

**Palmer Town Council
Meeting Minutes
April 11, 2022**

Call to Order:

The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Monday, April 11, 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

None.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Appointment to the Palmer Redevelopment Authority:

Brenda Binczewski- local real estate professional with RE/Max Connections.

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

Appointment to the Palmer Cultural Council:

Kate Davignon- local funeral director and resident for over 9 years.

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

Conservation Agent Sarah Fortune, April 2022 Town Wide Cleanup.

Sarah Fortune informed the council that Saturday April 23, 2022, the Town will be hosting a River & Town Wide Cleanup in honor of Earth Day. The event will start at 8:30am at Laviolette Field for registration. The cleanup is from 9:00am-12:00pm. Any volunteers that sign up at Laviolette Field will be provided trash bags, gloves, and a dumpster to drop off that trash and debris after the cleanup. The rain date for the event will April 30, 2022

Route 181 Culvert Project.

Sarah Fortune explained the culvert project and the grant money that was received to help cover the cost. The remaining funds for the project in the amount of \$66,495.25 which is 25% of Town responsibility is in a Resolution.

Motion to accept the funds to be transferred from free cash to the Route 181 Culvert in the amount of \$66,495.25 by K. Williams, second by J. Sizer. Motion passed 7-0-0.

Department Head- Town Planner Linda Leduc, Economic Development presentation.

Linda prepared a presentation for the Town Council on the economic development of the Town. She showed the top 15 properties that are located within the town that have the most potential for development. She also provided where the properties stand and a breakdown of the positives and also the negatives of why they are not developed.

Brief discussion.

Wastewater Treatment Plant \$5,000,000 Loan Authorization- Public Hearing and vote.

R. Lavoie read the loan authorization.

B. Barry opened the public hearing at 7:36pm.

Phil-Resident from Bondsville questioned the project and who would be responsible for paying this loan back?

B. Barry responded with the 1900 sewer users will be paying it back over a period of time.

Gloria Byrnes- Resident from Bondsville asked if their sewer bills will be increased?

B. Barry stated yes, they will be.

Chris Smith- Resident of Palmer questioned why the cost can't be spread throughout all the residents?

R. McNutt stated that the sewer is not funded by the whole town. The town is looking to expand the sewer throughout the town to increase the number of users.

M. Lemieux added that the Town has not raised sewer rates in many years. The Town of Palmer has the lowest rate and to cover the cost of maintaining the treatment plant the increase needs to happen.

B. Barry also added that the \$5,000,000 is an estimated cost for the projects.

R. McNutt stated that there are two (2) main projects for the treatment plant. One (1) is the roof and two (2) is the Centrifuge. With the 1900 users the town still has to truck it away, with the centrifuge the removal costs would decrease as the removal amount would be less due to weight of the material.

Chris Smith questioned if the outside fees would increase as well. She stated that we have outside companies that utilize the facilities. She also would like the Town Council to use ARPA funds to offset some of the cost.

R. McNutt stated that the additional funds from the sewer bills are left in a sewer surplus account for when issues arise.

B. Barry questioned the balance of the sewer surplus account currently.

Janice- Resident of Palmer stated that she is not on sewer as she has a septic system. She questioned Chris Smith has to if their septic system fails should the entire town help her pay for it.

Public Hearing closed at 8:01pm

Motion to accept the \$5,000,000 loan authorization for the roof replacement and centrifuge purchase for the Wastewater treatment plant by J. Sizer, second by R. Lavoie. Motion not approved 3-4-0 not a 2/3 vote.

Resolution Rondeau Street drainage and repair engineering \$67,500.00 from free cash.

R. McNutt provided a brief overview of what occurred to Rondeau St. over the last spring and summer. He explained that the town paid over \$200,000 to patch the road for the winter months. He has completed some research on funds being used by the town to fix the road since the Town is not able to utilize Chapter 90 funds on a non-accepted road. R. McNutt went on to say that he would like to create an ordinance to have private roads accepted by the state. He also stated he would like to have the ordinance and the approval for the beginning stages of getting the road fixed properly combined for the next meeting.

R. Lavoie mentioned that he feels that we will be opening Pandora's box with all the other private roads. He is concerned about the other areas that need work on their roads and if we accept them at what cost is it going to be to the Town.

P. Hebert wanted to know what the process is to have Rondeau Rd. as an accepted road. What are the dimensions that require them to be accepted? Once the streets become accepted then the Town will have access to Chapter 90 funds.

B. Barry stated that private roads need to be treated the same way. She requested research to be completed on Rondeau Rd. The Town will have the financial responsibility. The requirements of the private roads and ensure that we have checked off the boxes.

M. Lemieux agreed that this is a great idea, and we should also look into other private roads in town.

B. Barry requested R. McNutt to have legal counsel's opinion on the accepting roads.

The Town Council agreed to have this topic discussed at the May meeting.

Resolution-Palmer Police Cruisers FY2023 \$100,00.00 (Free Cash)

R. Lavoie questioned why the cruisers are being paid for with Free Cash as they are normally paid through as a budget item.

R. McNutt responded that we couldn't fund it operationally this year.

R. Lavoie stated that he feels that he could find a few ways to have it in the budget by cutting a few things.

J. Sizer questioned the amount of the cruisers. In her experience she stated that \$100,000 may not be enough to purchase them.

M. Lemieux questioned for future police cruiser purchases, will they come out of the operating budget or free cash?

R. McNutt responded that if he forecasted the next two (2) years the purchasing of the police cruisers will have to come out of free cash due to the operating budget being very tight.

Motion to approve the \$100,000 to purchase two (2) police cruisers out of free cash by J. Sizer, second by M. Lemieux. Motion accepted 6-1-0.

Resolution- Hydraulic Lift for Public Works \$60,000 (Free Cash)

M. Lemieux questioned if the lifts are permanent to the building?

R. McNutt stated that they are not tied to the DPW building. The lifts are portable.

Motion to approve the \$60,000 to purchase the hydraulic lifts from free cash by M. Lemieux, second by P. Hebert. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Ordinance- Honorary Naming of Town Assets- First Reading

R. Lavoie read the first reading of the honorary naming town assets ordinance.

B. Barry stated the second reading will be at the May Town Council meeting.

Any other new business.

None.

Subcommittee Reports

The budget subcommittee will be meeting on April 20, 2022.

B. Barry stated that if any Town Council Members have any questions, comments, or concerns to email them to her and she bring them to the meeting.

Town Managers Report

R. McNutt acknowledged Gerry Skowronek on his retirement on April 1st. We want to wish him a happy retirement.

Received Troy Brin's resignation letter. He will be taking a full-time position in Monson. His last day will be May 5th. We have posted for his position and in the interim, we have Jennifer Baker. She has just been certified and has been meeting with Veterans.

M. Lemieux questioned about splitting the time between Palmer and Monson for the Veteran's Agent.

R. McNutt stated it was ever changing and it really wasn't going to save the Town any money.

A letter has been sent to the Chairpersons of the Massachusetts House and Senate regarding opposition to legislation which would potentially harm the Town of Palmer and our ability to derive revenue from cannabis operators we license. R. McNutt suggested that the Town Council also compose a letter to the Chairpersons and the Senate.

The bridge repair between Monson and Palmer has begun and the Town Council was provided the detour routes.

The fuel assistance program has done very well. There is a definite need in our community as we have helped 53 families so far.

M. Lemieux questioned about the Pink House as he is getting a lot of pressure of when the house will be taken down.

R. McNutt responded with that the judge gave the owner 30 days to take down the property and the owner stated that he could do it. The Town requested a \$75,000 bond to ensure that the house will be removed, and the owner declined to do so. As of April 19, 2022, the town will be ready to start contracting out to have the house taken down.

Miscellaneous Correspondence:

J. Sizer stated that she has received three (3) letters from 8th grade Palmer High School students. They were letters that voiced their concerns on some issues. She wanted to thank the students for writing these letters.

B. Barry added that the students are in a Civics' class, and it is a requirement of the class to write letters. She suggested that we have a special meeting to discuss the concerns from the students and/or collaborate a letter from the Council to the class in response to their concerns.

Councilor's RoundTable:

None.

Adjournment of Formal 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 (non-union, the Town Manager's contract and union collective bargaining Police and Dispatchers) 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 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)