

*Palmer Town Council*

*Meeting Minutes*

*Monday, January 12, 2015*

**1. Roll Call**

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, January 12, 2015 was called to order at 6:30 pm. Present were Town Manager Charles Blanchard, Councilors Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert, Matt Lovell, Barbara Barry, Jason Polonsky, Mary Salzman and Donald Blais.

**2. Visitors Comments**

Tyler Wolanin, District Representative for Anne Gobi introduced himself to the Town Council. He stated that he would be holding office hours in the Town Hall once a month to hear concerns from residents. He announced that he would be holding office hours on Tuesday, January 13<sup>th</sup> from noon to 1:00pm. J. Polonsky asked if there are plans to hold evening office hours. T. Wolanin stated that they will make it as assessable as possible for people based on his availability.

**3. Meeting Minutes**

None

**4. Old Business**

**a. 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee Update**

Lorinda Baker, Chairperson of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, addressed the Town Council. She outlined the current committee members, mailing/email addresses, the status of the logo contest, and status of the event's website. She stated that they are developing a sponsor and donation letter to be sent to area businesses. L. Baker also outlined the future goals of the committee as the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary approaches. The next meeting of the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee is January 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 PM. M. Salzman asked if the Committee needs any resources from the Town Council at this time. L. Baker stated that the committee will be looking for volunteers to help carry out the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events.

**b. Tax Title – Peter Brown**

Tax Title Attorney Peter Brown of D'Ambrosio Brown & Associates addressed the Council regarding the status of the town's tax title collections. P. Brown reported that the Town has collected over \$2 Million since the Town hired his firm in April 2010. He stated that properties that have not paid taxes for FY13 and FY14 are now due to be placed into tax title. He stated that the town is on schedule to handle these tax title cases in March 2015. P. Brown recommended that the town create a tax taking calendar to continue to pursue delinquent taxes annually. P. Brown reported that the town will look to move on properties with low value that have accumulated interest over years. The Town will continue to identify these properties and clear these delinquencies from the tax rolls. The Town will also to continue to pursue properties that have unknown ownership.

M. Salzman asked if steps are being taken to collect on unpaid taxes despite lack of calendar for delinquent collections. P. Brown stated that the town currently follows the

statutory demand process but following a calendar would formalize curtesy notices. M. Salzmann asked what the current outstanding balance of the low value and owner unknown parcels is. P. Brown stated that \$1.7 Million is current tax title balance but the collectable balance significantly less if you take out the properties of low value. B. Barry asked what the current status is on properties that are delinquent on FY13 taxes. P. Brown stated that delinquencies still need to be processed. He noted that his Attorney fees are calculated at the end of the tax taking process.

**c. Municipal Trash Collection**

C. Blanchard provided additional information to the council regarding a proposed Municipal Trash Collection Program. Arlene Miller from MassDEP addressed the council regarding the history of the Town's attempts to move to a municipal collection system and gave examples of communities who had recently made the switch. C. Blanchard stated that the most advantageous program would be to pass an override to include the cost of trash collection under the local tax assessment. He stated that under an individual fee based system, individuals may opt out of the program and may not be successful if a large number of resident's do not use it. A. Miller stated that typically the cost of town-wide trash collection typically costs 50% less than individual subscription service. She noted that the Town of Granby was successful in passing a local override to add municipal trash collection into the tax base. J. Polonsky asked if private contracts could be voided if municipal trash collection is accepted. C. Blanchard stated that more research would need to be done if the adoption of a municipal trash collection program would void an individual collection contract. C. Blanchard stated that he does not recommend going to a fee based system to make sure 100% of the community is serviced by the program. A. Miller stated that carriers that have contracts don't normally hold up to legal scrutiny. M. Lovell asked if it is feasible to include the referendum on the June election. C. Blanchard stated that the town would go out to bid before the election to get a hard number that the residents could vote on.

**d. Police/DPW Radio Upgrades**

Mark Cady of LB Communications and Police Chief Robert Frydryk addressed the Council regarding the Police and DPW Radio upgrades. R. Frydryk explained that after the propagation maps for the new system had been fully developed, the estimate for the new system had increased significantly. M. Cady distributed information regarding the increased cost projections for the upgraded radio system. Because three additional receive sites are required to provide proper coverage for a mission critical communication system, the price was increased. He explained that the system would be designed to operate in analog mode but could be upgraded to digital if needed in the future. M. Cady explained that the civil costs were significantly higher because the structures on Breckenridge St will need significant upgrades including a new tower for the antenna and enclosure for the radio equipment.

J. Polonsky asked how much had been appropriated previously to the project. R. Frydryk stated that \$488,000 had previously been appropriated to the radio upgrades. J. Polonsky asked if the radio system had been moved when the new station was constructed. R. Frydryk stated that the voting site was still located in Town Hall because it was not part of the new police station project. Currently, \$87,000 has been expended of the original

appropriation. \$275,000 in additional funds is required to complete the project. M. Cady explained that the Bi-Directional Amplifier System for the schools was \$25,000 more than the original projection for the hardware costs. The town would still be saving by having Pathfinder students run the cabling. Discussion continued over the need for the radio system upgrades and the reason for the increased price costs. M. Cady stated that the majority of the price increase was due to the addition of two transmission sites on the proposal due to the narrow-banding propagation maps. M. Cady also explained that the system would be designed to be forward compatible with digital transmission if the decision to change from analog were to be made in the future. Discussion continued over the future need for digital communication frequencies. M. Salzman asked if the fire departments use the same sites as the Police Department. R. Frydryk stated that while the departments share some of the same sites, they maintain their own equipment. Palmer Water District has provided some of the in-kind site work for the Breckenridge water tower site.

P. Hebert asked how the additional cost would be paid for. C. Blanchard stated that it should be taken from free cash once it is certified. John Kuzmiski stated that the certified free cash should be approved by the DOR by the end of the week. R. Frydryk stated that other vendor's had been considered to reduce costs other than Motorola, however, he was not comfortable moving forward with them given the required ongoing service on the system. M. Lovell asked if trucking technology was a viable option. M. Cady stated that while trucking creates capacity in the system, the need for additional voting sites is to cover a greater area. C. Blanchard broke down the individual project costs and the need for each line item increase. M. Cady stated that if the civil work were done under a Motorola blanket contract, the cost could be a 50% markup. B. Barry stated that no motion is in order at this time because free cash has not been certified. This will be brought up at the next meeting.

R. Frydryk thanked the Council for their support during his tenure as police chief. C. Blanchard asked if the Council could address the need to appoint an Interim Police Chief after his retirement. He recommended the approval of Lieutenant John Janulewicz as Interim Police Chief. B. Barry stated that the appointment of an interim chief does not require the Council's approval.

**e. Vote: 1366 Park Street**

The motion to change the zoning of 1366 Park Street from the Industrial A district to the General Business District was made by M. Salzman. Motion seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 7-0

**f. Approval of Peterson Rd PILOT**

C. Blanchard outlined the terms of the proposed PILOT on the solar project on Peterson Road. He noted that all Planning Board approvals had been attained for the project. J. Polonsky asked where the project was located. R. Lavoie explained that it is located at the end of Country Lane. Motion to approve the PILOT Agreement by M. Lovell, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 7-0

**g. Old Mill Pond Floor Bid**

C. Blanchard explained that the School Building Committee recommended that in order to begin construction at the beginning of the School vacation, bids for the construction would be placed in the January 21<sup>st</sup> Central Register with Bids scheduled to open in February. The estimate for the first phase work would be \$1.6 Million with \$274,000 on the first year of debt service with a 10 year loan. This would take care of the critical needs. The Phase 2 work would be done the next year which would cover most non-classroom area. C. Blanchard stated that the proposed debt service could not be covered under the town's current levy limit over the life of the project. He recommended that the Town Council schedule a special election in March to approve a debt exclusion on the project cost. C. Blanchard explained that the committee has selected all the materials for the project that have been used to establish this estimate.

B. Barry asked when the annual election was scheduled for. C. Blanchard stated it is June 9<sup>th</sup>. J. Polonsky asked what the estimate was on the project for the last election. C. Blanchard stated that although the number was not part of the question last year, the estimate was roughly \$3.2 Million. J. Polonsky also asked what the cost is to hold a special election. C. Blanchard stated it would cost \$7,600 to hold the election. C. Blanchard explained that if the vote was delayed to the June election, there would not be enough time to execute the contract and order materials. B. Barry stated that she felt the School and Town did not do enough to educate the public before the last vote on the project. J. Polonsky stated his concern with getting the information out to the public prior to a March election. C. Blanchard expressed his concern with delaying a vote which would not allow the contractor to begin work at the beginning of school vacation. C. Blanchard asked A. Golas to pull up the initial vote from the previous election on the carpet replacement. A. Golas reported that the debt exclusion vote was defeated 529 to 659. C. Blanchard explained that informational meetings were conducted by the Town and School but were not well attended by the public. C. Blanchard stated that the Council could decide to split the vote on the town projects based on need. B. Barry asked how many solar agreements there are. He explained that there are four projects that have been built. B. Barry asked if the solar agreements were estimated in the FY15 budget. C. Blanchard explained that the anticipated PILOT was not included in the FY15 budget. He explained that the funding from the PILOTS are calculated under new growth as a personal property tax. Discussion continued over how the PILOT agreements may be used to offset the cost of the project.

C. Blanchard stated that although the council did not need to make a decision on setting a special election date that night, the central register bid was set to be advertised for January 21<sup>st</sup>. C. Blanchard noted that the wording for the debt exclusion was not presented to the council until 30 days prior to the previous election. M. Lovell suggested tabling the discussion to the next meeting. Motion to hold a special election for a debt exclusion question for March 3<sup>rd</sup> by M. Lovell, seconded by M. Salzmänn. M. Salzmänn stated her concern that the March Election is a very short timeline. B. Barry stated that she was not sure if an April date would be more advantageous. Discussion on the motion was tabled to January 20<sup>th</sup> so that input could be collected by the School Committee. The motion on the floor failed 1-6 with M. Lovell in favor. C. Blanchard stated that the most

advantageous timetable it to go out for bids beginning January 21<sup>st</sup>. He will discuss the potential of moving the election date to April.

**h. Councilor's Preliminary Budget**

Discussion on the topic was tabled to the January 20<sup>th</sup> special meeting.

**i. Additional Old Business**

J. Polonsky asked the status of the Three Rivers proposed Parking Lot. C. Blanchard explained that he had met with Chuck Ksieniewicz on the issue and he will be working to clear up some land ownership issues on the property.

**5. New Business**

None

**6. Subcommittee Reports**

**a. Ordinance Subcommittee**

D. Blais reported that the Ordinance Subcommittee is currently deliberating a false alarm ordinance which will be presented to the council at a later time.

**b. Town Manager Evaluation Subcommittee**

B. Barry stated that the new Town Manager Evaluation sheets would not be ready for the annual evaluation so the old evaluations will continue to be used for this year.

**7. Town Manager Reports**

C. Blanchard reported that Bonnie Weeks has agreed to become the full time building inspector. He also reported that a summary of the energy savings to the town through the Green Community Repair program was provided to the council. C. Blanchard provided an update on the DPW Director's Status. He stated that Rudy Pisarczyk has done a good job in handling the responsibilities of the position in the interim and is currently working to fill the permanent position.

**8. Misc. Correspondence**

None

**9. Councilor Roundtable**

D. Blais thanked C. Blanchard for the work he did presenting the trash collection proposal to the Town Council. He also thanked Gov. Baker for releasing the Chapter 90 funds which were held back by the state.

M. Salzmann congratulated M. Lovell on being a dad for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time and to J. Polonsky on his engagement.

P. Hebert stated that he would like an ordinance banning Sharia Law in the Town of Palmer because they are in conflict with the bill of rights.

## **10. Adjournment**

Motion to Adjourn made by J. Polonsky, seconded by M. Salzmann. Motion passed 7-0 at 8:55 PM.