

Palmer Town Council

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 5, 2015

1 **1. Roll Call**

2 The Palmer Town Council Meeting of Tuesday, May 5, 2015 was called to order at 6:30 PM
3 Present were Town Manager Charles Blanchard, Councilors Robert Lavoie, Philip Hebert,
4 Barbara Barry, Jason Polonsky, Mary Salzmann and Donald Blais. Absent was Matthew Lovell

5 **2. Visitors Comments**

6 None

7 **3. Budget Discussion**

8 • **School Department**

9 Finance Director Brad Brothers and Superintendent Tom Charko addressed the Town Council. T.
10 Charko stated that a 1.1% budget increase was requested over the FY15 budget. Including
11 insurance costs, which are appropriated under the town's budget, the overall budget increase is
12 2% over FY15. T. Charko explained that the budget as proposed would be a solid budget for the
13 schools. B. Brothers stated that the budget as proposed is \$500,000 over Net School Spending.
14 B. Brothers stated that the increase in the administrative salary is to compensate for the
15 replacement of the superintendent. B. Brothers continued to outline the proposed school
16 department budget. C. Blanchard noted that there would be savings to electricity with
17 purchasing of solar credits from the Blue Wave Solar Project on Baptist Hill Rd.

18 J. Polonsky asked why the school is required to pay out of state tuition. B. Brothers stated that
19 the school is required to send some students to Connecticut schools. B. Barry asked about status
20 of purchasing new textbooks from the funds allocated in the previous fiscal year. B. Brothers
21 stated that additional information would be provided regarding the textbook replacement. B.
22 Lavoie asked for a breakdown of the contract services line item. The detail of contract services
23 was provided by B. Brothers. B. Brothers also explained that an increase in grant funding was a
24 result of carry-over from the previous year.

25 B. Brothers stated that the total school budget proposed is \$15.27 Million. This proposal reflects
26 the increase to 73 students going out of district through school choice. The proposal would also
27 include taking in 21 students through school choice. B. Brothers stated that they would like to
28 grow the incoming school choice program to help fund extra maintenance.

29 J. Polonsky stated that he would like to see a higher investment in technology over the previous
30 year. J. Polonsky also addressed the increases in administrative salaries as a concern. M.
31 Salzmann asked if the school system is ready to administer the PARCC Test. T. Charko stated that
32 many school districts are not ready to use the PARCC Test and that the test was not successful in
33 many of the school districts that did implement it. He stated that administering the test
34 successfully would require a heavy investment in technology upgrades.

35 M. Salzmann asked if the school department pays sending tuition for students to attend private
36 schools. T. Charko stated that they do not. D. Blais asked if the Technical Education teacher
37 proposed in the FY16 Budget was a position being brought back that was previously funded. T.
38 Charko stated that the Technical Education Teacher is a new position that the school will offer.
39 D. Blais stated that he would like to see the schools bring back many of the elective classes that
40 were eliminated through budget cuts.

41 J. Polonsky stated that he is glad to see some stability in the budget. B. Barry asked where the
42 schools stand on computer replacements. T. Charko stated that the schools are on a 5 year
43 replacement program. He also stated that although the schools do receive donations of
44 computers, nearly all of them are used computers.

45 B. Barry stated that the town should continue to monitor school choice sending to make sure
46 there is not a continued impact on students who do stay in district. P. Hebert asked how the
47 schools may be able to keep more students in district. T. Charko stated that although they
48 cannot prevent students from exercising their right to school choice, they will continue to open
49 up school choice receiving to recover the tuition loss.

50 C. Blanchard stated that he was pleased to meet the school's proposed budget despite impacts
51 on town from the high snow and ice deficit. C. Blanchard also thanked T. Charko for his service
52 to the School Department and for working with the town during his tenure as Superintendent.

53 • **Library**

54 Library Director Ben Hood and Library Finance Committee Co-Chair Jane Heede addressed the
55 Town Council. B. Hood highlighted the action plan of Library in FY16. He stated that they are
56 looking to move forward on all aspects of their current action plan and are looking into the
57 automation of some library processes.

58 B. Hood stated that the Library must meet collection requirements of state, although they will
59 need a waiver request because the proposed budget does not meet the full compliance level. C.
60 Blanchard stated that the mid-level compliance is in the Town's Proposed FY16 Budget. B. Hood
61 requested that full compliance be funded by the town.

62 J. Polonsky stated that he was encouraged by the increase in permanent staff rather than
63 continuing to fund the Biblio-Temps. B. Hood stated that the budget provided by the Library
64 represents full compliance of the circulation requirement. M. Salzmann asked is shared cleaning
65 services with the town and school would reduce costs. C. Blanchard explained that cleaning
66 services are procured through competitive bidding. C. Blanchard confirmed that the mid level
67 compliance was budgeted in the proposed FY16 Budget. B. Barry stated that the Town Council
68 must weigh the large snow and ice deficit when determining if the town should fund the full
69 circulation compliance.

70 • **WWTP**

71 Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent Gerry Skowronek addressed the Town Council. He
72 stated that his proposed increase in overtime costs was due to the increase in hourly wages. He
73 also stated that the increase in the general expense line item is due to the use of stronger

74 chemicals in the treatment process. G. Skowronek stated that the capital outlay funding is to
75 replace the generator in pump station #1. He stated that they are currently looking at
76 purchasing a clam shell catch basin cleaning vehicle to decrease the wear on the Vactor Truck.
77 He hopes that this vehicle could be purchased through the capital improvement program. C.
78 Blanchard stated that the purchase of the clam shell truck is not feasible in FY16 Capital
79 Improvement Plan.

80 G. Skowronek stated that the \$125,000 for bonding the SRF project which was budgeted for
81 FY15 will be delayed until the next fiscal year. He stated that the sewer costs will be increased
82 based on the planned schedule and the reserve will go into capital reserve budget. Discussion
83 continued on how SRF bond payment schedule.

84 • **Police**

85 Police Chief John Janulewicz addressed the council regarding the department of Public Safety's
86 budget. J. Janulewicz highlighted the positions which were filled due to retirements in the
87 department. B. Barry asked why the fleet maintenance costs were not reduced despite the
88 ongoing replacement schedule. J. Janulewicz noted that the maintenance costs is level funded to
89 maintain current fleet of cruisers. Discussion continued on the cruiser replacement schedule. B.
90 Barry stated that she would like to see the full maintenance costs of the cruisers. B. Barry also
91 stated that she would like a full description of forest warden position and would like to know
92 how many hours are put in by emergency management director each year. C. Blanchard
93 explained that the increase in the Dog Officer salary is to cover the regionalization agreement
94 with Monson.

95 • **DPW**

96 C. Blanchard explained that the proposed budget would add 2 additional employees to the DPW
97 staff. He also noted that the capital improvement request is to pay for the garage door
98 replacement on 2 of the bay doors at the DPW. J. Polonsky would like to see curbside collection
99 of leaves restored with the increase in available staff at the DPW.

100 C. Blanchard outlined the revenue figures for the proposed FY16 budget. He outlined options for
101 the town to pay off snow and ice deficit. M. Salzmann asked for a cost breakdown of each storm
102 and for a breakdown of cost by activity.

103 C. Blanchard stated that the Tax Title account currently has balance of \$155,000 in it so no
104 contribution to the account was proposed for FY16. C. Blanchard provided information on the
105 proposed career plan for all clerical and administrative positions. He also provided information
106 regarding his proposed DPW reorganization plan. B. Barry stated that she would like
107 departmental breakdown by individual and impact on the proposed budget. C. Blanchard stated
108 that he will ask labor counsel to be present in an executive session to discuss the proposed
109 career plan and DPW reorganization plan. Discussion on the proposed wage rates continued. An
110 Executive Session will be held at 6:00 PM on May 18, 2015 to discuss the proposed plans.

111 **Adjournment**

112 Motion to adjourn from formal session by J. Polonsky, seconded by D. Blais. Motion passed 6-0 at 8:45

113 PM