

## Palmer Town Council

### Meeting Minutes

June 10, 2024

#### Call to Order:

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, June 10, 2024, was called to order at 6:32pm by Town Council President Barbara Barry. Councilors Jessica Sizer, Mark Caci, Philip Hebert and Karl Williams were present. Also present were Town Manager Brad Brothers and Executive Assistant Marlene Ottomaniello.

#### Visitor Comments –

Starla Muraska, 98 Beech St. – Purchased a home in Palmer, roof was in disrepair. Would like to address the issues she experienced with the Building Department while having her roof replaced. The Building Inspector shut the project down due to outstanding taxes and sewer bills, she paid them within an hour of being informed and the work on the roof continued. The Building Inspector then issued a violation for not having the proper paperwork. The Building Inspector visited the home questioning the completion of the roof, she felt mistreated during their conversation. There was another violation issued for completing the roof without the proper permit. The Town Council would like to get more information, Starla M. hands them the violations along with what she has written out.

Steve Kosmider, Thorndike – Questions the Forest Lake Cottage Project and the town helping Thorndike and Bondsville Water Departments. The Town Council will have more information after Town Manager Brad Brothers meets with the developers.

#### Minutes-

December 11, 2023- Motion by P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams *vote: 4-0-1.*

May 13, 2024 - Motion P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams *vote: 5-0-0.*

#### New Business

##### **Streets and Sidewalks Ordinance Public Hearing**

##### **Public Hearing opened at 6:48 pm**

DPW Director Matt Morse explains this ordinance is to address various issues and concerns related to public ways, sidewalks, and storm water runoff in Palmer. The ordinance would cover a lot of different aspects such as snow on sidewalks, sediment and dirt washing onto streets and sidewalks from private properties, storm water runoff causing ice dams on roads, homeowners blowing leaves onto sidewalks and public ways, plowing snow from private property into public ways and storm water discharge from properties causing safety hazards and road damage. The primary goal is to achieve compliance, not to issue fines. The first step is a verbal warning and public education and focuses on correcting public safety concerns. The ordinance would provide improved safety, especially for children walking to school and reduced road damage/ maintenance costs.

##### **Public Hearing closed at 6:56 pm**

##### **Streets and Sidewalks Ordinance 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading**

Be it moved that the Council amend the Code of the Town of Palmer, Chapter 122, Streets and Sidewalks, by replacing Article III. Snow removal in its entirety with the following amended Article III. Snow, Debris, Water, and Sediment on Ways and Sidewalks- Snow, debris, water deposited in, on, or across public way or sidewalk. No person, other than an employee of the Town of Palmer or contractor working on behalf of the Town in the performance of their appointed work, shall direct, discharge, dump, shovel, pile, push, blow, plow, or deposit snow, ice, leaves,

debris, or discharge water, into, onto, or across any public way, including sidewalks, or other public property. Sediment in, on, or across public way or sidewalk. The owner or person having the care of real property shall cause the cleanup and removal within 24 hours of any sediment deposited from said property onto any public way, including sidewalks, or other public property. Snow removal from sidewalks. The owner or person having the care of real property abutting upon any street, land, court or square within the Town where there is a sidewalk shall cause the snow to be removed therefrom within 24 hours after the end of any snowfall. Violations and penalties – to be enforced by the Palmer Police Department. Criminal complaint. Whoever violates any of the provisions of this article may be penalized by indictment or any complaint brought in the District Court. Noncriminal disposition. Whoever violates any provision of this article may be penalized by first a verbal warning along with public education, second by noncriminal disposition as provided in MGL c. 40, § 21D and may be punished by noncriminal fines as approved by Town Council.

### **FY 2025 Municipal Budget Public Hearing**

Town Manager Brad Brothers gives highlights and an overview of the budget process that started with Interim Town Manager Robert Reed. The budget has gone through multiple review stages involving the Town Manager, Town Accountant, department heads and the Budget Subcommittee.

Highlights for FY25 Proposed Budget include:

*FY25 Revenue*-Property Taxes and State Aid are projected stable, however, we have seen a significant increase in New Growth. This is a trend we expect to continue as we look to ensure our inspections are up to date. The two main drivers for Local Receipt increases were investment income and income from cannabis excise tax. Local Receipts fluctuate from year to year.

*FY 25 Expenses*- As you go through the departmental budget pages, there are variances between the FY totals, this is caused by transfers from one budget line to another. HMO and PPO Health Insurance plans were renewed for a 5% reduction for FY25. Salary adjustments were made to department heads based on a compensation study, local market analysis and comparable town salary information. Palmer Public Schools- 3.5% Budget increase which includes expansion to no cost full- day pre- kindergarten, development/expansion of collaborative teaching models and transportation contractual increases. Central Purchasing- Increase in fuel costs based on FY24 shortfall. Information Technology- \$25,000 was added for a department head to hire for the last three months of FY25, the goal is to do an analysis on our current contracted services model and see if it makes sense to restructure our IT services. Veterans Agent- Increased position to 37.5 hours to foster program expansion for our veterans. Assessors- Increase in department head work hours to 37.5, matching hours of other department heads. ACO- Fully captured true costs of the facility and program which will be billed back to each municipality, 4 towns in the in the regional agreement. Facilities- added full-time position including \$30,000 to cover general maintenance expenses. This position will create a preventative maintenance plan, capital plan and take over the day-to-day oversight of our buildings. Reserve Fund- Currently we have \$91,000 set aside in the reserve fund for the following, Part time Assessing Data Lister, Part time Local Building Inspector and a Health Agent- either a part-time on call or contracted service provider to ensure compliance with annual inspections. Other Expenses- Slight increases to all other expenses including stabilization accounts which will be memorialized in future financial policies. *Wastewater*- Inflation to general operating expenses in addition to growing capital project expenses have the recommended budget totaling \$4,449,490. After reducing anticipated offsets of \$822,000 (Monson, septage, misc. revenue) the balance left to cover is \$3,627,490. Assuming a 98% collection rate based on trend history we would need to bill out \$3,701,520. With 5,141 EDUs being billed, it sets the FY25 rate to \$720/EDU up from FY24 \$610/EDU.

*Capital*- A five-year capital plan is under development. At this time, we are requesting \$2,195,735 of free cash be transferred to the Capital Stabilization account. The remaining \$500,000 free cash balance will carry forward into the next FY certification. As we develop our financial policies, we anticipate recommending a minimum of \$500,000 free cash be carried forward annually.

## **FY 2025 Municipal Budget Public Hearing opened at 7:08 pm**

Councilor K. Williams questions who would oversee the Facility Director. Town Manager Brad Brothers explains the position would report to him, oversee contracted work and capital projects.

Sandy Noonan- Questions the differences in departmental percentage increases. Town Manager Brad explains the documents are available online and reviews each departmental increase from the FY25 Proposed Budget sheet. Explains the variances are caused by transfers from one line item to another.

Steve Kosmider- Would like an explanation on Sewer EDUs and why there is increase in the rate. WWTP Superintendent Ken Lord explains how EDUs are calculated and the rise in rates are due to the increase in operating expenses and growing capital project expenses.

Ruth Curtin- Questions what the revenues have been per year from septic companies using the sewer plant. Town Council would like Ruth to reach out to the Town Manager Brad Brothers for that information.

Sandy Noonan- Would like an explanation on the percentage increases to the Police Department vs the Library. Town Manager Brad Brothers explains that Police Cruisers were added back into the operating budget along with an increase to training and contractual obligations.

Town Council expresses the challenges faced during this budget process. There were many changes in the budget involving moving costs from one department to another and to look at the actual dollar amounts rather than just the percentage increases.

Tina Brohman- She is a Homeowner in Palmer and the Veteran Service Officer. She has just gone through her second budget. The budget subcommittee and Brad have gone line by line item by item making sure that they are not overspending. She enjoys working for Palmer and her community. She wanted to thank you all for your due diligence and being proactive.

## **Public Hearing closed at 7:37 pm**

**Lemonade Day Proclamation - August 24, 2024-** That the Town of Palmer hereby proclaims August 24th, 2024, as "Lemonade Day Palmer" and encourages all residents of the Palmer area and surrounding communities to participate and have a role, either by selling or buying lemonade.

Motion to support and sign the proclamation by K. Williams 2<sup>nd</sup> by J. Sizer *vote: 5-0-0.*

**Appointment** - Valerie Wlodyka to the Board of Registrars *term to 6/30/24*

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

**Appointment** - David Pasquini to ZBA *term to 6/30/2026*

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

**Resolution 2024-12** - To approve SLFRF /ARPA funds in the amount of \$13,786 for renovation work to be done in the Legion field concession/restroom building.

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

**Resolution 2024-15** - The Town of Palmer adopt M.G.L. CH. 41 §38A Collection of accounts due city or town; powers and duties of Tax Collector.

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

**Resolution 2024-16** - To transfer \$29,547.39 from Free Cash to provide funds for FY24 Snow and Ice deficit.

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

**Resolution 2024-17** - To approve the use of SLFRF/ARPA funds in the amount of \$794,206.67 for work invoiced to date for Palmer Road

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

**Resolution 2024-18** - To approve a transfer of \$50,000 from Free Cash to Commemorative Signage Fund.

Motion by J. Sizer, 2<sup>nd</sup> by P. Hebert *vote: 5-0-0*

**Town Manager's Report**- Brad Brothers gives a quick overview of upcoming events and town business.

The Palmer Library is kicking off it's summer reading campaign. On June 20th from 2- 4p.m. attendees can sign up for the summer reading program and receive a free kid's scoop ice cream. On June 27th they are also offering a Mobile Mini golf from 1- 4p.m.

Hryniewicz Park Summer Concert Series will run on Thursdays from 6-8p.m.

Barker St. Land Grant update- The seller has agreed to sell according to the newly appraised value of \$96,000, previously \$100,000. The grant will still reimburse 70% of all costs related to the purchase.

The Building Department now has 65% of permits being issued online.

Boards and Committees open seats, anyone interested send him an email or letter of interest with details about yourself and what your goal is for the committee.

Town Election June 11, 2024 – Voting hours are 10a.m. - 8p.m.

Summer Food Service Program at Palmer High School on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. for kids ages 4-18. Starting Monday July 8,2024.

### **Misc. Correspondence**

Councilor M. Caci has received noise complaints about the food truck at Hryniewicz Park. Town Manager Brad Brothers is working with the vendor to find an alternative location that is furthest away from residential properties. Plans to relocate Porta Potties away from residents as well.

### **Councilor's Roundtable**

Enfield School District budget cuts, loss of 120 staff members. The Palmer Schools Superintendent Matt Francis and the Central Office staff deserve credit for their creative ways of maintaining and not having to cut.

Motion to adjourn meeting at 8:04 pm by J. Sizer, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams *vote: 5-0-0*.