

Palmer Town Council

Meeting Minutes

January 8, 2024

Call to Order:

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, January 8, 2024, was called to order at 6:35 pm by Town Council President Barbara Barry. Councilors Jessica Sizer, Philip Hebert, Mark Caci, and Karl Williams were present. Also present were Interim Town Manager Robert Reed and Executive Assistant Marlene Ottomaniello.

Visitor Comments –

Steve Kosmider, Thorndike- Would like an update on Church St. Bridge. Town Council reads last update from DPW Director Matt Morse -things are progressing as the bridge deck and the pedestrian walkway have been installed, they are working on installing handrails, guardrails, and some concrete work.

No Old Business

New Business

PVTA Route Changes

Paul Burns gives a brief overview on the PVTA Route changes. Key points discussed were - Additional state funding was received to enhance bus service in the area over the next 5-10 years, starting this year. The Palmer and Ware bus routes saw the first service increases after being combined in 2017 due to budget cuts. Overall goals are to expand weekend service, restore service cuts due to staffing shortages, and increase frequency on all routes to every 30 minutes. The Palmer circulator route was reinstated in December with frequency increased from every 3 hours to every 45 minutes. More service enhancements like evening and weekend hours are planned for March once new drivers complete training. Connections to Springfield were increased from two trips to six trips per day, stopping at the Wilbraham Big Y. Around \$100,000 was spent on improvements such as ADA ramps, crosswalk beacons, and a bus shelter in Palmer. Challenges include increasing awareness of the expanded service and adding more bus stop signs/shelters. Current ridership is only around 700 per month, down significantly from 2,000 pre-pandemic, likely due to previous service reductions. Increasing frequency is expected to boost ridership. Three people attended the public hearings, mainly interested in the Palmer/Ware changes. The small regular ridership seems to be from the same core group currently.

Resolution 2024-06 To see if the Town of Palmer will adopt M.G.L. CH. 59 §5 CL. 54 the local option to exempt Personal Property accounts valued at \$2,500 or less from taxation. - (Board of Assessors)

Rachael Carney, Principal Assessor –By adopting this threshold, we exempt the very small businesses that are difficult to discover, inspect and tax fairly. Personal Property accounts that fall in this value range are generally home offices and small home-based businesses. Home based businesses are difficult to discover because they often do not have signs or pull business certificates, so taxation is sporadic at best. Many similar sized communities have adopted a minimum threshold.

Motion by J. Sizer, 2nd by M. Caci vote: 5-0-0.

Resolution 2024-07 - to approve the use of Free Cash to pay previous years Amazon invoices in the amount of \$1492.53.

Motion by J. Sizer, 2nd by M. Caci *vote: 5-0-0.*

Accept gift donation of \$4000 from John J. Mullen Sr. Charitable Trust- to be used for Fuel Assistance for resident of Palmer (Community Development Office)

Motion by P. Hebert, 2nd by K. Williams *vote: 5-0-0.*

Accept gift donation of \$5000 from LWS Foundation to be used for Three Rivers Community Development (Community Development Office)

Motion by J. Sizer, 2nd by K. Williams *vote: 5-0-0.*

Appointment of Elizabeth O'Connor to Conservation Commission term to 2027

Motion by M. Caci, 2nd by J. Sizer *vote: 5-0-0.*

The Town Council would like to send their condolences to the family and friends of Brenda Cole who recently passed. She had been a member of the Conservation Commission since 2017.

Discussion of Budget Process and Priorities

Town Council and Interim Town Manager Robert Reed review the budget process. Interim Town Manager Robert Reed is implementing standardized budget sheets that departments fill out with prior year expenditures, current year budget, and requests for the upcoming fiscal year. Guidelines have been given to departments to maintain current expense levels where possible. A new capital improvement committee has been formed to review and prioritize capital expenditure requests. The Town Council indicated some priorities to consider while moving forward with the budget process. These included review of the school budget, state aid, reinstating police cruiser purchases in the operating budget, budgeting for annual track replacement fund, IT services - potentially hiring in-house rather than contracting out, funding for road/sidewalk repair and maintenance, training for DPW staff and ongoing funding for records retention/management.

Review and possible action Town Manager Screening Committee

Town Manager Screening Committee - 5-member committee consisting of two Town Council members, one Department Head and two Town Residents. The Town Council reviews and discusses applications submitted by Department Heads and Town Residents. Town Council Members to be selected at a future meeting.

Motion to appoint Chief of Police Christopher Burns by M. Caci, 2nd by J. Sizer *vote: 5-0-0.*

Motion to appoint Town Resident David Golden by K. Williams, 2nd by J. Sizer *vote: 5-0-0.*

Motion to appoint Town Resident Roger Fortune by P. Hebert, 2nd by K. Williams *vote: 5-0-0.*

Subcommittee Reports

There was a Supreme Court ruling regarding public participation at meetings, have Legal Counsel review Public Comment Period in Council Rules.

Motion to enter Executive Session by P. Hebert, 2nd by K. Williams

M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21 # 3. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation (THE UNITED PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION (UPSEU), LOCAL 424M (DPW/ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT) (Contract 2022 – 2025) if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.

Roll Call Vote to enter Executive Session at 8:09pm

B. Barry- yes, J. Sizer- yes, P. Hebert- yes, K. Williams- yes, and M. Caci- yes

Town Council will not reconvene to open session.