

Palmer Town Council

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 20, 2015

1. Roll Call

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Tuesday, January 20, 2015 was called to order at 6:30 pm. Present were Town Manager Charles Blanchard, Councilors Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert, Barbara Barry, Jason Polonsky, Mary Salzmann and Donald Blais. Matthew Lovell was absent.

2. Visitors Comments

None

3. Old Mill Pond School Floor

School Committee Chairmen Gary Blanchette and Vice Chairmen Andrea Mastalerz addressed the council regarding the Old Mill Pond School Floor Debt Exclusion proposal. B. Barry explained that the council was in deliberations whether or not to hold a special election on the OMP Floor Debt Exclusion during the previous meeting and were seeking input from the school committee for their stance on the issue. C. Blanchard explained that the concerns brought forward by the council regarding the timing of the project were presented to the architect and he provided updated timelines if the council decided to postpone the special election until April.

J. Polonsky asked if the current condition of the floors could withstand another year of wear if the council decided to hold the debt exclusion question on the June election. C. Blanchard explained that the floors are usable for another year, the issue will be the increased cost of inflation by delaying the project schedule. He stated that by waiting an additional year, the project costs could increase by 4 or 5%.

M. Salzmann asked the school committee members if this project was a high priority for the schools to complete. A. Mastlerz stated that the floors are in need of replacement and are well past their useful life. G. Blanchette stated that the recommendations given to the schools to mediate the mold issue had been effective, but new flooring is needed to alleviate the problem completely.

B. Barry asked for the estimate on the gym floor costs as part of the phase 1 project. C. Blanchard stated that the gymnasium floor was estimated at \$61,000. B. Barry asked which type of floors were selected by the building committee. C. Blanchard stated that rubber floorings were selected for the classrooms and vinyl flooring in the corridors. Selections had not been made on the administrative offices or other areas of the building not included in phase 1.

P. Hebert asked for clarification on the 10 and 5 year bonding options presented to the council. C. Blanchard explained that depending on which bonding term the council decided to go forward with would impact the annual tax rate and amount of interest paid over the life of the loan. C. Blanchard outlined the debt service impacts for both phases of the project.

P. Hebert stated that he believed that the town would be able to cover the cost of the debt service through the use of free cash. C. Blanchard explained that free cash is only reserves of unexpended

funds from the previous year and are currently lower than where they should be given the size of the municipal budget. He stated that free cash should not be used to fund an ongoing costs such as debt service. P. Hebert stated that he is not in favor of requesting a debt exclusion for the replacement of the floors. C. Blanchard stated that in order to fit the debt service for the carpet replacement into the operational budget, a debt exclusion would be needed. P. Hebert asked if it would lower the cost by only replacing the worst areas first and parceling the project into smaller phases. C. Blanchard stated that of all the flooring is in generally the same condition and a significant cost is the mobilization of the contractor. Completing the whole school in two phases would be the most cost effective solution given the timeframe to complete the project. C. Blanchard explained that he believes the project is needed for the schools. B. Barry agreed that a debt exclusion is needed to fund this project. She stated that since residents have just been impacted by the police station on their first quarter tax bills, the debt exclusion would not be successful at this time. She stated that she would support a debt exclusion vote at the June election and not begin the project until the summer of 2016.

C. Blanchard explained that while the mold problem had not presented itself over the past summer, the presence of the rugs do contribute to the mold problem and should be replaced. Discussion continued on the need to mitigate mold spores in the OMP School floor. D. Blais stated that he supported a debt exclusion vote to fund the project. R. Lavoie stated that he did not support asking for the tax payers to fund an override for the floor replacement project.

G. Blanchette stated that the school committee would hold informational sessions and create an informational video for M-PACT to distribute information regarding the override. B. Barry stated that more needs to be done to get the word out about the information sessions before the election than prior to the previous election. Discussion continued on ways to lower the tax impact on residents through the debt exclusion.

Motion to place a ballot question on the June Town Election for a debt exclusion vote to fund the replacement of the Old Mill Pond School floors by M. Salzman. Seconded by J. Polonsky.

M. Salzman outlined the proposed timeline of events leading up to the vote for presenting information to the residents. C. Blanchard explained that the timeline for a debt exclusion vote in March would allow the town to mobilize a contractor to begin work during the summer break season for 2015. By withholding the vote to the June election, the project would not be able to begin until the next year and inflation would raise the project cost estimate.

Motion passed 4-2 with P. Hebert and D. Blais opposed.

4. Councilor's Preliminary Budget Discussion

B. Barry asked if any councilors had anything they would like to see as a priority headed into the development of the FY16 budget. P. Hebert stated that he would like to see the revitalization of Burleigh Park continue to move forward. He also asked that the town look into purchasing a pressure washer for the DPW to clean their vehicles.

M. Salzman asked for a line item increase for Town Council expenses to allow for councilors to go to more conferences and trainings. C. Blanchard asked that the council provide a list of which

trainings the councilors would like to attend and he would try to fit that cost into the budget. B. Barry asked that another \$300 be allocated to that line item.

J. Polonsky asked that the funds that are generated from the solar PILOT agreements be allocated to community improvement funds such as improvement to Burleigh Park. C. Blanchard explained that the funding from the PILOT agreements is calculated into the town's new growth formula so funds could not be separately allocated from the PILOT's as a revenue source. The council reiterated their support for revitalization of Burleigh Park.

B. Barry asked that the amount received from the PILOT payments be allocated to capital expenses in the annual budget. She also asked that a focus be placed on the DPW capital expenses in the FY16 budget. She wanted to be sure that the Net School Spending issue had been taken care of in the FY16 budget and would like to see the budget concentrated in other areas that are lacking. M. Salzmann stated that she is concerned with increased costs in health insurance because of the state's deficits in their GIC plan.

M. Salzmann asked if any upgrades to town hall were planned in the budget. C. Blanchard explained that he is working with Architectural Insights to develop a renovation plan for town hall. B. Barry asked that the town look at pursuing historic building status for the town hall in order to seek grants to offset renovation costs.

5. Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn made by R. Lavoie, seconded by P. Hebert. Motion passed 6-0 at 7:25 PM.