

**Palmer Town Council  
Meeting Minutes  
January 10, 2022**

**Call to Order:**

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, January 10, 2022, was called to order at 6:30 pm by Town Council President Barbara Barry. Councilors Jessica Sizer, Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert, Karl Williams, Matthew Lemieux, and Mark Caci were present. Also present was Town Manager Ryan McNutt and Executive Assistant Sarah Hermanson.

**Visitors Comments**

None.

**Minutes**

12/13/2021- Motion to approve the minutes of 12/13/2021, by K. Williams, seconded by P. Hebert. The motion passed 6-0.

**Old Business**

Drafting a policy on naming or dedication of Town property.

B. Barry requested ordinance subcommittee review the draft ordinance before the next town council meeting February 14, 2022. The three (3) members are K. Williams, P. Hebert, and R. Lavoie.

**New Business**

Department Head Report- Keri-Ann Wenzel- tax discussion.

Keri-Ann Wenzel, Principal Assessor, presented a power point presentation of how the property values were determined for fiscal year 2022. The presentation provided an overview of why the values changed, comparing the values from FY2021 to FY2022, an average over the last five (5) years single family value and average tax bill, a comparison of neighboring towns FY21 to FY22, and how the tax bills are calculated. A suggestion to residents. review your property record card to verify that the information is accurate. Also, the Town offers exemptions and abatements for certain situations. Reach out to the Assessor's office for more information.

Brief discussion.

B. Barry opened the floor for residents to ask questions.

Resident- David Lane- 119 State St. Palmer

Questioned the breakdown of where the tax dollars are spent from the pie chart that was in the Assessor's presentation. Public Safety was a slice of the pie and Mr. Lane questioned why fire was not included in the public safety piece.

B. Barry stated that the fire districts are separate from the town.

D. Lane questioned why Bondsville Fire Department had the highest district tax.

B. Barry state the fire departments do not have to follow the proposition 2 ½ budget.

D. Lane questioned the tax base. Where and why did you come up with the values.

K. Wenzel stated that they are based on the market value, assessed value, and it is a requirement of the state.

D. Lane questioned why are outsourcing for collection of taxes?

B. Barry stated that it is a lock box service, and it is a cheaper option then adding to staff.

Resident- Bonnie Rathbone- 20 Brown St. Palmer

Stated the presentation was nice and she appreciated the time and effort that was put in it.

She brought the newspaper article from the Palmer Journal that had the headline that tax rate was going down. B. Rathbone stated that Ryan had provided the Journal incorrect information. She stated that her tax bill went up \$600.00 a year and was questioning on where all the tax money is going. She stated that it was poor timing on the Town to send out the bills right before a holiday and the Town Hall was closed. Also, poor timing with raising the values when people are struggling already.

B. Barry explained that there are state laws of when the real estate tax bills need to be sent out. They have gone out to residents the same time every year. The increase in taxes is terrible with everything else that is going on in the world today. The DOR and the state of MA require values to be updated. The town cannot control what is published in the local newspaper.

K. Wenzel stated that the state must approve the values before the bills could go out.

B. Barry- if residents are struggling to pay their taxes come and talk about it as the town has some services that may help.

Resident- Brian Royea- 3177 Main St. Bondsville, MA.

Stated the taxes in Palmer are higher than Mashpee, MA

There are two bridges in town that need to be fixed, where is the money coming from for that.

New police station, new courthouse, and no casino, did the town spend too much money before and now must play catch up?

B. Barry answered that the courthouse is state owned not town owned. The debit exclusion for the police station was voted in by the residents not the town council.

Resident- Val Rogers- Thorndike, MA

Requested to know where their tax dollars are being spent?

Mr. Rogers stated the town needs to offer more resources. Other towns provide resources, and their taxes are not as high as Palmer's. The school system is failing, there is no parks and recreation department. The budget for the school and the town needs to scrutinize.

P. Hebert stated the state needs to be aware of the frustrations.

B. Barry explained that the Town Council or Town Manager have no control over how the school spends their budget.

M. Lemieux reminded the residents that other towns have the CPA tax and that allows additional funds to provide more resources for projects in town.

Resident- David Lane- 119 State St. Palmer, MA

Questioned where the Conservation Department fell in the line with the breakdown of fees?

Why does the Town charge a fee for a site visit? Shouldn't the town have records of properties?

B. Barry suggested that Mr. Lane discuss his concerns with R. McNutt at a later time.

### **First Reading- Rezone parcels into Highway Business**

R. Lavoie read the zoning amendment for each of the six (6) parcels of land. The rezoning is from residential to a business district.

Six parcels are affected by this zoning amendment, specifically 101 Ware Street (Map 74, Lot 32), 0 Breckenridge Street (Map 74, Lot 31), Ware Street (Map 74, Lot 34), 49 Ware Street (Map 74, Lot 35), 37 Ware Street (Map 74, Lot 36) and Breckenridge Street (Map 74, Lot 37).

Six parcels are affected by this zoning amendment, specifically L8 High Street (Map 7, Lot 8), 1002 High Street (Map 7, Lot 7), L6 High Street (Map 7, Lot 6), L5 French Street (Map 7, Lot 5), 54 Walnut Street (Map 7, Lot 4), and 24 Converse Street (Map 7, Lot 3).

### **Discussion ahead of Fiscal Year 2023 municipal budget**

B. Barry opened the discussion to the members of the council.

P. Hebert stated that the budget needs to be scrutinized. Review where cuts could be made on every level. Review the school's budget. Would like to see the Parks and Recreation position to be open and filled again.

K. Williams would like to see the enrollment trend of the schools.

B. Barry would like to invite the School Committee and Superintendent to discuss the budget at the next Town Council meeting in February.

M. Caci would like to have some council members attend the school committee meetings as well. It shows accountability.

B. Barry stated the schools provide an outline of their budget but would like it to be more detail.

R. McNutt confirmed that the schools are good partners to work with.

M. Lemieux indicated that there needs to be more transparency with the school budget.

B. Barry agrees the Parks and Recreation position needs to be reinstated. Additional funds would be a greater resource in the parks area. She also would like justification for all positions.

J. Sizer also recommended the Parks and Recreation position to be brought back.

**Any other new business**

None.

**Subcommittee Reports**

None.

**Town Managers Report**

Tax Title Auction was held on December 14, 2021, of three properties: 1110 Park St (Vinny's Pizza), 30 Crawford St. (single family home), and 1512 North Main St (Jewelry Store). All three properties were sold. The Town netted \$200,000.00.

There are multiple bridges in town that are in the process of being fixed and/or replaced. Church Street Bridge is moving forward with being replaced. The Main Street Bridge in Three Rivers will have minor repairs completed. The state project with the Monson/ Palmer bridge will have a detour as the bridge will be closed for about a week in early March.

The Code Enforcement/ Zoning Officer is stepping away from the position to focus on his private business. He gave his notice but offered to continue his hours until we can find his replacement.

The Animal Control building that the Town was approached by, is the owner of the animal hospital in Monson located at 125 Palmer Rd. She is selling the building because it is too small for her needs. She was aware that the town was looking to expand their Animal Control Facility and offered the town an opportunity to purchase the building. We are currently waiting on the appraisal of the property.

**Miscellaneous Correspondence:**

None.

**Councilor's RoundTable:**

P. Hebert submitted a formal letter and documentation about mandates of masks and vaccines. Attached is the documentation.

B. Barry would like to schedule a meeting on 01/24/2022 at 6:00 pm for Community Meeting with residents to be held at the Palmer Police Station.

**Executive Session**

Close public session, roll call vote to convene executive session for the purpose of M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21 #3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body. Council will not reconvene in open session at the end of the executive session.

**Adjournment of Formal Session**

Motion was made by to exit formal session and enter executive session with adjournment there from by R. Lavoie and seconded by P. Hebert. Roll call vote 7-0-0.

