

**Palmer Town Council
Meeting Minutes
March 28, 2016**

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1. Roll Call

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, March 28, 2016 was called to order at 6:30 pm by Barbara Barry. Present were Town Manager Charles Blanchard, Councilors Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert, Barbara Barry, Lorinda Baker, Mary Salzmann and Donald Blais. Absent was Councilor Karl Williams.

2. Visitors Comments

None

3. Budget Discussion

a. School Budget

B. Barry gave an overview of the budget and revenue sources for Fiscal Year 2017. She presented the new revenue sources for the town and breakdown of new cash distribution. B. Barry noted that after the distribution of new funding between the town and school, \$121,268 was remaining to spend on increases in the town budget. She stated that there is the misconception that the town is withholding funding from the school and that the ultimate decision on funding of the school budget lies with the school committee.

School Business Manager Brad Brothers and Superintendent Patricia Gardner addressed the council. B. Brothers presented the proposed school budget with a summary of cuts which would need to be enacted to meet the town's proposed budget.

C. Blanchard presented the School's funding history. The \$488,463 total School Department budget increase proposed by town was presented by C. Blanchard. A School Department Budget summary was presented by B. Brothers. P. Gardner stated that she would like to focus on professional development in the FY17 budget year. B. Brothers stated that there is a lower amount of special education students, however, placement costs are increasing. He noted that there is a reduction in transportation costs and a 3.7% increase in contract costs. B. Brothers outlined the grant funding that the school receives. B. Brothers presented the two proposals from the school to reduce their budget to fit to town's proposed budget. Under the first proposal, two teaching positions would be eliminated. The second proposal involved moving the fifth grade from Converse Middle School to Old Mill Pond School. Neither proposal is set at this time.

B. Barry stated that there should be a discussion by the school and if they think there should be a significant increase to the school budget, the school should pursue a proposition 2 ½ override vote. P. Hebert noted that he would like to address high insurance costs.

M. Salzmann stated that she feels the towns and schools should be on same page. P. Gardner stated that she is trying to do what is best for the students of Palmer.

1 Lisa Murray of the Palmer School Committee stated that she feels that the School Committee's
2 full budget request should be funded. She stated that the Town Council recognizes that
3 technology investment is a priority. She challenged the Town Council to make education their
4 priority.

5 B. Barry stated that there are only limited funds available for the Town Council to appropriate. If
6 the funding they can provide is not sufficient, then the alternative funding sources should be
7 pursued. Discussion continued on the discrepancies between the Town and School budget. P.
8 Hebert stated his concern with the MCAS testing process.

9 M. Salzmann asked for the per pupil expenditure report to be presented. The per-pupil
10 expenditures for the Palmer School Department compared to surrounding schools was
11 presented. Discussion continued on per-pupil expenditures. C. Blanchard stated that the school
12 has recognized that the costs to fund an extra school facility does significantly affect the budget.
13 Discussion continued on budget cut proposals.

14 D. Blais stated that he discussed with legislators regarding an increasing Chapter 70 funding. P.
15 Gardner addressed potential cuts and how they were proposed to save teaching positions. L.
16 Baker asked where the majority of school systems Palmer students were choosing to attend that
17 elected to use school choice. B. Brothers stated that Belchertown, Quaboag, Monson and Ware
18 are highest school choice out school districts. Discussion continued on school choice. Andrea
19 Mastalerz stated that she is aware that there are some difficult decisions that the school must
20 make. Rudolph Wilk of 228 River Street stated that the town needs to push for more business to
21 come to town to help fund the schools. B. Barry stated the town has taken many strides to push
22 for new businesses.

23 **b. General Budget**

24 C. Blanchard stated that additional information which was requested had been provided to the
25 Town Council. He will provide additional detail on questions brought up this meeting. The Town
26 Council addressed the proposed budget line by line. C. Blanchard stated additional information
27 had been provided to the Town Council regarding the proposed mosquito control district.
28 Currently that are waiting to hear the interest from other towns.

29 L. Baker asked for a breakdown of the number of Police Officers and their positions as well as an
30 explanation of the fitness expense line item. B. Barry asked for additional information on the
31 current condition of the Police cruisers. C. Blanchard noted that additional Part Time Police
32 Officers will be hired. P. Hebert asked about additional revenue received from other towns
33 based on the Regional Dog Officer agreement.

34 M. Salzmann asked for information on the Railroad Crossing Maintenance line item. She also
35 questioned if there was sufficient funding for snow and ice removal. L. Baker asked about 189
36 State Street Monitoring cost and additional costs to park maintenance account. C. Blanchard
37 noted that the town is moving away from individual Park and Cemetery Departments and
38 toward a unified Grounds Maintenance Department.

39 B. Barry asked about the funding in the Debt Reserve Fund in the wastewater budget and why it
40 was a negative number. Finance Director John Kuzmiski stated that the proposed payments are

1 to address the loan origination fee on the SRF Loan. Additional information will be provided on
2 this budget proposal.

3 B. Barry noted that the Civil Defense line item name should be changed to Emergency
4 Management. L. Baker asked for more information on the LPVEC Reimbursement line item. C.
5 Blanchard stated that the funding is to pay for a third party file for the Town's Medicaid
6 reimbursement.

7 B. Barry stated that she would like to know the cost to revamp the Town's chart of accounts.

8 B. Barry stated that the next regular meeting, the Town Council will not discuss the budget. The
9 next budget meeting will be held on Monday, April 25, 2016 at 6:30 pm.

10 L. Baker asked for additional information on Central Purchasing and Health Department
11 Inspections.

12 **4. Adjournment**

13 Motion to Adjourn by P. Hebert, seconded by L. Baker. Motion Passed 6-0 at 8:18pm.