

**Palmer Town Council
Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2015**

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1. Roll Call

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, September 14, 2015 was called to order at 6:30 pm. Present were Town Manager Charles Blanchard, Councilors Barbara Barry, Mary Salzmann, Philip Hebert, Lorinda Baker, Karl Williams, and Donald Blais. Absent was councilor Robert Lavoie.

2. Visitors Comments

Jim Davis of 3 Hickory Lane, Palmer, stated that he feels that the town’s athletic fields are in need of repair. B. Barry stated that she met with the DPW and schools regarding the condition of the fields. She stated that they are working to enact a new process put in to notify DPW of problems with the fields when they arise. She also stated that the Council taking steps to invest in the community by investing more into the maintenance of its fields.

3. Meeting Minutes

August 3, 2015 – B. Barry deferred the consideration of the meeting minutes to next council meeting.

4. Old Business

a. 2nd Reading - Loan Authorization 2016-01 - DPW Dump Truck

Loan Authorization 2016-01, authorizing the loan of \$219,487.00 for the purchase of a new DPW dump truck, was read by B. Barry

b. Public Hearing - Loan Authorization 2016-01 - DPW Dump Truck

The public hearing on Loan Authorization 2016-01 in the amount of \$219,487.00 for the purchase of a new DPW dump truck was opened by B. Barry at 6:35 pm. There was no public comment on the Loan Authorization. The public hearing was closed at 6:35 pm by B. Barry.

c. Vote - Loan Authorization 2016-01 -DPW Dump Truck

Motion that \$219,487.00 be appropriated to pay costs of purchasing a dump truck and for the payment of all costs incidental and related thereto; that to meet this appropriation the Treasurer with the approval of the Town Manager, is authorized to borrow \$219,487.00 under G.L. c.44, s.7(9) or any other enabling authority; That the Town Manager is authorized to contract for and expend federal or state aid available for the project, provided that the amount of the authorized borrowing shall be reduced by the amount of such aid received prior to the issuance of bonds or notes under this resolution; and the Town Manager is authorized to take any other action necessary to carry out this project by P. Hebert, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0.

1 **d. 2nd Reading - Loan Authorization 2016-02 - Town Hall Renovation**

2 Loan Authorization 2016-02, authorizing the loan of \$560,000.00 for the renovation of the
3 Palmer Town Administration Building, was read by B. Barry.

4 **e. Public Hearing - Loan Authorization 2016-02 - Town Hall Renovation**

5 The public hearing on Loan Authorization 2016-02 in the amount of \$560,000.00 for the
6 renovation of the Town Administration Building was opened by B. Barry at 6:45 PM. M.
7 Salzmänn asked if there is a list of renovations to be done under the proposed loan
8 authorization amount. C. Blanchard gave summary of all proposed renovations. M.
9 Salzmänn asked if the floors should be sealed regularly to protect from asbestos residue. C.
10 Blanchard stated new floor coverings would be done as an upgrade since any asbestos in the
11 existing floor tiles would only become an issue if the tile was removed. D. Blais stated he
12 supported the proposal. The public hearing was closed at 6:50 PM

13 **f. Vote - Loan Authorization Town Hall Renovation**

14 *Motion that \$560,000.00 be appropriated to pay costs of funding town hall renovations and*
15 *for the payment of all costs incidental and related thereto; that to meet this appropriation*
16 *the Treasurer with the approval of the Town Manager, is authorized to borrow \$560,000.00*
17 *under G.L. c.44, s.7(9) or any other enabling authority; That the Town Manager is authorized*
18 *to contract for and expend federal or state aid available for the project, provided that the*
19 *amount of the authorized borrowing shall be reduced by the amount of such aid received*
20 *prior to the issuance of bonds or notes under this resolution; and the Town Manager is*
21 *authorized to take any other action necessary to carry out this project by D. Blais, seconded*
22 *by L. Baker. Motion passed 6-0.*

23 **g. 2014 Audit Review**

24 Town Auditor Tom Scanlon and J. Kuzmiski addressed the town council regarding the town's
25 2014 Audit. T. Scanlon stated that the town has positively worked toward increasing its
26 reserves over the past few fiscal years. He noted that free cash had been certified at \$1.8
27 Million in FY14.

28 M. Salzmänn asked if errors with the free cash document had been corrected which were
29 noted in the management letter. T. Scanlon stated that the issues had been corrected. M.
30 Salzmänn asked if the timeliness of bank statements which was highlighted in the FY13 audit
31 was an ongoing issue. T. Scanlon stated that it is a note to keep eye on in the future. M.
32 Salzmänn asked about the fund balance of the deficit accounts and what has been done to
33 correct the issue. C. Blanchard noted that the comments regarding issues with the deficit
34 accounts were noted in FY13 and had been corrected in FY14.

35 T. Scanlon stated that any Department of Revenue penalties had been corrected in the
36 previous fiscal year. B. Barry asked where the town stands on closing out FY15. J. Kuzmiski
37 stated that he is currently working with school department on closing their grant report. He
38 has finished the cash reconciliation and FY15 should be closed out soon.

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1 **h. Town Council Rules**

2 Changes to the council rules were outlined by M. Salzmann. She stated that the full
3 document with changes will be compiled, placed in new Council Rules document, and
4 disseminated to the Town Council prior to the next meeting.

5 *Motion to accept all proposed changes to the Town Council Rules by D. Blais, seconded by K.*
6 *Williams. Motion passed 6-0.*

7 **i. Other Old Business**

8 M. Salzmann asked about the status of appointments to multi-member boards. C. Blanchard
9 noted that realignment of multi-member boards had been performed 2 years ago and is
10 currently being followed by the town.

11 **5. New Business**

12 **a. DPW Director Appointment - Gerald Skowronek**

13 DPW Director candidate Gerry Skowronek addressed the Town Council regarding his
14 pending appointment. C. Blanchard stated that he interviewed G. Skowronek for the
15 position of DPW director along with three other candidates and felt that he was the ideal fit
16 for the position. M. Salzmann asked if he will be staying on as Wastewater Superintendent.
17 G. Skowronek stated that he would continue to serve in the role of Wastewater
18 Superintendent. P. Hebert asked what he would do to improve snow removal operations. G.
19 Skowronek stated that he is currently working with management to establish contracts and
20 follow up procedures with private contractors. He will be working to hold people more
21 accountable to the town for their work. B. Barry stated that she had the opportunity to
22 speak with Gerry and feels he is the right individual for the position and is confident that he
23 will bring stability to the DPW.

24 *Motion to confirm the appointment of Gerry Skowronek to the position of DPW Director by*
25 *M. Salzmann, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0.*

26 **b. Petition for Zone Change – Park Street**

27 Mark Baldyga of 10 Fieldstone Drive addressed council regarding his petition for zone
28 change of contiguous parcels on Park Street adjacent to East Palmer Park Drive. He stated
29 that currently there are many used car licenses issued in that area that are grandfathered
30 and would be not be compliant under current zoning laws. He would like to change the
31 zoning of each parcel from general business to highway business. B. Barry stated that they
32 must refer the petition to the Planning Board for their consideration.

33 *Motion to refer the petition for zone change to the Planning Board by P. Hebert, seconded by*
34 *D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0.*

35 **c. 1st Reading – Ordinance 2016-01 – Adoption of Chapter 148, Sec. 26 H –**
36 **Lodging/Boarding House Sprinkler Ordinances**

1 Ordinance 2016-01 regarding the adoption of chapter 148, section 26 H which would
2 require the installation of sprinkler systems in all boarding and lodging houses within five
3 years of adoption was read by B. Barry.

4 The public hearing on Ordinance 2016-01 will be held Tuesday, October 13th.

5 **d. 1st Reading – Ordinance 2016-02 - Adoption of Chapter 148, Sec. 26 I – New Dwelling**
6 **4+ Unit Sprinkler Ordinance**

7 Ordinance 2016-02 regarding the adoption of chapter 148, section 26 I which would require
8 the installation of sprinkler systems in new and substantially renovated homes with four or
9 more dwelling units was read by B. Barry

10 The public hearing on Ordinance 2016-02 was set for Tuesday, October 13th

11 **e. Conservation Commission Land Acquisition Request**

12 Conservation Agent Angela Panaccione addressed council regarding property that the
13 Palmer Conservation Commission would like to acquire from MassDOT. A. Panaccione
14 stated that the Conservation Commission began petitioning for a donation of the property
15 from MassDOT in 2008, however, discussions regarding the land donation were held up
16 during casino debate.

17 K. Williams asked where the property is located. A. Panaccione stated that the property is in
18 the Midura Conservation Area and it a land locked parcel. The property is currently on the
19 list of properties the town would like to acquire under its open space plan. She stated that
20 by the town acquiring the property, it would offer permanent conservation protection of the
21 property. Currently there are a number of trails on the property. The property would be
22 retained for passive recreational use.

23 B. Barry asked if there is currently a conservation restriction on the Midura Conservation
24 Area. A. Panaccione stated that there is no formal conservation restriction, however, as long
25 as the property is in the care and custody of the Conservation Commission, the land is
26 protected. She is looking for a letter of support from the council to pursue a donation of the
27 land to the Town of Palmer. Discussion continued on the need to adopt a conservation
28 restriction on the Midura Conservation Area.

29 *Motion to draft letter to MassDOT to support the transfer of property from MassDOT to the*
30 *Palmer Conservation Commission by L. Baker, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0.*

31 A. Panaccione thanked those that assisted with the Source to Sea clean up along the Swift
32 River in Bondsville.

33 **f. Designation of the Palmer School Committee as Special Municipal Employees**

34 C. Blanchard noted that the town charter prohibited any school committee member from
35 working for the school department so the need to designate the School Committee as a
36 Special Municipal Employee was unnecessary.

1 **g. Appropriation of \$40,000 from the Stabilization Fund to Endelson Playground Project**
2 **to Cover Costs Due to Unanticipated Site Conditions**

3 C. Blanchard addressed the council regarding unanticipated site conditions which lead to
4 cost over runs on the Endleson playground construction project. He stated that the current
5 deficit on the project is \$35,000. He is requesting that \$40,000 be transferred from the
6 Stabilization Account to complete project. M. Salzmann asked if the Town were to recover
7 any funds, if they could go back to the stabilization account. C. Blanchard stated that the
8 council could vote to move any recovered funds back to the stabilization account. He stated
9 that additional drains were added to the site to compensate for the fact that they are
10 unsure of the source of the chlorinated water found on site.

11 *Motion to transfer \$40,000 from stabilization to the Endleson Playground Project Account by*
12 *P. Hebert, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0.*

13 **h. Discussion on Palmer Rail Stop – Councilor Hebert**

14 P. Hebert stated that he would like the town council to push for the restoration of a
15 commuter train stop in town. The stated that the proposal to restore rail service has been
16 supported by library. B. Hood, Library Director addressed the town council. He stated that
17 the library would like to be a place to rally support for a train stop. B. Hood stated that he
18 would be attending a public hearing at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission regarding
19 the proposal to restore local rail service. He stated that the library could host public forums
20 on railroads to generate support.

21 P. Hebert stated that town council representation would go a long way in promoting the
22 restoration of rail service. D. Blais stated that he is a big supporter of the restoration of rail
23 service in Palmer. C. Blanchard stated that the town has been on top of the proposals
24 presented by MassDOT and the proposed project is only in the conceptual phase. Dan
25 Slowick of Palmer Redevelopment Authority addressed council. He stated that the PRA met
26 with the PVPC to discuss establishing rail stop. D. Slowic stated that proposal will need as
27 much support as possible from residents to move forward. He stated that according the
28 PVPC, it would cost \$15 Million to build a new rail stop in Palmer. He stated that he believes
29 the future economic development of Palmer relies on restoration of rail service.

30 John McElduff of Newton, MA addressed the council. He stated that he owns many different
31 apartment buildings in town. He stated that establishing a rail stop in Palmer would be great
32 opportunity for the town. J. McElduff stated that establishing a commuter rail in his old
33 home town has reinvigorated the local economy of the area. P. Hebert stated that he would
34 like to create one group under the direction of the council to push for rail service. He
35 suggested that a letter to be sent to MassDOT and the legislature to support the restoration
36 of rail service to the Town of Palmer.

37 *Motion to authorize the Town Manager to draft a letter to the appropriate individuals to*
38 *support the restoration of rail service in Palmer by P. Hebert, seconded by L. Baker. Motion*
39 *passed 6-0.*

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1 **i. Burleigh Park Building**

2 C. Blanchard stated that the out of pocket costs for the pavilion would have been over
3 \$190,000 even with labor provided by Pathfinder. C. Blanchard recommends holding off on
4 project until free cash is certified, continue to work towards lowering the anticipated costs
5 and begin to establish the infrastructure for the building over the next year. M. Salzmann
6 and D. Blais stated that they agree with C. Blanchard’s recommendation. C. Blanchard stated
7 that the anticipated project costs are well above the available budget costs.

8 B. Barry stated that there are many other issues that the town council needs to address
9 before constructing a recreation building. B. Barry stated that she would like a meeting to
10 discuss what the council’s priorities are going into the next budget year. She stated that the
11 council needs to begin looking at the replacement of deteriorating bridges around town. D.
12 Blais and M. Salzmann stated that they agreed with B. Barry. M. Salzmann stated that she
13 doesn’t like to see the town hemorrhaging money. Discussion continued on what the needs
14 of the town are.

15 **6. Subcommittee Reports**

16 Council Rules Subcommittee – M. Salzmann stated that the Council Rules Subcommittee has
17 completed its revisions of the rules for the year.

18 Superintendent Search Committee – D. Blais gave names of finalists for superintendent brought
19 forward by the Superintendent Search Committee

20 **7. Town Manager’s Report**

21 C. Blanchard commended R. Pisarczyk for his service as acting DPW Director over the last year.
22 He stated that an Architectural Insights had been selected as the architect for the redesign of
23 town hall. C. Blanchard stated that William Byrnes has resigned from the Traffic Safety
24 Committee. C. Blanchard stated that the town council ordinance subcommittee should consider
25 if they would like to amend the ordinance on removing snow from sidewalks to give exemptions
26 to individuals not living in high pedestrian traffic areas.

27 B. Barry asked what the current make-up of the License Commission is. She asked that C.
28 Blanchard look into the prescribed make-up of the License Commission when the Town Charter
29 was adopted. Discussion continued on what the council believed to be the prescribed make-up
30 of the License Commission.

31 **8. Misc. Correspondence**

32 None

33 **9. Councilor’s Roundtable**

34 L. Baker asked why the Three Rivers district was omitted from the bikeability and crosswalk
35 assessment conducted by the Wellness Committee. C. Blanchard stated he would forward her
36 concern to the committee.

1 M. Salzmann thanked all those that attended the 9/11 ceremony at the Converse War
2 Memorial.

3 D. Blais thanked all that served on superintendent search committee. He also criticized the
4 Springfield Republican's coverage of the Town Council meetings. Finally, he stated that he would
5 be holding a historical talk at the Palmer Historical and Cultural Center.

6 P. Hebert stated that there had been a great turnout for Celebrate Palmer. He thanked all those
7 that volunteered for the event. He stated that he was surprised that some businesses on Main
8 Street did not open during the event. Finally, P. Hebert stated that he would like more support
9 from the town for the 9/11 ceremony.

10 **10. Adjournment of Formal Session and enter executive session.**

11 *Motion to enter executive session under purpose 6, to consider the purchase of real estate, and*
12 *adjourn therefrom by D. Blais, seconded by M. Salzmann. Motion passed 6-0 by roll call vote. D.*
13 *Blais – Yes, K. Williams – Yes, P. Hebert – Yes, L. Baker – Yes, M. Salzmann – Yes, B. Barry – Yes at*
14 *8:50 pm.*