

**Palmer Town Council**  
**Meeting Minutes-Excerpt**  
**February 12th, 2024**

**Call to Order:**

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, February 12th, 2024, was called to order at 6:30 pm by Town Council President Barbara Barry. Councilors Jessica Sizer, Philip Hebert, Matthew Lemieux, Rob Lavoie, Karl Williams, and Mark Caci were present. Also present were Interim Town Manager Robert Reed and Executive Assistant Marlene Ottomaniello.

**Visitors Comments**

Steve Kosmider, Thorndike- Questions what projects the town is borrowing money for and how the budget process works. The Town Council explains the budget process and that there is a project involving borrowing money for the roof repair at the WWTP, the estimated cost is around \$4 million. The town has already spent money on Duke Track, costing about \$2.5 million. The budget process- Department heads requesting money must present itemized budgets to the Town Manager. The Town manager submits a budget around March 1<sup>st</sup>, and the budget subcommittee consisting of three councilors review the budget. All Town Council members then review the budget and submit questions to the subcommittee members. The subcommittee holds public meetings with the Town Manager and Accountant. The subcommittee reviews the entire budget and capital plan, then makes recommendations to the full Council for voting.

Josephine Fitzgerald, Bondsville – Has concerns with vehicles parked on sidewalks, forcing you to walk in the street, trash cans blocking sidewalks on garbage collection days, large amounts of trash in yards throughout Bondsville and a desire to see Bondsville renovated, especially with the possibility of a train coming through. The Town Council suggests he reaches out to Mr. Reed at the town manager's office with these specific concerns. He can help determine whether these issues fall under police jurisdiction, zoning regulations, or other departments.

Dave Golden- Suggested that the Town Council appoint a dedicated point person to liaise with the state regarding the upcoming train project, especially since the town is currently without a manager.

**Minutes-** August 14th, 2023 - Motion to approve by J. Sizer, 2<sup>nd</sup> by P. Hebert Vote: 6-0-1

**New Business**

**Warrant for Presidential Primary-** Signed by Town Council. Voting is Tuesday March 5th from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm

**John Latour- CDBG FY24 –**Town Council and Joun Latour review the current and past grants as well as details for the FY 24 Grant Application. FY 22-23 grant is funding infrastructure work on Maple Street and Maple Terrace, focusing on sewer, water, and drain lines. The FY 21-22 grant will support the construction phase of this project. The FY 24 Grant Application plan is to apply for \$950,000 to continue similar infrastructure work on Maple Terrace and support social services and administration. The town previously had “mini entitlement” status but lost it due to a slight increase above the median poverty rate, despite this, the town secured \$1.35 million in the last grant cycle. John Latour is working on the FY24 grant, the town has met the prerequisites for applying for the new grant and is currently working on a waiver for remaining funds from previous grants. The town council suggests ideas to increase community involvement and attendance at meetings. Expressing this is crucial for securing grants and demonstrating local interest in projects. Currently meetings are posted at the town hall, library, police station, and town website with a variety of time ranges.

**Accept gift donation of \$2000 from John J. Mullen Sr. Charitable Trust-** to be used for Fuel Assistance for resident of Palmer (Community Development Office)

*Motion by M. Lemieux, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams Vote: 7-0-0*

## **Tina Brohman & Rick Pobliego-** Request to dedicate Main St Three Rivers Bridge

Rick Pobliego gives the history and background of Ignacy Pobliego. "Iggy" was one of 12 siblings, born and raised in Three Rivers and lived about a 10-minute walk from the bridge. Rick worked with historians and authors specializing in WWII to gather his information. Ignacy ("Iggy") Pobliego was the son of Polish immigrants and was born and raised in the Three Rivers section of Palmer. His Uncle Iggy served in the Civilian Conservation Corps in Pittsfield, MA, before joining the U.S. Army in 1942. Iggy volunteered for the paratroops and was assigned to the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of "Band of Brothers" fame, commanded by Colonel Robert Sink at Camp Toccoa, GA. Of the 7,000 volunteers only about 2,000 completed the many months of the most rigorous training the Army had to offer at the time. PFC Ignacy Pobliego was one of those who endured and successfully completed the training, making up the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Shortly thereafter the 506th sailed to England aboard the troop ship Samaria where it became a regiment of the 101st Airborne Division "The Screaming Eagles". There he began many more months of training exercises and practice jumps in preparation for the D-Day Invasion. While in England, Private First Class "Iggy" Pobliego and the rest of the 506th took part in a demonstration jump for General Dwight Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill which greatly impressed the Allied Leadership. PFC Ignacy Pobliego was part of the 101st Airborne Drop into Normandy, France on the night of June 6th, 1944 where he fought as part of a machine gun platoon until he was killed in action on June 23, 1944, near Carentan, France at the age of 22. We would like to have the Main Street Bridge in Three Rivers, MA named in honor of PFC Ignacy "Iggy" Pobliego and dedicated to him and to all those of "The Greatest Generation" who sacrificed their all during WWII. We would greatly appreciate any and all assistance and advice you may be able to offer so that this dedication could take place.

Motion to name the Main Street bridge in Three Rivers in honor of PFC Ignacy Pobliego and dedicate it to him and to all of those who sacrificed and gave their all during World War II.

*Motion by M. Caci, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams Vote: 7-0-0*

## **Town Manager search update**

Bernard Lynch- Community Paradigm Associates, LLC presents a PowerPoint (via ZOOM) along with Town Manager Finalists handout for the Town Council to review. Key Points discussed- Screening Committee met on January 25th, reviewed the fourteen applicants that submitted resumes. Conducted interviews on February 3<sup>rd</sup> based on specific municipal experience, knowledge, and style attributes identified in Position Statement. Three finalists were selected for presentation to the Town Council, one withdrew. The two finalists remaining were Brad Brothers and Carolyn Brennan. The proposed interview topics for Town Council are Career Overview, Specific Interest in Reading, Leadership and Management Style, Financial Management, Project Management and Procurement, Community and Economic Development, Personnel Management/Labor Relations, External Relationships, Community Engagement/Citizen Relations, and Town Council Relationship.

*Brad Brothers* -MBA- Bridgewater State University (12/24). Master of Education-Worcester State University. BS in Business Administration-American International College. Assistant Town Manager in Plymouth, MA (4/22-present). School Business Administrator (2/21-4/22) Carver, MA. Chief Operations & Finance Officer of Schools (10/16-2/21) Palmer, MA. Business Manager of Schools (9/12-10/16)

*Carolyn Brennan*- Certificate in Local Government Leadership and Management- Suffolk University. MBA-American International College. BS-Human Development-University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Town Administrator Hadley, MA (9/20-present). Council on Aging Director- East Longmeadow, MA (4/07-9/20). Council on Aging Director- Hampden, MA (1/89-2002)

*Discussion*- The Town Council and Bernard Lynch discuss how long each interview should take with primary and follow up questions. A Town Council Meeting is scheduled with Bernard Lynch to interview Brad Brothers and Carolyn Brennan on February 22<sup>nd</sup> with recommended interview topics and follow up questions. The Town Council also sets a date to vote on the finalist, Monday February 26<sup>th</sup>.

## **Appointment of Sandra McConathy to Conservation Commission term to 2027**

*Motion by M. Lemieux, 2<sup>nd</sup> by P. Hebert Vote: 7-0-0*

## **Review/Discussion of Policy Implementation**

### Financial Management Policies-

Key points discussed - Robert Reed worked on updating financial management policies, starting with guidelines for financial reserves, free cash and stabilization funds. Robert Reed is implementing new standardized budget sheets for departments to improve financial management. The Town Council would like some clarity on the percentages for maintaining free cash, the policy needs further revision to remove conflicting percentages. The council suggests ranges for both stabilization fund 3-5% and free cash 3-5% of annual budget, with a preference not to specify detailed allocations for free cash usage to maintain flexibility. The stabilization fund had a balance of about 14% in the general fund but was reduced due to roof expenses. A capital committee meets regularly to provide an ongoing capital planning process. There is a question about a School Capital Improvement fund/ School BAN stabilization account with a balance of over \$300,000 that needs investigation. The council decided to table the policy discussion until a future meeting to allow more time for review.

### Public Participation/ Public Comment Period-reviewed by legal counsel.

Public Comment Period: The Council shall provide time at each regular meeting for the public to address the Council body on any matter not on the agenda. The presiding officer shall set and enforce appropriate order and time limits for such comments. Those citizens addressing the Council shall conform to the following:

- They are encouraged to abide by the same rules of propriety, decorum, and good conduct applicable to Council Members.
- Those wishing to address the Council shall wait to be recognized by the Presiding Officer, who must recognize all those wishing to be heard.
- The Presiding Officer shall make every effort to recognize those wishing to be heard in the order in which each request was made.
- Those addressing the Council may be asked to give their name and address in an audible tone for the record.
- Initial remarks will be limited to five (5) minutes unless the Council President extends such time.
- All remarks, comments etc. shall be addressed to the Council as a whole.
- No person other than members of the Town Council and the person having the floor shall enter into any discussion whether directly or through a member of the Council without permission from the presiding officer.
- The presiding officer at his or her discretion may ask that a group (more than three (3) proponents of the same topic) to make a unified presentation.

*Motion to accept and adopt to Town Counsel Rules by P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by J. Sizer Vote: 7-0-0*

## **Review of Streets & Sidewalks Ordinance**

DPW Matt Morse provides and updated Streets & Sidewalks Ordinance

Discussion- Matt Morse would like to address issues in town that are ongoing by updating this ordinance. The Town Council questions enforcement, including who would be responsible DPW director, police, or a designated agent, and whether to use criminal or non-criminal disposition. concerns about enforcing existing ordinances, such as snow removal from sidewalks. The Town Council sees the challenges of enforcement and suggests the possibility of issuing warnings instead of fines. The council would like to see if Chapter 40U §6, which allows for appointment of a hearings officer has been adopted by the town, Robert Reed plans to investigate this and potentially put it on the agenda for the next meeting. The Town Council would like further review before 1st reading.

### **Discussion of Building/ Local inspector position**

Robert Reed updates the Town Council that Bonnie Weeks, the full-time building inspector recently retired for personal reasons. Mr. Fenner, who was previously the zoning agent, is currently filling in part-time. Mr. Fenner proposed remaining as a part-time Building Commissioner and hiring a local inspector at a lower salary, he is also willing to apply for the full-time position but is seeking a salary increase to around \$80,000 (up from the previous inspector's salary of about \$74,000). The town has had difficulty advertising and attracting candidates for the position, which is a common issue across Massachusetts for various municipal roles.

Town Council and Robert Reed discuss the needs of maintaining a full-time Building Inspector position, allowing for a salary increase to attract and retain a qualified candidate, and giving Robert Reed the flexibility to fill the position without immediately adjusting this year's budget. Robert Reed recommends hiring Mr. Fenner as the full-time Building Inspector, citing his capability, initiative, and the significant effort he's put in to help the town during this transition.

### **Misc. Correspondence & Councilor's Roundtable**

DPW Director Matt Morse applied for, and the town was awarded a Complete Streets grant of \$500,000. This grant is tied to the town's Complete Streets plan, which focuses on improving public roads for various modes of transportation beyond just vehicles. The funding will likely go towards projects such as sidewalks or bike lanes, rather than vehicles or equipment. The Town Council would like Matt Morse to provide more details for its planned use at a future Town Meeting. The Town Council would like to thank Matt for all his hard work in securing this grant.

Church St. Bridge update - An inspection was conducted on January 26th. There are still some punch list items that the contractor needs to address such as handrails and guardrails. An official inspection report is expected within 1 to 2 weeks.

Liberty Plaza Development update – There has been some visible activity with trucks and open gates and all necessary permits are now in place. They may have had issues with hitting a ledge or rock during excavation. It is a private development, so the town can't impose deadlines or penalties.

New Business Opening - A new pottery studio is opening on February 19th in the old Park Street School building. Hours of operation will be shared once available.

### **Motion to enter Executive Session by P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by J. Sizer**

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

**M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21 # 3.** To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.  
Hryniewicz Park Playground – M.E. O'Brien & Sons Inc.

**M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21 # 6.** To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. Converse Middle School & Thorndike Grammer School

### **Roll Call Vote to enter Executive Session at 8:18pm**

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

Motion to exit Executive Session by P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by K. Williams

**Roll Call Vote to exit Executive Session and return to open session at 9:20pm**

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

**Vote on Collective Bargaining Agreement the DPW/ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT (Contract 2022 – 2025)**

Motion to not approve Collective Bargaining Agreement the DPW/ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT (Contract 2022 – 2025) by Roll Call Vote

*B. Barry- yes, J. Sizer- yes, R. Lavoie- yes, P. Hebert- yes, K. Williams- yes, M. Lemieux- yes, and M. Caci- yes*

*Motion to adjourn meeting at 9:24 pm by P. Hebert, 2<sup>nd</sup> by J. Sizer Vote 6-0-0*