

**Palmer Town Council
Meeting Minutes
March 14, 2022**

Call to Order:

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, March 14, 2022, was called to order at 6:30 pm by Town Council President Barbara Barry. Councilors Jessica Sizer, Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert (via telephone), Karl Williams, Matthew Lemieux, and Mark Caci were present. Also present was Town Manager Ryan McNutt and Executive Assistant Sarah Hermanson.

Visitors Comments

David Ducomb from High Street in Palmer requested the Town Council to postpone the voting on the zoning change for the six (6) parcels located on the Sherman property until a further study can be completed. He would also like more time for the residents that will impact. He stated that they were unaware of the 1st reading and had only heard about the public hearing and 2nd reading. David would like the town to investigate spot zoning. He feels that the 80+ abutters would be negatively impacted by this rezoning. He mentioned in the Town Charter on page 12, section 8-9 that Town Council should read over and vote in favor of postponing the rezoning.

B. Barry stated to the audience that the Public Hearing was already held and that is not the intent for this meeting.

D. Ducomb stated that he attended a Planning Board meeting. He reviewed the minutes from prior meetings and the town residents need to be aware that there is one Planning Board member that has not attended a meeting in the last 18 meetings.

Stephen Chiacchia from the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce stated that the Chamber is fully onboard with the rezoning. They believe that there are many benefits to the town as well as an increase in the tax base and potential employment opportunities.

Minutes

None.

Old Business

Ordinance- Rezone (6) six parcels into Highway Business (Breckenridge).

Motion to approve the rezoning of (6) six parcels into Highway Business (Breckenridge) was made by R. Lavoie, second by M. Lemieux. Motion passed 7-0-0.

Ordinance- Rezone (6) six parcels into Highway Business (Sherman).

Motion to approve the rezoning of (6) six parcels into Highway Business (Sherman) was made by R. Lavoie, second by P. Hebert. Motion passed 7-0-0.

New Business

Vietnam Veterans' Welcome Home Proclamation was read by R. Lavoie. William Byrnes and two other Veterans accepted the award.

Guest speaker Amy Scribner, Director at River East School- to -Career, Inc. Amy provided a brief overview of what the program offers. They are based out of the Palmer Public Library and have been there since 2004. They serve 9 school districts, support work base learning, prepare students for the workforce, provide interviews, and have speakers come in to educate on certain topics.

M. Lemieux asked if the service is free.

A. Scribner stated that they are a grant funded program through DESE as well as the schools that are apart of the program pay a membership fee.

Guest speaker Beth Zelazo from the Palmer Cultural Council spoke about the survey that that the PCC is taking part in. Beth informed the audience that the survey is for the PCC to know what types of things/ events you would like to see. The time frame to take the survey is from now until April 30th.

Appointments to the Rail Steering Committee: There are three vacancies on the Rail Steering Committee that need to be filled.

John Latour, Community Development Director, and a Town Council liaison.

Motion to accept the appointment of John Latour by M. Lemieux, second by K. Williams. Motion passed 7-0-0.

Mark Caci volunteered to be the liaison. Motion to accept the appointment of Mark Caci by M. Lemieux, second by p. Hebert. Motion passed 7-0-0.

B. Barry stated that the other vacancy is with the PRA and Ben Hood will discuss with members of the PRA and let the Town Council know who they would like to appoint.

Vote on Right of First Refusal- 129 Sykes Street Chapter 61a conversion.

R. McNutt explained that 61a is a tax situation that typically farmers utilize to receive a slight reduction on their taxes. They can take it out of 61a and pay the conversion amount of taxes, but also, they provide the town the right of first refusal, and the option to purchase the land to keep as protective land or municipal use.

B. Barry stated that Conservation and Planning Department provided letters stating the town should not exercise the Right of First Refusal.

Motion to not exercise the right of first refusal by M. Lemieux, second by R. Lavoie. Motion passed 7-0-0.

Forest Lake Public Fishing & Boating Access Agreement (MA Dept. Fish & Game)

Terry Smith from the Fish and Boating access provided the Land Management Agreement to the Town Council for approval. The agreement is to construct more parking for the boating area and there is a foundation that was left to reconstruct a building for different uses.

K. Williams questioned if motorboats would be allowed?

T. Smith responded with yes motorboats are allowed but the horsepower engines are limited. Only small fishing boats allowed.

Motion to accept the Land Management Agreement by K. Williams, second by M. Lemieux. Motion passed 7-0-0.

P. Hebert added that no fees should be charged for the boat access.

T. Smith stated that it is open to the public and there is no fee structure.

Fiscal Year 2023 draft municipal budget- referral to Town Council Budget Subcommittee.

B. Barry stated that the subcommittee members are Jessica Sizer, Matthew Lemieux, and herself. They will begin meeting to go over the draft budget. She recommended to the other council members to review the budget and send any questions or concerns to their attention.

Discussion of the American Recovery Plan (ARPA) funds.

B. Barry stated that the Town Manager provided a list of capital projects and the use of ARPA funds and other sources of funding. B. Barry stated that she would like to see that the Palmer High School track be a part of the plan to fix the track and the drainage. Before COVID there were discussions with a group of parents and the cost at that time was about \$1.7 million dollars. She went on to say that she would like to see this project come to light especially for the Domnarski Family and raising money for this to be in memory of Lisa Domnarski.

B. Barry requested that we have 2 (two) meetings in April. One which is the regular Town Council meeting and the other to discuss the Capital Budget and the ARPA funds.

Any other new business.

B. Barry stated she had a few things that she would like to bring up. One that she appreciates all the interest in the town government. She is recommending that the Planning Board meetings possibly could be televised. Will discuss with the Planning Board to see what options there are to make this happen.

The next item is to create a design committee, as surrounding towns have done recently, they have a theme to newer buildings. This could bring the character of the town back into the town. Possibly a 5–7-member team and work with the Planning Board as an advisory board. We would need an ordinance to establish this type of committee as well as in our zoning laws.

M. Lemieux pointed out that he feels that would hinder the process for new business. We already have processes in place this would add yet another layer that a business would have to go through to complete a process.

B. Barry doesn't want to look at it as a hinder in the process. Other communities have this place.

P. Hebert you can't tell people what to do. You can't tell a business what they have to do with their property. It is their business.

B. Barry it is to be an ordinance and change the zoning. There is something to be said about the design element and the signage. This is not forcing it is something that happens.

J. Sizer added that business owners would enjoy building to what the town is looking to do.

M. Lemieux wanted to add that at Ryan's last meeting the town is at 6% for Commercial Base and the Master Plan states that we should be at 15%. We have a long way to go.

Subcommittee Reports

The ordinance committee met on the Public Asset naming policy. With researching other communities and the research that Ryan assisted with, the committee came up with a draft and it will be ready for final vote at the April meeting.

Town Managers Report

The assistant assessor Denise Boucier retired last week. We would like to wish her a happy retirement.

On March 8, 2021, a presentation was held at the Library about the Economic Development in the area. Linda Leduc led the presentation and there was not a great turn out from the public. We are going to hold another presentation via zoom for the public on March 21, 2022.

B. Barry questioned if Linda Leduc will do the presentation at the April 11th town council meeting.

R. McNutt responded yes; she will be there.

A resident questioned the policy on damage to mailboxes during plowing season. Some towns provide restitution for damage to mailboxes. This past season the town may have had 3-4 mailboxes that were damaged. If we decide to offer a restitution, we are going to have to set parameters and standards for the mailbox set and placement.

Recently, the Thorndike bridge was closed due to an 18 inch hole that was discovered on the bridge. Mass DOT, the town, and a private contractor came out to evaluate the bridge. Even though there is speculation that this bridge would be shut down at any point, it was discovered that the bridge is in much better shape than originally thought. The surface deck does require patching and eventually replacement but overall, the bridge is in good shape.

The fuel assistance applications were sent to the councilors in case they knew of anyone that needed one. It was a struggle for some residents before the inflation of the cost of heating fuel and now there is an even greater demand for help. It was very gracious of the Council to approve the \$50,000 from the ARPA funds to help this program and the residents in need.

B. Barry asked about the website and where does it stand for improvements.

R. McNutt stated that we looked into other vendors for a website, and it was going to be too costly. We are now in the process of reviewing and trying to fix our current website.

R. Lavoie asked for an update with M-Pact and the audio within the room so the residents can hear in the room.

R. McNutt discussed that we did work with M-Pact. There is a microphone and sound are amplified within the room. They continue to work on the streaming piece of the meetings.

B. Barry questioned about the interactive piece to have not only in-person and via zoom.

R. McNutt we are still working out those details.

Miscellaneous Correspondence:

None.

Councilor's RoundTable:

B. Barry requested that we have 2 (two) meetings in April. One April 11th at 6:30pm which is the regular Town Council meeting and the other April 25th at 6:00pm to discuss the Capital Budget, ARPA funds, and Town Manager's goals.

Adjournment of Formal Session

Close public session, roll call vote to convene executive session for the purposes of M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21 # 3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining (non-union, the Town Manager's contract) 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.

Executive Session

Motion was made by roll call at 8:10 pm to exit formal session and enter executive session with adjournment there from by R. Lavoie and seconded by M. Lemieux. Motion passed (7:0:0)