, 6 lieutenants and 45 patrolmen and we say we can't do that, this is what we can do. We can give you this much of an increase in your budget for these positions. Generally, since I've been a selectman that's kind of how it's done. This is what we can give you this is what you have to deal with. Over the course of time, and this is the way the lay person, at least the way I look at it, how can this be explained other than mis management of budget? I know you just got here. I'm talking about before you. I remember the previous superintendent any time he was told you're getting a 2-2.5-3 % increase his answer usually was we can make that work. That's what I heard and that's what I heard from our town administrator. I don't understand after 3%, 2.9%, 2.7%, 1.4% anybody that does budgets can look at that and say that's below the average but maybe under the circumstances there's a reason why, and then of course 4.3. What I'm looking to explain is your need for level service now is 2.5. Obviously that can't happen with the numbers. Can you explain to me how it's not mismanagement of funds?

Mr. Tiano: This budget when we talk about level service is not our need. That's the floor. That's just to re-do what we're doing this year.

Mr. DeBarge: Need is perspective, right?

Mr. Tiano: No, need is based on the needs of the children in front of us. Need is based on where you want your achievement scores to be, your student growth scores. Need is where you need to be to provide services for our families and our students. We look at the folks that are coming through the door and how we provide our services for them and within the goals of the school committee in terms of class size. This is not our need. This is the floor.

Mr. DeBarge: How did the floor get to be so high?

Mr. Tiano: I would go back a few years. We've spent a lot of time looking at this. If you go back to FY21 and you're below level service so you're at $286,000. Those are reductions that are being made or backfilled with one-time monies. As you move to the next year you still have that hole and now it compounds.

Mr. DeBarge: I don't know of any community or any leader that I've ever talked to, and it's not like I talk to a ton of them so I'm sure you can find some, that if they got 2.94 in FY21 and that wasn't enough and then it leapfrogged to 1.1 million in FY22, Marc do you know of any communities that go from 2.94 up to 7% and then the next year level off at 5% so the needs are met? To get you where you need to be, what's the percent of 2.5 million?

Mr. Tiano: About 7%.

Mr. DeBarge: Then next year, if you have 7% here that would get you to your 2.5 and then what would you need next fiscal year?

Mr. Tiano: Whatever our contractual obligations would be at that time.

Mr. DeBarge: It seems untenable. And that's the problem I'm having. I can't wrap my head around that.

Mr. Tiano: It's definitely an issue. That goes without saying. That's why we're grateful that we're here with you folks. When you look at percent increases, and I'm not sure if you've done this and I haven't, but to look at across the Commonwealth, and I shared some information with the committee, that school committees are asking for 6-5-4% because the needs have changed in terms of what we're providing for our students. I would look broadly across the state but I don't have that number. For myself, I don't compare these percent increases and I would need to compare them to other districts and their needs.

Mr. Rosenblum: Can you explain to me foundation budgeting? From what I understand, by 2027 school districts are going to get more funding by the new formula based on about 4-5 criteria. Also, when going through DESE I can see it's obviously like the census, you can be 1-2-3 years behind based on data. Expenditures in 2020 were close to 46 million. With foundation budgeting, from what I understand looking forward to 24 the funding from Chapter 70 is about 14 million, which you have. There's also another 3 million dollars from unrestricted government aid to the town and then those numbers they're trying to close the gap between municipalities and what the state's funding. Is that going to help at all down the road? Like Mr. DeBarge is saying, when you get 3 and you ask for 4 your increase is actually higher because you're compounding based on what you've made or you've been given the year before. The expenditure portion of it, when I'm pulling reports and looking at them saying 46 million, and I can see our enrollment has gone down about 11%. Right now, my head is swirling. I could say about 22 things. Foundation budgeting. From what I understand that's basically how you really look at how your district compares and how the funding comes in. Can you explain that better to me?

Mr. Tiano: Perhaps Kathy can jump in but to describe foundation funding in the formula that's used it's not an equitable formula. That's why prior to last year our increase was .0003% over 5 years. Last year our student demographics went into a different percentile so I think we received .03% increase unlike your gateway cities that receive a majority of funding from the state as opposed to municipalities. Apry from communities here in Western Mass, rural and suburban districts is that the money never funnels to us in the middle. We're not rich enough, we're not poor enough. In terms of the funding changes coming in 2027, I'm not hanging my hat on that or hoping that's going to be a windfall for us if history is any indication.

Ms. Demetrius: The only thing I would add about it is there are people that are working on it, lobbying, to fix it. It's an old process and there's not many people in the industry that would disagree that it needs some work. The biggest problem with it, like he said but wording it differently, is those towns that are poor do well with a foundation budget. The towns that are wealthy don't get a lot from the foundation budget, but they're wealthy. Their towns can make up a much larger difference. It's towns like Ludlow right in the middle that aren't getting a lot. They're not the poorer towns and also don't have the extra wealth from the town to help close that gap. There are people working on it. Whether it will happen in 2027 I haven't heard but they're optimistic.

Mr. Rosenblum: Based on numbers, we're below the middle. We're about 111 out of 318. We talked about it at our last meeting. When we look at our assessed home values about $275,000, we're actually close to the bottom third. One last thing is I made a mention to a past chairman, and this isn't singular to Ludlow because it happens in just about every school department, but nobody knows where money goes. It can go from line item to line item and nobody knows. I made a comment that there should be a part of your agenda that says when you're going to do some kind of substantial line item transfer, and I work with Munis all the time and I have to go through 5 people to get money moved, you should have an agenda item that says if you're going to move $20,000 from this line item to this line item there should be an agenda item so at least your committee knows where it's going to and why so it's a little bit more transparent. A lot of school departments this is how it works. We found money out of a 2014 purchase order that was encumbered that was still sitting there. Something like that helps out because if everybody else does it doesn't mean that we have to. I know that when we have a charter committee and when that starts looking at how we're going to form either a town manager or mayor I know I want someone sitting on the school committee because I think there needs to be better eyes on it. Again, it's not this board or school department, it's in general. When I look at August 23rd and see $588,000 still sitting between encumbered funds and remaining budget and we get $300,000 back to me there could be a very good explanation for it. Where did that extra money go? In some instances, in your fiscal 24 budget, you might need some of that money to offset short things there.

Mr. Tiano: That's illegal to take FY23 money and move it into FY24.

Mr. Rosenblum: I understand that but how can we get a purchase order and get money from that that was encumbered that's still sitting there? It's not here, it's the grand picture. We can't see the money. We want it to be that we work together.

Mr. Tiano: Our budgeting process for last year. When Kathy and I came in and there's always how do we go through our process we put our administrators through. We really tightened up how they budget. Budgeting is forecasting. On our website, when you look at 300-line items there are hundreds of pages of what is being spent. We had budget meetings where we had each principal in and each department and on the screen we're looking at where did you get that number. You want to buy bulletin boards. Go out and get the price of it and that's what you're spending and then we decide where we're going to budget. It's down to that fine detail. This year as people flipped over July to the fiscal year, Kathy was not only going through in Munis, she was going through the budget book that said no, you were going to buy 10 of these and now you want to buy 12. That level of detail is there but I hear what you're saying. I've been in districts where if you budget right you shouldn't be transferring a lot. Incidentals like the price went up on whatever the principal was purchasing and that's something we've discussed with our school committee.

Mr. Rosenblum: Sometimes when you get to May and there are line items short but you have ones that you're going to be able to save and that's when you make that transfer. I think you can do it with our town budget. We get to a certain time and we can transfer money between line items and departments when we can see a short fall. And to your point, we got $23,000 back a few years ago, we got $213, now we got $300. Obviously something is working. It's not me coming over the top on anybody, the business department or committee, it's just saying the question is Board of Selectmen, Town of Ludlow, how much money can you give us but the question never is from anybody in town how is it being spent.

Mr. Tiano: You can see that now.

Mr. Rosenblum: That's what I'm saying. The transparency of things. We talk about communication and transparency and that's where we're trying to get to and you're getting there.

Mr. Tiano: It's all on the website.

Ms. Bowler: At one of our recent meetings, they made a comment about our budget being right there and it being extremely transparent.

Mr. Rosenblum: I'm saying it's getting better but there's certain items that could be…When I go through Munis I have to go through procurement, pre-audit, down the line to have $3,000 moved.

Ms. Demetrius: If there's a purchase order on our side from the school that's from 2014, I'm not saying it's impossible, it would either be from a grant because that money can carry over year-to-year, but 2014 is a pretty long time ago.

Mr. Rosenblum: That's the clarification I'm looking for too.

Ms. Demetrius: I think I was still the assistant business manager so at least a year and a half ago plus I was looking at some purchase orders and I ended up finding out there was tons of purchase orders still open from previous years that can never be spent. Basically, I'm guessing what would have happened was they either didn't get closed out at the end of the year when they should have or they were carried over and all the money wasn't spent. It could have been during the Covid years, I'm not going to guess what happened before I was there. I went through and closed them all. I talked to Kim about it but that's money that would have ended up landing in free cash. We do end our year with open purchase orders for various reasons. It's stuff we could have ordered through the year that's delayed. We could have been waiting for the last month's bills to come in. There are a couple of tuition people that take a while to get you the bills. One year we had an HVAC unit and the part wasn't coming in until the following January so that stayed on the books. Our goal is to clean them up. The only time we would have a purchase order stay open more than a year, and even then it should only be 2 maybe, is if it was a grant. Grants can go 2-3 years. We're trying to clean those up so I don't think there's many left. As to why we have funds left, there are costs that we can't 100% predict if they're going to be spent or how much. I think we did better last year than the year before and I think we'll be able to do even better this year because we did have some turnover in staff in a few places and we hope for that retention. I was also being conservative. I was working with somebody else's budget that I didn't create.

Mr. Goncalves: For next time we meet, our per teacher count is 10.1, students per teacher, is extremely low, this is all DESE, 10.1 which is a lot less than everybody surrounding us. Maybe you guys can enlighten me on that one. Our per pupil expenditure, Chicopee 15.7. Our per pupil expenditure in 2020 at $17,505, in Chicopee it was 15.7 per student. In Westfield it was 15.6 per student, West Springfield was 15.1 per student, Hampden-Wilbraham was 16.1, Northampton 15.3, Belchertown 14.5, South Hadley $15,000 even, Palmer 16.5, Monson spent about as much as us.

Ms. Bowler: When you're looking at those numbers you have to look at what those districts are that are the most comparable to Ludlow. A lot of those districts you're looking at are not the most comparable. The most comparable to Ludlow is Agawam.

Mr. Goncalves: I'd rather see those districts around me vs the state average because out towards Boston I'm sure the expenditure for teachers is $30,000 more than it is here.

Ms. Bowler: A lot of the ones that are equal to Ludlow are out towards Boston.

Mr. Goncalves: We can't compare the cost of living and what expenses are and what you're paying teachers and what health benefits cost out there vs here.

Ms. Bowler: That's how DESE does it.

Mr. Goncalves: Per pupil expenditure has nothing to do with the income or how much you're collecting. It's how much you're spending to educate each kid in the communities around us. We're a little bit more than most of them, a couple thousand a kid with 2,200-2,300 kids that's a lot of money. Maybe we can get a feel for what's costing us that much more than everybody else around us. I'm giving you time to think about it.

Mr. Tiano: As Sarah was mentioning, when you're on the DESE website that clicks on all of our comparable districts across the state. And they do that based on income.

Mr. DeBarge: Maybe it's DESE that's the problem.

Ms. Bowler: The more funding you cut and the services we have to look at cutting in Ludlow…Ludlow is known for its special education programs. We keep a lot of our kids in district. I don't know about the constituents you talk to but I know being on the school committee and the parents that talk to me are really concerned about the lack of programming we have within our

schools, the lack of languages, the lack of specials, the broad ability for students to broaden their minds in our schools because we've cut bare bones in their perspective. When we're looking at what we can cut next, at our last meeting we don't know where to cut. Then we have to look at our special education department because we built the special education department to keep kids in district. When you start looking at not educating kids within the district you're now looking at sending kids out of district. Now it's cheaper to educate your kids in your district because you're hiring a teacher and para to educate a group of kids as opposed to sending that one student to now a separate school where you're paying a tuition to that school, each kid is a tuition and transportation fee. If we can't have the teachers and programming within our district because we don't have the funds to accommodate those because now we're just having the bare minimum of what we can educate our students with then that costs more than educating within our district.

Mr. Goncalves: I understand you completely. What percentage of our budget is special ed?

Mr. Tiano: I don't have that off the top of my head.

Mr. Goncalves: I'm worried that we are going that direction and maybe there is an alternative, if it's 25% are the 75% suffering because we're throwing that much money at that program? And we need to know that. Longmeadow gets half the money we do in Chapter 70 so I'm going to guess we have twice the size of the program because the cost per student is fairly close. They got 7 million when we got 14.

Ms. Bowler: You can't compare Longmeadow to us because they have the money that we don't have.

Mr. DeBarge: Again, 47% is the average of all those communities. Are they going to their respective other half of the government? Are they in the same numbers as this? You're saying you're cutting down to bare bones at 47%, which is the average of communities that you provided.

Ms. Bowler: There are districts out there that the first thing the Board funds is their school department. They give their school department what they need and then they work around the rest of their budget.

Mr. Goncalves: Their per capita is $60-$70,000/person.

Ms. Bowler: That could be but what I'm seeing on here is that 45% was 47 and we're now looking at 45%. Am I reading this correctly?

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Mr. Strange: It is but that's raw data. The level 1 expenditures are going to come down and we're going to have to cut and that number will come back up.

Ms. Bowler: This is a conversation.

Mr. Goncalves: We're spending a couple thousand more a kid than most of the communities around us. We're getting a lot more money from Chapter 70 than most of the communities around us. We have a better student/teacher ratio than everybody around us and the money is not enough. Is it one of those things? Is it all of those together? Just looking for a little help to understand it better.

Mr. Tiano: We will provide that for you.

Mr. Silva: The salary increases. Is this year a higher percentage? Some of the contracts start low and they go up.

Mr. Tiano: It's 3% for next year. Last year was 2, the year before was 1.

Mr. Silva: So, this year the 3 is adding a little bit more so that hurts a little bit.

Mr. Tiano: Yes it does. Anytime you've raised your salary our budget is 75%, but when you look at we still have positions thar are unfilled and the competition for staff on the municipal side as well that you have staff are looking for increases. Next year will be the last year of our 3-year

contract with a lot of our staff so it's been a 1%-2%-3% and on the town side it's that as well or more.

Mr. Silva: Off the top of your head, do you have the number of employees you have?

Mr. Tiano: 460.

Mr. Laing: We do have staff that have left recently and we are unable to fill positions. It's in the public view what is happening. The things we go through each year as the town and school. Everyone knows. Finding good help could get harder and harder.

Mr. Stratton: I just want to reiterate that the budget that Dr. Tiano has been talking about is not looking to add people. It's just to keep the people we have. I heard last week from Maura Ricardi, a school adjustment counselor at East Street. She's one counselor in that entire school. When we say we're not sure where we're going to cut that's what we're talking about. If we're cutting things you're cutting whole services that are losing personnel. Now you're losing whole services. We're really at a critical point.

Mr. Gennette: Thanks everybody for that. That was a pretty good discussion. I want to talk about the town for a minute and address the things you bring up in the department increase. What's the fire department's budget off the top of your head?

Mr. Strange: 4 million.

Mr. Gennette: They're bringing in 2 million in ambulance funds. When you're trying to compare that to school you couldn't even begin to come to 50% of what they're bringing in for their budget. The senior center came in and they're looking for some mild positions because they can bring in a majority of those funds. My point is when you're looking at what the funding goes to these departments, they're bringing in a lot of money to help fund those positions and that's why you see those increases.

Mr. Tiano: We could provide those to you in terms of the grants and staff that are funded.

Mr. Gennette: That would be great. I think the economic climate really has us over a barrel here. Part of the problem is that Ludlow is 12th in the state in taxes.

Mr. Strange: Tax rate.

Mr. Rosenblum: Tax bill we're in the bottom third. We're below the halfway point.

Mr. Gennette: Which is a very weird position to be in overall. And we're trying to remedy that as well. With the economic cycle that we're in right now, we have the baby boomers that are retired and that's a big issue. If we keep hitting them as hard as we are, there's a mass exodus instead of a natural progression of people timing out of their homes, maybe giving it to their kids or grandkids and we get generational people in town, those kinds of things instead of a natural progression of people leaving their homes you create this mass exodus which creates a mass influx and you don't know what you're going to get. It's not that we don't want the turnover for people to come in and a younger generation to participate in what's going on but if you have a mass influx of that we turn it around. If you look at the cost of per child what the cost is and you match that up to property taxes it doesn't equate. We're over a barrel. If we keep pushing our seniors out you're going to have a real problem on your hands. Right now, you're decreasing your student population a small amount. It looks like you had one year that was up 19 but it looks like some of your younger grade is down from 133 to 125 but you stay kind of right in that range. If those numbers start going up, you haven't seen classroom sizes. You're going to start seeing classroom sizes. If we start pushing our seniors further out the door this is going to get worse. We need to figure out a comfortable balance along this board to try to figure out what isn't going to be detrimental to our seniors. There will be a time when the baby boomers have moved on and there's not as big a population that's retired. Maybe at that point it will be in the better interest to fully fund schools and push the agenda but right now we're trying keep seniors in their homes. It's a really big deal. I just wanted to put it out there because we've been talking about the school and I thought that it was important that we talk about the town as well and some of the struggles that we're faced with. Our DPW is struggling and this is the trash. Now you need more police, you start bringing in more bad elements and the

drugs are worse and all kinds of stuff. It compiles if we don't stay in control of it. I just wanted you guys to understand where I stood and that is firmly with the seniors. I'm not against the schools in any way, shape, or form. I would love to have the best schools on the planet but I have to take care of seniors right now. That's where I am. I don't know how the other members of the board feel but I felt it was important to put that out.

Mr. Dias: We have 460 is the head count for the school. What's the total town or town less the 460?

Mr. Gennette: 209.

Mr. Dias: With our employees at 460, that's more than double the rest of the town employees you can see where that...we're compounding our increases over increases from last year. Our cost of salaries are increasing and compounding as well. This year is a 3rd year where some of the agreed contracts are going up 3% instead of 2, it's even more so. When we compare 460 to 209.

Mr. Gennette: I think a lot of this went back to when the state upped minimum wage and they really kind of put the crunch on everybody.

Mr. Dias: Just some perspective on that topic.

CORRESPONDENCE

162. Chief Valadas – Notifying the Board of the retirement of Sergeant Michael J. Gilrein on December 8, 2023, and a request to fill the Police Sergeant's vacancy from the Active Civil Service List.

Mr. DeBarge: To our chairman, James Gennette from Chief Dan Valadas regarding retirement of Sgt. Michael J. Gilrein. Please be advised that I have received written notification from the Hampden County Regional Retirement Board and their receipt approval for public employee retirement administration commission and voluntary accidental. Sgt. Gilrein began his full-time service with the police department in May 1996 after appointment as a patrolman. He completed his MPTC recruit police academy in September 1996 and served in that capacity until his appointment to Sgt. in March 2015. During his career, Sgt. Gilrein served as patrol officer, bike patrol officer, motorcycle officer, as a member of the department's tactical response team and finally as a shift supervisor on the day shift. Sgt. Gilrein served the Ludlow Police Department and residents of Ludlow dutifully and honorably for over 27 years. He will be missed as a valued member of the department and we wish Sgt. Mike well in his retirement and the request to fill the spot. It's a big loss to the department. Mike got along with everybody. The thing I'll say most about him is he is even tempered in almost every situation we've been in. I've been in tactical training with him. He was an instructor with me and there is not many better people I've met. It's a huge loss to the department and him retiring means he can't be Chief somewhere and he'd make a real good leader. My best to you Mike.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to accept the retirement of Sgt. Michael Gilrein on December 8, 2023, and request to fill his vacancy to the active civil service list. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

163. Chief Valadas – Request to charge off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 11F for an injury sustained by a police officer as a result of an incident that occurred on December 6, 2023.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve charging 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 December 6, 2023. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0-1.**

164. Chief Pease – Request to charge of medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a firefighter/paramedic as a result of an incident that occurred on December 5, 2023.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve charging off medical expenses and lost wages to Chapter 41, Section 111F for an injury sustained by a firefighter/paramedic as a result of an

incident that occurred on December 5, 2023. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 4-0-1.**

162. Daniel Valadas, Chief of Police and David Irwin, Lieutenant notify the Board of the names of individuals being submitted for annual appointment as special police officers with the Ludlow Police Department effective January 1, 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves that the following officers be submitted for annual appointment as special police officers for the Town of Ludlow effective January 1, 2024. Seth M. Beal, David Belanger, Quashawn Branch, Justin Cruz, Joseph P Fontaine, James P. Harrington, Edward Hiney, Alan D. Kipetz, Joseph E. Metcalfe, Nelson Ramos, Steve N. Ramos, Fernando L. Ribeiro, Juan Rivera, Cory J. Rodrigues, Nelson Rodrigues, Troy J. Rubner and Armando J. Saraiva, Kyle Sorenson and Albert Witowsky. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

166. Danie Valadas, Chief of Police and David Irwin, Lieutenant requesting conditional appointment of three special police officers David Belanger, Kyle Sorensen and Quashawn Branch effective December 19, 2023.

Mr. Silva: What's the difference.

Mr. Goncalves: I think we're going to be appointing a new special officer to the police department special police. Mr. David R. Powers. **That was a motion. Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

UNFINISHED BUISNESS

Board to discuss and possibly vote to allow the Ludlow High School Swim Team to use the pool at the Ludlow Community Center Monday-Friday 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. for practices and 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. for home meets.

Mr. Rosenblum: Has this been the norm in the past?

Mr. Silva: Yes, we had a discussion when the soccer thing was going on and the Boys Club would still like us to approve it. We've been saying the selectmen are fine with it.

Mr. DeBarge: They have to wait for us to meet to do this on correspondence to decide that it's ok to call them and say it's ok? I'm sorry. I don't understand.

Mr. Gennette: I agree with Derek. I think they should probably have the club request. This shouldn't come from them it should come from the club.

Mr. Rosenblum: They should approve it then have it come to us for a rubber stamp.

Mr. Gennette: In the meantime, we don't want to delay them.

Motion made by Mr. Silva to allow the Ludlow High School Swim Team to use the pool at the Ludlow Community Center Monday-Friday 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. for practices and 2 p.m. – 6 p.m. for home meets. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign Selectmen meeting minutes of December 5, 2023.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the selectmen meeting minutes of December 5, 2023, absent Mr. Gennette. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign executive session minutes of December 12, 2023, all members present. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

NEW BUSINESS

Board to approve and sign the Liquor Licenses, Common Victualler Licenses and Entertainment Licenses for 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to sign all the licenses but do that after the meeting concludes. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and waive the fees for the following Common Victualler Licenses for the following. Ludlow Council on Aging, Christ the King Church, Ludlow Community Center, Brigham Lodge, The First Church in Ludlow, St. Elizabeth's Parish, St. Peter/Paul Ukrainian Church, Exit 7 Theater and Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and waive the fees for the following Common Victualler Licenses for the following. Ludlow Council on Aging, Christ the King Church, Ludlow Community Center, Brigham Lodge, The First Church in Ludlow, St. Elizabeth's Parish, St. Peter/Paul Ukrainian Church, Exit 7 Theater and Our Lady of Fatima Parish. **Mr. Silva second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the ABCC 2024 Seasonal Population Increase Estimation Form.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the ABCC 2024 Seasonal Population Increase Estimation Form. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to approve and sign the 2024 Renewal Certification Form.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the 2024 Renewal Certification Form. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss New Year's Eve hours for liquor license establishments.

Mr. Rosenblum: We generally go to 2, correct?

Mr. DeBarge: 2 o'clock serving 4 o'clock close?

Motion made by Mr. Silva I see no problem with keeping what we did last year for the continuing year. **Mr. DeBarge second.**

Mr. Gennette: Marc, you've got that information from last year, right?

Mr. Strange: Yes.

All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

Board to approve and sign the Class I, II, III Licenses for 2024.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to approve and sign the Class I, II, III Licenses for 2024. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

Board to discuss and possibly vote to approve $15,476.21 in Building Infrastructre Funds for a new intercom system at the public safety complex.

Mr. Silva: Is this for the building or for the whole complex?

Mr. Strange: It's for fire. Apparently, the intercom is not working properly so they can't tell what each other is saying.

Mr. Silva: $16,000 for an intercom sounds like a lot of money.

Mr. Strange: I agree. This was a capital request initially. They thought it would come in over $20,000 but it came in at $15,000, which is why it's in front of you.

Mr. Gennette: We also didn't want to have to wait for them to get an improvement to their intercom system if calls are coming in.

Motion made by Mr. Rosenblum to approve $15,476.21 in Building Infrastructre Funds for a new intercom system at the public safety complex. **Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**

167. Sgt. Brian Shameklis, Chairman Safety Committee – Recommending to the Board that a streetlight be placed on Rood Street adjacent to Applewood and Spring Meadow Drive on existing pole #194/10.

Mr. DeBarge: This is a dark area and the resident who called about this is retired from the PD and notified the police department about the numerous animals that are hit. It's a very dark corner so they voted 5-0 to do it and I think we should endorse it.

Mr. Goncalves: I travel that every evening and it is super dark. It's not a big stretch but it's dark and there's a little bend in the road and there's water that travels under the road so it's a great spot for there to be a lot of animals.

Motion made by Mr. DeBarge to put a streetlight on Rood Street adjacent to Applewood and Spring Meadow Drive on existing pole #194/10.

Mr. Gennette: To clarify, that's not a traffic light.

Mr. Goncalves second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.

RECEIVED
2024 JAN 24 P 12:47
TOWN OF LUDLOW

BOARD UPDATES/MISC

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

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Rosenblum: I want to thank all the departments for coming in. I think we finally ironed out this process to where we have a timeline. In relation to the school department, maybe the word transparency was the wrong word. I apologize if I used the wrong word. It's just so people know where the money is going. Since Dr. Tiano has come in we have seen a lot more information than we have seen in the past. The fact that we've gotten back more money goes to show we're seeing more of it. I hope that when it gets posted on the next school committee meeting that we don't hear that we don't care about children in this town because I think that over the course of the last 5 years or so we've shown that we're investing in our children and I know that everyone on this board wants to do as much as we can. We have a new track & field going in for 4.8 million dollars out of ARPA funding. We have a new school; we have a new admin building. $450,000 in capital expenditures approved last year. I think there is CARES money. We do invest in our children. Unfortunately, as you said, sometimes the numbers don't make sense when you look at what our population really is vs what we're asking. I think we all want to do what's best for the children. I hope that I don't read that comment again. Lastly, when it comes to things in general, we sit here and we had our last new business item was Board to discuss and possibly approve a certain amount of money. That's the kind of thing I'm saying for their agenda. They might, I'm not sure, just so people know. It's not that I'm saying they're hiding anything. We're always tasked with you need to give the schools more money. We want to but we have other requests and there's other things we need to do. The question is how is it being spent. I think people should ask that question too, not in an argumentative or nasty way. All of our numbers are all FOIA. We've been audited, we get audited and our information is the freedom of information act. It's not that we hid anything or line our pockets. Thank you, especially the school department and school committee. It's the biggest part of our budget. It's 45-46-47% of our budget. We need to ask those questions and we wouldn't be doing our due diligence if we didn't. As people said before a couple weeks ago, we need to be better, so we need to ask questions too. People are asking questions of us so we need to ask questions of others.

Mr. Silva: I want to commend all those that did the wreath ceremony, including Mr. DeBarge. And Merry Christmas. I brought this tie on purpose. It says what happens at the Christmas party stays at the Christmas party.

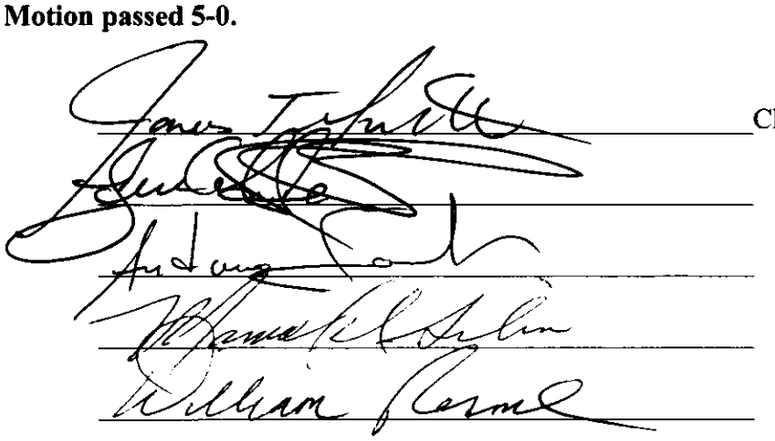
Mr. DeBarge: The largest wreath laying group we've had yet. The ceremony went well. Wreath laying took about 10 minutes with about 980 wreaths. With all the people we had, it was a great event, as it always is. That's my favorite event of the year. The 250th, we also just concluded the house decorating contest. We had 31 applicants. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prize, they've put out the winners and thank you do David Sady and everyone else that went along with him. He photographed all 31 houses on his own time and posted them. He's also, for those of you interested in the high school track and field project, he's also got videos out there recording its progress as construction goes along.

Mr. Goncalves: Merry Christmas, or whatever holiday it is that you celebrate. Everybody be careful. Reach out to an elderly neighbor and make sure everybody is ok. We'll see you next year. We're open to comments, criticism or whatever you saw that we can do better, let us know. We're really looking out for the town's money, especially in this budget season. Happy Holidays to everybody and we'll see you in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Rosenblum: I've seen it and I've had a couple friends that posted pictures of it. When you order Amazon or anything you can request a place that you have your packages delivered. If you have a garage, but then a door that goes into your garage, I think you can request where you want those packages dropped. I think you've all seen it where you're seeing people taking pictures of people taking stuff off their steps. This time of year kind of stinks that you have that hard-to-find gift that you can only get it by the 23rd of December and now it's gone because someone grabbed it off your doorstep. Public service announcement. If you order anything, leave a direction as to where you want it to go, somewhere it can be hidden so it's not in plain view of people driving around looking for these.

Mr. Gennette: I just want to thank everybody that came in tonight for visitations. It's really nice to see people working hard to try and save on their budget or try to find funds to do things that they need. Most impressively by the senior center. I just want to say thank you to everybody that came in. As far as the school board went, I was really happy with the conversation we had. I think it was probably the most productive that we've had on both sides of the table. Thanks to everybody for that. Have a Merry Christmas.

Motion made by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn the Selectmen's meeting at 8:30 p.m. **Mr. DeBarge second. All in favor. Motion passed 5-0.**



Chairman

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TOWN OF LUDLOW