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West **Springfield** Town Council

Sean T. *Powers, President*

Brian J. Clune*, Vice President*

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Frederick J. Connor | Anthony R. DiStefano | William E. Forfa | Brian J. Griffin Michael J. LaFlamme | Daniel M. O'Brien | Jaime L. Smith

Town Council Study Session Minutes

***Monday, May 19, 2025* at *5:00* p.m.**

Council Office, J. Edward Christian Municipal Office Building 26 Central Street, Second Floor, West Springfield, MA 01089

1. Opening Ceremony/ Roll Call

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President Powers called the meeting to order at 5:24 p.m. President Powers noted that in accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 30A, the meeting was being audio recorded and inquired if anyone else is recording the meeting, to identify themselves Kate Sullivan identified that we are taping for minute purposes.

Roll call was taken and the following Councilors were present: Michael J. LaFlamme, Brian J. Griffin, Daniel M. O'Brien, William E. Forfa, President Sean T. Powers and Frederick Connor,(5:28).
Vice President Brian J. Clune, Councilor Anthony R. DiStefano and Jaime L. Smith were absent. With six Councilors present, there was a quorum to conduct business.

Dave Sypek, 1323 Amostown Rd, Mayor Reichelt, Attorney O'Brien-Scott, CFO Sharon Wilcox, Director of IT Stephanie Straitiff, Director of Collector Tasha Hoye, Police Chief Jay Gearing and Fire Chief Christopher Bartone were also present.

2. Study Session:

A. Mayor, Law Dept, IT, Debt, Fire, Police, FY 2026 Budget - General Questions Mayor Reichelt said he did a quick overview 2 weeks ago and there is no real change in many of these Departments. IT where the School is moving software purchases and hardware around. The Mayor's Office we reduced it with the Executive Asst., Fire was reduced with the Executive Asst. and Police we reduced it by the Fire Arms Clerk and the Cold Response individual. There is no new staff added to those Departments and the Structure of the Budget this year was for a Level Funded Budget where to provide cuts to get down to level Funded which include regular Coloas. Also found helpful with the Budget conversations is to provide what it would take to get down to Level Funded and if things were cut what order would they like them cut. Also, discussed with the Town was in a better financial position what they would like to add to the Budget in the coming years. Police/ Fire there was discussion on having a drone and in Police we added Free Cash for a drone that can be used on the Police side if they have someone that is licensed.

Mayor Office

Councilor O'Brien and Mayor Reichelt discussed the Councilor voted on a $160k and the increase doesn't start til January and the Mayor Salary is increased to 11% due to it being half of the FY and the percentage of the raise was 20%

Councilor O'Brien said he has the breakdown between the Executive Asst.and the Chief of Staff. There is a 30k difference between the 2 positions where the Chief of Staff is making more. Mayor Reichelt mentioned the Executive Asst was hired at $71k, where it was a $10k difference. CFO Wilcox mentioned the Executive Asst was hired after the Budget came out in FY2025. Mayor Reichelt said the last Executive Asst decided to leave due to not being paid enough and we hired the new Executive Asst back in August at a higher amount because we could get anyone for 55k. Councilor O'Brien discussed the Chief of

Operations making $84.250.00. Mayor Reichelt mentioned Chief of Operations had a 2% increase, where she was paid out of the Channel 15 Cable Fund because she was taking on roles of scheduling the tv and we transferred everything over to this budget this year.

Councilor O'Brien asked what is the Executive Asst job description.Mayor Reichelt discussed they would answer phone calls, send letters, and handle constituent communication through **the** office. The Chief of Operations has taken on those responsibilities and in addition to all the other things that she is doing with outside communication with events, ribbing cutting and the other touchpoints outside the Town **Hall**.

Councilor O'Brien mentioned that they couldn't keep the Executive Asst due to not paying them enough. Mayor Reichelt said the reason why they did not keep the Executive Asst was due to reducing the Budget and noticed the time that we had no Executive Asst and the **Chief of** Operations was able to take on roles that were more of **value** to the Town.

Councilor Connor and Mayor Reichelt added there wouldn't be an expanded job description for the Chief of Operations.

Police/Fire Department

Councilor Forfa asked if the drome will **be** used for the Police Department and the Fire Department for route conditions and assessments. Police Chief Gearing said that is correct.

Law Department

Councilor Connor asked why the Case Manage is under Law Dept. and not Health Dept. Mayor Reichelt said it needs a supervisory home, where it is better suited in the Law Dept. and it covers Health, Library, Police, Senior Center where **it** serves multiple masses.

President Powers asked how the Case Manager was working out. Town Att. O'Brien-Scott said they are receiving positive feedback, she helped **over** 60 Residents with receiving services **with** housing, government benefits and has filled the need that other Departments don't have the expertises with Social Security, Wayfinders, Snap Benefits and she has helped a lot of people. Mayor Reichelt mentioned everyone has said the Case Manager has been doing a great job and she has been helping a lot of people.

Mayor Reichelt mentioned that the Riverwalk individuals should be out by tomorrow. Councilor O'Brien discussed this will be coming up tonight and what is the process. Gave an example of pitching a tent on second base and bringing my family to Mittinenguage Park for Memorial Day weekend and having a fire. Mayor Reichelt mentioned they would ask them to leave and if they are still there then they will be arrested and their stuff would be removed. We have been working with them to get housing and some people have been going down there starting with them

Councilor O'Brien and Mayor Reichelt discussed there have been things that have come out through the Supreme Court that have given us more ability and where we can create an Ordinance around it.

President Powers asked if the Mass Supreme Court that you couldn't evict someone without placement was still in effect. Mayor Reichelt said when that Oregon decision came out, it did change a lot of things last year, which gave us more authority saying if the parks close at dusk with hours posted you can tell people they can not stay and before that there was a lot of uncertainty of what you could do versus what you couldn't do. We were telling panhandlers that they needed to move on and that changed when the ACLU reached out to us saying you can not do that anymore and we were being watched. That caused us some hesitation on if we go down there and arrest them, are we going to have a Civil Lawsuit and when that decision came out is when we hired the Case Worker.

Councilor O'Brien and Mayor Reichelt discussed sitting down in the summer to create an Ordinance.

President Powers mentioned having a General Park Ordinance for the Town.

Councilor Connor asked if we could offset the cost with some of the Opioid Substance Abuse Funding to the Case Manager salary. Town Att. O'Brien-Scott mentioned it is possible it is a permissible use and we have received a large request from the CARE Coalition to fund their operation, the Case Manger sometimes helps with people that have substance abuse, but it is not her main focus. Mayor Reichelt discussed the Opioid Funding has an end date.

President Powers asked how the CARE Coalition was doing. Town Att. O'Brien-Scott said that their Federal Grant money has reached the maximum cycle for it and next year will be their last year to receive the grant money.

Councilor O'Brien asked if it is the same Case Worker the Police Department had and handles metal health. Town Att. O'Brien-Scott said she is more of a case worker that connects people with services and helps them submit administrative paperwork and the Police Department was more of a Mental Health.

Councilor O'Brien asked why did the Town let go the Mental Health Coordinator. Mayor Reichelt said it wasn't as much of a case load as we thought and we didn't want to pay double the service that we already provide with EAP.

Police Department

Councilor O'Brien asked why they eliminated the Fire Arms Clerk. Police Chief Gearing said he pitched to consolidate the Fire Arms Clerk and the Administrative Asst. where it is saving money in the long run.

Law Department

Councilor Connor and Mayor Reichelt discussed that the Case Manager's office is located on the 3rd floor.

Police Department

Councilor O'Brien said now that it is starting to get nice all the ATV's on the road going into Bear Hole and there is no enforcement. Police Chief Gearing discussed its something that we are going to ignore and we lose 99% of those battles and we do partner with the Sheriff's Department. Mayor Reichelt said they have bike patrols in Bear Hole and we also have 2 new cameras.

Councilor Forfa asked what would happen if you ran into a group of them? Police Chief Gearing said you could pursue them safely, box them in, monitor them from a distance.

Councilor O'Brien and Reichelt discussed adding a pole camera on Old Westfield Rd to stop people from illegally dumping

Councilor O'Brien asked how many Police Captains are on the force now. Police Chief Gearing said we have 2 budgeted only 1 at the moment and the 2nd one is budgeted for the Detective Bureau.

Councilor O'Brien and Police Chief Gearing discussed that the Lieutenant is running the Detective Bureau and they just ran a Sergeant Exam Course, where that will go out to bid depending on the size of the test and the Captains position should be field year.

President Powers and Police Chief Gearing discussed they have 6 new candidates going into the academy which should bring us up to full staff and 1 **will** be retiring 1 in May 1 in June and **3** more in January.

Police/Fire Department

Councilor O'Brien mentioned the Coordinator **will not** be there 24/7. **Where** you don't need another layer of bureaucracy and money on top of Dispatch. Also agreed with state of the art equipment, cutting the step out and agreeing the concept. Councilor O'Brien addressed his concerns with adding another position that is $100k and having a senior person in that position. Mayor Reichelt discussed the person would be a Senior person and it was budgeted for $88k and the idea is having someone in charge of Dispatch**,** instead of 1 **person** be in charge of PD Dispatch and another person be in charge of FD Dispatch. By taking those 2 people out and combining them into 1, where **the** PD and FD can go back to doing Police and Dire work but with someone with a background that can oversee Dispatch.

Councilor O'Brien said the most experienced Dispatcher can be **the** overseer. Town Att. O'Brein

Scott mentioned who would be the one to discipline them, if they are in the same union.

Councilor O'Brien and Town Att. O'Brein Scott discussed at the moment the Chief Gearing would be discipling.

Fire Chief Bartone said **when** we go to **this** consolidated system where if you are a Dispatcher and an employee where there is an issue should they be calling the Police Chief or Fire Chief, is it medical where the ambulance went and the cruisers and for that continuity it would be better for that employee to report to 1 senior boss

Councilor O'Brien asked if he was the Senior Dispatcher and in charge of the unit, where I could talk to

the Chief of FD or the Chief of PD depending on the issue. Fire Chief Bartone mentioned there is a significant amount of training and quality of insurance that they need to maintain such as the medical emergency dispatch certifications, where that needs to be reported to someone. When you consolidate everything and you bring in 1 boss that this person can talk to, with the overlay with the QA and QI alone just on the calls and reviewing the tapes and what the Dispatches are providing good exercises to the citizens where that is imperative.

Council O'Brien said you could have a designee in the PD or FD to act in that role and have the PIO could act as the lesion. Police Chief Gearing mentioned this position is its own Department now where people are going to be held for overshifts and you are going to need this oversight for what will be going on in this Department.

Council O'Brien and Mayor Reichelt discussed this position is budgeted for $85k.

President Powers and Mayor Reichelt discussed phasing in the Dispatchers and starting with the Department Head. Also the Dispatchers that we have now will receive additional training and will be hiring new ones as well.

IT Department

Councilor Connor mentioned there are big increases in computer software in schools and contract services.

Mayor Reichelt mentioned the Councilors had some questions with **the** large increases on the School side **IT** side and seeing increases in IT budget.

Director of IT **Stratiff** said in this budget it reflects some investments that we had made in the last couple of years. The financial system upgrade is something that we are doing this year and a lot of the increase that

you are seeing is something that we worked on last year. We backed up our appliance and our cost to support **that** system is much more costly than the system that we had before, this system is a much better system where we would recover much faster if something were to happen, there is a new fire and EMS management system which is software on the Townside, new fire altering system which comes with software maintenance, **the** new Police CADS system went in last year and built in an integration with a fire system in anticipation of Central Dispatch,automatic patching and vulnerability scanning to reduce the Towns Cyber Security risk. The largest thing in service is the detection and response services that we funded the first year with a grant and this is the first year you are seeing this in the Budget, this provided the Town 24/7 with threat motoring for monitoring any threats. Also worked with School Business Manager Tarquini to go through some of their software, over the last couple of years they added so Power School related software were the School Dept. and IT Dept was each paying for some. We decided to consolidate it am=nd moved it over to the School Sept. side budget

Councilor Connor and Director of IT Stratiff discussed the managed detection and response service is ongoing. The financial system piece is 1 year cost for the conversion

Police/Fire *Department*

Councilor O'Brien, Mayor Reichelt and Director of IT Stratiff discussed the the new Dispatch is

located on the 3rd floor the equipment was purchased with ARP Funds which was $800,000.00 IT *Department*

President Powers mentioned the Computer Services in the Maintenance Contract. Director of IT Stratiff discussed the services that manage detection and response service and the services related to converting our Financial system to the new upgraded system, the new Fire and Police system and the integration that will allow for Central Dispatch.

President Powers and Director of **IT** Stratiff discussed in the Maintenance Contract.they are the software vendors that are providing support and licensing for the software.

Mayor Office

Councilor O'Brien asked what Miscellaneous encompasses. CFO Wilcox said that is reserved for wage, street lighting and a lot of small Committees that need supplies.

Councilor O'Brien and CFO Wilcox discussed the $500,000.00 reserve wage is to settle contracts that have not settled since the FY26 Budget was published.

Councilor O'Brien and CFO Wilcox discussed Reserve should be 10% of the Operating Budget which is a combination of Free Cash $11 million and Stabilization Fund of $12 million

Councilor Griffin asked **how** Free Cash is created. CFO Wilcox said you start with the balance

that you turn back into the Town, any budgetary appreciations that are unspent will be returned back and any revenue projections come in greater than what is estimated also would be added to Free Cash.

Councilor Griffin asked if we could use Free Cash to help with taxation. CFO Wilcox mentioned she would not recommend that, it's not something you can rely on from year to year and if we used Free Cash we could go into a deficit and we could be put in a position that we are seeing with other communities where they are going to have to raise their taxes or cut their Budgets.

Councilor Connor and CFO Wilcox discussed once the Town issues debt, we have options for structuring such as working with a Financial Advisor on different ways to structure the debt

Councilor LaFlamme mentioned the Investment Income is $2 million and asked what is moving that. Director of Collector Hoye said it is by rates in the market bond and it is very limited in MA to invest. The Town is receiving almost 5% from CDs from the bank and trying to keep everything as safe as we can, but also making as high as we can.

Councilor LaFlamme and CFO Wilcox discussed the Town has received $200,000.00Marijuana excise tax

Councilor LaFlamme and CFO Wilcox discussed when the families living at the Clarion the State gave us a 1 time sum of money last FY.which was negotiated with Communities in the area.

Councilor LaFlamme discussed it has been 30 years since we entered the Big E agreement. Town Att. O'Brien-Scott mentioned the agreement does not deal with the taxes and they are exempt under State Law under property that is used for agriculture proposes. The parts that are used for Commercial are used for tax, the Big E is one of our highest tax payers and all the taxation structure is set by the State Law.

Councilor LaFlamme and Town Att. O'Brien-Scott discussed the agreement was done in 1994 for them to expand from 12 days to 17 days and exchange for doing that, they will give 1% of their gross revenue that will go into the Big E trust and will disturbed the funds that serve the purpose of the Residents of West Springfield

President Powers said you could bring this to Probate Court, where you would need approval of the Judge to change those terms.

3. Adjournment

President Powers moved to adjourn the meeting: Seconded by Councilor Forfa..

Voice vote: **6/0**

Meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m