

Chair Soto called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Members present: Clr. Valley, Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Marsan, Clr. Pesce, Clr. Santos, Clr. Simard, and Chair Soto.

Acceptance of the Agenda

MOTION BY: Councilor Valley, seconded by Councilor Simard to accept the agenda.

MOTION BY: Councilor DiZoglio, seconded by Councilor Valley to move TR-26-36 out of order to Item 7 under Proclamations/Correspondence. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Pesce, seconded by Councilor Simard to move TR-26-24A as the next item of business after TR-26-36. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to accept the agenda, as amended. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Pledge of Allegiance/Invocation/Moment of Silence

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Words of Wisdom by Helen Keller read by Vice-Chair Pesce. The Council observed a Moment of Silence for Samuel J. Coco and Dennis Fragala, a former Methuen Deputy Fire Chief. Councilor Santos gave the Invocation for the evening.

Public Participation

Tim Vermette, 28 Weybossett Street, Methuen, said he was present during the rail trail meeting. He stated he has been dealing with a few of the Councilors with issues that are on the trail. The biggest thing that they want to do this year is the overhangs that are at the Depot. That is pretty much what our focus is on this year. And then to work with the Rec department whereas there really has not been an interaction between them and us. We are probably the biggest park in the city and probably get more use than any other parks but see no monies at all. There really has not been an interaction and they would like to fix that. He hopes to work with everyone here and see them on the trail.

John Hadley, 409 Forest Street, stated the opinions he is sharing here tonight are his own. He does not represent any organization or group that he volunteers for in Methuen. He would like to respond to comments made by a representative of our city during a recent radio interview broadcast on the program "Despierta Lawrence, wake up Lawrence". In that interview, a Councilor suggested that opposition to developing affordable housing at the Searles Estate is motivated by a racist, anti- Latino ideology, specifically as part of an effort to prevent, "people who look like me". He wants to be clear; nothing could be further from the truth. Podia estar mas de la verdad. He strongly objects and deeply resents the accusation. His position is based on a belief that the Searles Estate is a rare and irreplaceable historic asset that should be preserved and thoughtfully repurposed to benefit our city, not destroyed. Disagreement on policy should never be reduced to personal attacks or unfounded claims or racism. Racism is

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real and a serious problem. Labeling him as racist simply because he disagrees on a topic, undermines meaningful dialogue and divides our community like members of our City Council, he believes Methuen should address the issue of housing affordability, but he does not believe the Searle's estate is the appropriate location. There are many underutilized and vacant areas in our city, downtown for example along Osgood Street, Broadway and elsewhere that could support attractive and affordable housing. He addressed another concern a member of our City Council referred to residents who speak out as "a vocal minority". He finds this troubling. Every resident in Methuen deserves to be heard whether they represent one voice or many voices. The role of elected officials is to listen respectfully to all constituents, not to diminish their concerns based on perceived numbers. Similarly dismissing thoughtful, well researched input is merely. Emotional is not constructive. It discourages civic engagement. It shuts down productive, meaningful conversation. He closed with a brief example: In 1972 a nearby struggling town considered demolishing its historic downtown. A real estate developer presented a plan to the city to replace the historic structures with modern 1970's strip mall. Yet a small group, or the vocal minority, opposed the plan and fought to preserve and invest in the town's historic core. That town is Newburyport, Massachusetts one of the most vibrant and economically successful communities in our communities in our region. Preservation and City leaders with a vision all played a key role in its revival. Let us move forward with more respect, civility, and openness toward each other. We may not always agree but we can work together toward a shared goal, making Methuen a city we are all proud of. He repeated "De a Cuero pero Podemos trabajar con Partido hacer de. Todos nos sin Tomas usos todos". He thanked the Council for their time.

Steve Gillis, 235 Jackson Street, reported to Council that he dropped off a petition from the people of Methuen saying they did not agree with the sale of the Searles or anything happening to the Searles. Councilors should have that petition. He read prepared statement (attached). When we first bought the property, we did not say "just sell it". They were under the impression that the Historic Committee was going for grants and they never did.

Ben Thompson stated he has worked at the Marsh since March 2022, where he is a paraprofessional and work with students of autism spectrum disorder and is here tonight to take focus. He became disappointed and concerned when he learned that the city was considering presenting a resolution to emergency resolution to switch from Blue Cross Blue Shield to the Group Insurance provided to the group Insurance Commission which bypasses the hard work that the city union employees working together negotiating with the city. This unjustly limits the ability of employees to find an insurance plan that meets the needs of the employees and their families with the additional burden of increasing premiums here. This not only disrespect to the hard work of current city employees, but it also resulted in a \$50 increase in premiums per month for retirees that rely on insurance from the city. While the Blue Cross Blue Shield is not the Cadillac of insurance, it is a high-quality insurance that is accepted in most places. When he switched from his previous insurance to the city insurance in January, he was able to keep not only his primary care doctor, but all his doctors, which is amazing because he sees a lot of

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specialists. If the City of Methuen properly funded the health insurance trust, we would not be in this position. Fortunately, the City of Methuen has a \$20 million in reserves. He understands that using reserves is a band-aid and not a permanent solution. The burden of financial mismatch should not always be placed on the back of its employees. He urged the Mayor and the City Council without their consent and to choose to fully fund the health insurance trust for this year and future years.

Kara Blatt, co-president of the Methuen Education Association, and the Chair of the Public Employees Committee for the city. On the agenda tonight under New Business is item TR-26-32 presented as an emergency resolution to accept provisions of MGL, Chapter 32B, Sections 21, 22, and 23. This is a huge surprise to them as the committee because they have been trying to bargain with the city over the insurance. They have sent three demands to bargain without getting a formal meeting until last night with a discussion with the Mayor. It is unfortunate. This is a surprise to them. This also is here to undermine the PEC ability to collectively bargain with the city. And as collective bargaining of all city units, not just the teachers, police, fire, DPW, public works, everybody in the city is part of this insurance. And what this resolution does is take away the power of collective bargaining. They all bargained their contracts based on benefits and this is a huge benefit and cost to all employees, especially employees like our program assistants, cafeteria workers that do not make money that's even close to cover the cost of insurance. Some of these people are on Mass Health and now they are on the city's insurance, they are to take the part of having to eat or buy medicine. That is not okay to file this motion and take away the power of the collective bargaining units without meeting with them. They had to file a demand to bargain as well as an unfair labor practice because the city decided to create a survey without their consent. Unilaterally discussing things with our members is not okay and this resolution takes away from what we should be doing. It also took away from our retirees. There are 905 retirees that were given only two months to know about the \$50 increase given to them. The city did not have a retiree as part of this committee to before they changed this information. They were told they would unilaterally do this without them, which is unacceptable. That is not how they faithfully and respectfully bargain with the city. For months they have been asking for information only not to be given it. Then they got a little bit of it and then told we will informally meet with you. Unacceptable. They are hoping that on Thursday there will be productive conversation with the Mayor and the CAFO and that all people will be represented. She asked that the Council table this resolution or reject it fully until they can appropriately and honestly have accountability and have transparency with everybody before decisions like this are made. They are not against investigating the GIC, not against investigating Amia which is what Andover uses. They are not against anything. But they are not being given the accountability of the transparency and the respect that the unions deserve to make what they need to afford to work in this city.

Rosina A. Hatem, 33 Armory Street, present this evening to give her opinion and passion for the Searles Estate. She grew up here and left here to go to Hollywood and be a stunt woman. She has traveled the world to look at beautiful historic buildings, all over the world, all over the

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country. We have one of the best examples with the best fine arts and artifacts wherever you could find in the world. She was fortunate to see the George Washington Monument that once stood behind us that is now on Forest Lawn in Los Angeles. It is one of the highlights of that very famous cemetery. We are so lucky to have such a treasure and to be standing where we are standing here today to have a gentleman like Mr. Searles that gifted this town. Being in the film industry, her immediate response was, "oh my gosh, let's film here". Filming brings millions of dollars to the towns that they represent, that they come to film. She has been fortunate enough to work in the film industry for over 40 years and travel the world and the country to do this. She sees what productions bring to a community, money, money, and notoriety. This could be a destination place. The treasure that we have across the way has so many uses for this town. We have a multi-use venue that we could have. She has already spoken to friends that work on the gilded cage and such and they were like "oh my goodness". They are so excited to have a new place to explore, to bring money to this town. And it is at minimal cost to this town. It would bring so much work, the police and fire department would be hired to walk the streets. She is worked on productions where you have films from the streets in the scene. You have police that would make overtime. There is so much to offer the film community, a mutli-venue use. This town needs a community event space. It needs a place where people can come together casually. It needs a place where people could come and have a coffee on the beautiful grounds, and we have it. In her opinion, there is no need to get rid of it. She knows the Massachusetts film production would love to see the place. She has already called them. They were so excited because it is a treasure. We have the Organ Hall as well. We have this building inside. There are so many uses, and she knows there is a lot of pieces being filmed. Film productions like to work at a very fast pace. They like to do the work themselves. She thinks this town and this committee before her would be willing to see what they have to say to bring money into all of us and with minimal effort because they have their own carpenters, their own workers. You do not have to wait to get the work done and that will be quick money. Please do not let our Searles go away like the Tenney Castle did and what would happen if somebody did not come and buy the Organ Hall. Or what would happen to this building if we did not save it? Her sisters, her whole family went to PMA. She did not go. She would have gotten thrown out. She a Tomboy and was Mr. Giordano's first blackbelt. She has strong roots here and would love to volunteer her time and being the fighter that she is, she would fight with the last bit of her soul. Her dad just passed away at 101 years old. He worked for this town for decades. He is one of the city's oldest longtime residents that paid a lot of taxes for a lot of years. She would love to see this legacy of Methuen and the Searles Estate be one of our treasures and not have to go to LA cemetery to look at one of our treasures. Let it be known that what we have behind those walls is treasure. Its money in the bank for Methuen.

Abu Nassar, 9 Carriage Way, currently serves as the school committee chairperson of the Islamic School located at 125 Oakland Avenue. He works as a principal engineer in a high-tech company. As many others he chose to move to Methuen because of the school and what it represents. He would like to offer a simple perspective on the school's presence in this

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community. If you consider that there are approximately 180 days in an academic year, and this school has been operating for 25 years, that amounts to 4500 school days. Over those 4500 days, the school has operated virtually with no incidents or complaints from the neighbors. That consistency and harmony with the surrounding community is not accidental. It is a result of intentional values and responsible stewardship. In fact, just last week many neighbors especially from the Oakland Avenue and from across Methuen sent letters of support to this Council. He stands here today representing, not just the school, but all those voices who believe in what this institution brings to the community. Academically, their students continue to demonstrate excellency, year after year, particularly math, science, and robotics. Last Saturday, at the Regional Science Fair, held at UMass Lowell, their students competed against more than 100 highly capable participants and they truly stood out. They had four students ranked among the top ten in the entire region. They were also honored with the prestigious Thermo Fisher Junio Innovators nominee recognition. In addition, their students earned excellence awards, securing the number one position in their respective categories and most notably two of his students were named as Regional Champion, receiving the highest honor in the entire fair, and his named Cabot Grand prize. They are also proud to share that four of their students have advanced to the statewide competition, where they are confident, they will continue to excel and represent Methuen at the highest level. These achievements are not isolated. They reflect a consistent culture of academic rigor, innovation and curiosity that defines our school community. These achievements, in summary, their school is excelling academically and at the same time they have built a strong sense of community and responsibility. They are proud to be part of Methuen. The families he represents including those who are here today are law abiding, taxpaying citizens who actively participate in this city. They vote, they contribute, and they care deeply about the future of this community. When they speak about this school, they are not just talking about a building. They are talking about a place that has quietly and consistently contributed to the intellectual and social fabric of this town. Thank you for your time and continued service to the City of Methuen.

Bashir El Darwish, 87 Sevoian Drive, a former principal at the school. In 1987 he graduated from college and came to live on 687 Prospect Street, Methuen, MA. In 1991, his biological son was born in Holy Family Hospital. For twenty years, he has been paying the taxes on 87 Sevoian Drive. He is honored to stand before Council, not just as a former principal of the school, but someone who has invested a great deal of his life in Methuen's community. Over the years, he has worn many hats. He was microbiologist, an educator, a manager of a business, and as a case manager. But he has always felt that he is the father of this school. He helped starting it and always worked on helping with whatever he could do for the needs of the school and the two hundred students which are children of four hundred parents. In fact, the commitment to the school, this city runs so deep so every time his circumstances asked him to be somewhere else, he always returned to Methuen. He went all the way to Singapore. His heart is in Methuen. He came back to Methuen. And it is because of the school and the community surrounding it. Beyond his professional, his personal life shows commitment to serve. For the last thirteen

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years, he has been fostering dad to two young men who are non-verbal and mentally challenged. This caring for the most vulnerable members of our society has shaped his perspective and taught him patience and the importance of the community support and he always feels like giving back to the community which he exists in. It is a relation of win/win when you get to be in a wonderful city like Methuen to support the community. The community supports you for the last 25 years, the school has given back to Methuen, many things such as a rich community and also the crime level around the school according to our Chief of police, since establishing the school went down substantially, making the value of the properties around the school go up, stability of a community, and in turn the taxes coming back to Methuen. Let us work together by supporting our existence in this school for the next hundred years to build Methuen history to be precious.

Susan Wheeler, 8 Rivers Edge Place, spoke in support of the Islamic Academy. Her family have been residents of Methuen since 2002. They moved here specifically to be closer to the school on Oakland Avenue where their son was enrolled and where she served as the school's first Principal and lead teacher. I would like to take you back to the winter of 2001 and the day she first entered the building that would eventually become their school. As fate would have it her husband, son and she were present the day that the school committee first received the keys to the building. They joined the school committee as they went inside to assess its condition. What they saw did not feel like a beginning though. It felt like the aftermath of a natural disaster and heavily vandalized since being vacated two years prior. Graffiti covered the adjacent portable buildings and playground. Inside windows had been shattered. Tiny slivers of broken glass lay everywhere. Furniture was shrew about, and large file cabinets lay on their sides. Trash covered the floors. Light hung loose from the ceiling, some barely attached. Others completely torn out. Entire sections of electrical wiring were missing, not damaged, gone. In other places exposed wires dangled where safe systems should have been. The building felt unsafe, unstable, and forgotten. That was the environment they stepped into, a place that needed far more than a simple cleaning. In that moment, they did not see only what it was. They saw what it could be. Believing in that vision was the easy part. The hard part was everything that came next. Immediately work began that afternoon. Windows were boarded up while she and her son walked from room to room taking stalk of anything that might be useful. There was a lot. In the months that followed, the volunteers did far more than sweep floors and remove trash. They rebuilt. They replaced wiring, repaired walls, and secured windows. Piece by piece and day by day, they made the building functional again. Later that summer, she and her colleagues developed the school's program, creating curriculum, gathering materials, and enrolling students. There were long days and even longer nights. There were moments when progress felt slow and setbacks felt overwhelming. But all of them, day by day, they made the building functional again. Later that summer, a transformation took place. What once felt broken and unsafe became welcoming, a place of purpose. By September when their doors first opened, the chaotic space had become a classroom again, many classrooms. They were filled, not with echoes, but with children's voices, movement, laughter, and the unmistakable signs of

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learning. In the summer of 2002, she stood before the City Council to ask for approval to move forward with their vision. It was a pivotal moment. They sought and greatly received Council approval as a bonified school within Methuen. They made commitments, not only to restore a structure, but to build a school that would meet high standards, to service students, as well as the community with integrity. The school has honored those commitments each day. They fully adhere to Massachusetts curriculum standards and their staff works diligently to ensure their students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for success. Accountability has always been at the core of their work, driving ongoing self-evaluation and ensuring their commitment to continuous improvement. Equally important is their relationship with Methuen public schools and the broader community. Since 2001 they have maintained a strong and respectful partnership with the district leadership as well as local police and fire departments. These relationships are built on trust, communication, and shared commitment to what is best for students. The point of the story is simple. Transformation is possible with vision, determination, hard work that something that seems beyond repair can become something that is meaningful and lasting. The school at 125 Oakland Avenue is more than a building. It is a testament to resilience. It is a place where students feel safe, supported, and inspired to learn. All of us, as a community, can do so much.

Rashid Kahn, 41 Village View Road, as you heard in the previous meeting and again today, 25 years, the school has been an integral part of the Methuen community at large. Families who are law abiding, taxpaying and civically engaged have chosen Methuen to make their home, and they continue to contribute meaningfully to the city every day. They intend to use the parcel of land, just as they have for the past 25 years, only and exclusively for the education of their children and sports related activities of children. The Board of Directors sent an email to the Mayor and the City Council today. You have it in writing as well. The school is a huge success story as you have heard repeatedly. It is a huge success story for the community, development for the city as well. They have been lessening the burden on Methuen finances and public-school system for 25 years. For example, just the snow removal of the buildings is \$10,000 a year. The electricity and the gas and heat supply are about \$43,000 a year. And those building is in such a form that electricity and heat cannot be shut off in that building. Totaling \$53,000 for just snow, heat, and electricity. He has submitted a partial list of maintenance that they have done. If Council needs more details, they can tell Council all about it. They respectfully ask for Council approval for the purchase. They urge Council not to look at this transaction as a unitary transaction, as one-off transaction. They urge Council to look at is as continuation of their trusted relationship that has been shaped over the last 20 years of service and positioned to deliver ongoing value to the City of Methuen, its residents, and students.

Vice-Chair Pesce read the following letter from the Methuen Cultural Council.
“Greetings Members of the Methuen City Council; On Saturday, March 28, 2026, the Methuen Cultural Council hosted its “2026 Grant Reception and Awards Ceremony”. This year, the Council proudly awarded 26 grants totaling nearly \$39,000 to fund projects and performances that will benefit Methuen’s children, adults, and seniors, enriching the cultural life of our entire

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community. We were honored to be supported in this endeavor by Chairperson Neily Soto, along with Councilors Yanilda Santos and Patricia Valley. We sincerely thank them for their attendance and for joining us in celebrating this exciting news for our city. Sincerely, The Methuen Cultural Council, Ellen M. Baranowski, Chairperson”

Organizational Business - None

Reading and Acceptance of Minutes from Previous Meetings March 16, 2026 regular meeting

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS.

Chair Soto announced the Mayor is not in attendance this evening due to a family emergency. The Chief of Staff and the CAFO are here.

Proclamations/Correspondence: Councilor Valley Congratulations Regarding Tribute to Woman YWCA Award

Chair Soto extended sincere thanks to the Mayor for nominating Councilor Patricia Valley as the 2026 Honoree for the 43rd annual YWCA Northeastern Massachusetts tribute to women. She also congratulated Councilor Valley on this well-deserved recognition. This honor reflects her commitment to her public service, her dedication to our community, and meaningful work she continues to do for the residents of Methuen. She noted the 43rd annual tribute to the women will be held on Thursday, May 14th, 2026 from 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Andover Country Club. Tickets are on sale through the YWCA Northeastern Massachusetts event page. Congratulations Councilor Valley and thank you to the Mayor for nominating you.

Proclamation - Motorcycle Awareness Month

TR-26-36 A Resolution Proclaiming Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month in the City of Methuen (Sponsored by Chair Soto, and Councilors DiZoglio and Valley, and co-sponsored by Mayor Beauregard)

Councilor DiZoglio explained this is important to him because he grew up with the Willette family in Methuen. Billy, Austin’s brother, and he played sports together. He also coached Austin who was killed by a distracted driver while he was on his motorcycle a few years ago. His mother, Arlene, is in the front row. He has known her for about 20 years. She and the organization will come up and explain what they are about.

Paul Cote from Amesbury said before 2001 there have been massive tragedies with motorcycles in Massachusetts. The registry when he did accident reconstruction review with the registry and state police, they found that the rest of the country with the American Motorcycle Association nationally celebrates Motorcycle Awareness for the month of May because geographically and weatherwise that is an ideal month, especially in the northern states because

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May stood for motorcycles and you. That was in 1992. They used to have to beg the Governor's Highway Safety Bureau to do something in Massachusetts. They got tired of it, filed a bill to make it a law, a statute, for their annual proclamation they had the month of May. Reviewing those statistics, they found that 27% of the fatalities happened in February, March, and April. And we said why wait until May to make somebody smarter than us come up with an acronym for March. And they changed the bill and sent it to Senator Jajuga who was Chairman of the Safety Joint Committee. And motorcycle awareness really can help... save lives. The fatalities are down to the point where now more than 50% of the fatalities are rider error. Younger riders, we have got to smack them on the side of the head and say: "stupid hurts", but we still need the awareness. Over 145,000 bikes are coming out of winter's hibernation here in Massachusetts. Methuen has 1188 registered motorcycles, second largest in Essex County, to Haverhill. Arlene's son was killed in 2023 by a driver texting right over the line on Rt. 97 in Salem, NH. She has had to be silent while the criminal charges were pending which the person eventually pled guilty six months ago and is currently in prison for it. This is your first time doing this. There are about 30 other communities doing this. They issued the proclamation for their citizen bikers and they appreciate it. Arlene has started the Austin's Voice against distracted driving and is going around the state with them. Again, do not text and drive.

Arlene Willette "I'm truly honored to stand here as the City of Methuen issues this Motorcycle Awareness Proclamation in memory of my son Austin Michael Willette. Her family has deep roots in this community. This where they raised their family, where Austin grew up and where so many of our memories were made. Methuen has always meant so much to them. Since losing Austin due to a distracted driver has changed her and her family forever. What no family should ever have to experience has become part of their story. She was driving down the very road Austin grew up on, not realizing it was her beautiful son until she was standing over him. That moment will stay with her forever. It changed everything. Two weeks before they lost Austin, she had a conversation with him. She told him she felt like she had lost her voice and he said to her mum you need to find your voice again. That is where Austin's voice began inspired by Austin Michael. She was told she had a job to do and this is to be Austin's voice to bring awareness to distracted driving, to fight for him, so no other family must live with this reality. And we will never stop until we make real change and shift the way society treats distracted driving. As parents, we know how deeply we love our children. That love does not end with losing Austin. It gives us strength, the purpose, and the drive to keep going and to never stop until she meets him again. But through that loss, they have also seen the strength, compassion, and support of this community and the motorcycle community who have stood beside them and helped turn their grief into purpose to Austin's voice against distracted driving, 2024. April is National Distracted Driving Awareness month. It is a time to remind everyone how dangerous and life changing distracted driving can be. It only takes a second. Here in Massachusetts we recognize Motorcycle Awareness period, which runs from March 22nd through April 30th. These two awareness efforts go hand in hand, reminding all of us to stay alert and look out for one another on the road. Their vision is not only to spread awareness for motorcycle

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safety but to advocate for stronger laws and real accountability. A hundred-dollar ticket is not enough. A tragedy can happen before anyone ever receives that first ticket. We need prevention because life is more important than keeping penalties small and making people comfortable. The truth is, she does not think people truly understand how quickly it can happen. All it takes is looking down at your phone, picking it up for just a second, and in a moment everything will change. You do not want to be on either side of a crash. Trust me, and a crash is not an accident. Please take these words and start the conversation with your family, your friends, you children. Because that is how we begin to make real change. Please join us. Be Austin's voice. Help prevent another tragedy. Some of you here today may have already been touched in some way, experienced harm, loss, or know someone whose life has been forever changed by distracted driving. She is thankful to the City of Methuen, to the Mayor, to the Public Safety Committee, to the City Council, to her community and everyone here today to helping keep Austin's memory alive and for bringing an awareness that can save lives. Check twice. Save a life. Austin's voice against distracted driving 24."

Councilor DiZoglio read **TR-26-36** A Resolution Proclaiming Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month in the City of Methuen (Sponsored by Chair Soto, and Councilors DiZoglio and Valley, and co-sponsored by Mayor Beauregard)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to adopt. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Chair Soto declared a brief recess. Members present upon return: Clr. Valley, Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Marsan, Clr. Pesce, Clr. Santos, Clr. Simard, and Chair Soto.

TR-26-24A A Resolution Approving the Oakland Avenue Trust's Offer to Purchase the Oakland Avenue School with Such Other Conditions and Terms as Are Further Determined Appropriate by the Mayor and Authorizing the Mayor to Execute Whatever Documents Are Required to Close the Sale and Convey the Property (Requested by Mayor Beauregard) (remove from the table) *Note from the Mayor: While the City Solicitor indicated that the original 2001 Notice to Abutters satisfied the ordinance's requirements because the 2001 notice also contained the option to purchase, in the interest of transparency, I voluntarily chose to send my own abutters' notice of the proposed sale so that abutters could attend the City Council meeting with any feedback or concerns. Additional supporting documentation is attached.*

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Pesce to remove from the table. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Marsan, seconded by Councilor Santos.

Councilor Santos said she is in 100% of the sale of this property. Constituents would like to know if the CAFO has reviewed the profit and loss of the school to ensure they can make the payments suggested.

CAFO Duprey responded, no.

Councilor Santos asked, “how do we know if they can afford this payment if we haven’t reviewed their financial statement?”

Solicitor O’Neill said he does not know if the city would typically review their financials. This deal would be structured with a mortgage deed that would allow the city to take the property back if the school were to enter default, just like any other regular commercial mortgage. The city does not have any exposure in that regard. If Council approves the resolution and the city goes to closing, the city will look at that issue and make sure that we are satisfied they can do so. But even if they were unable to do so, the city would be fully protected by a mortgage deed which would allow us to take back the property if they were unable to make those payments or if for some reason they decided they wanted to stop making payments and do something different. Until that school is completely paid off, the city retains the right to repossess it, just like it does with a home mortgage.

Councilor Santos: that being said, there is going to be on the note, specifications of any late fees, any penalty in case of any late payment as well. Madam CAFO said we have not reviewed any of their profit or financial statements, but, if this goes through and they purchase this property at assessed value, they can turn around and refinance the property. She asked if they have any plans to do that and how can we protect the city from that.

Solicitor O’Neill said the offer that was made by the school is to either purchase outright and pay the money upfront or purchase with city financing. He would ask the school to speak to that and the offer was made with no prepayment penalty, which would mean they could pay it off at any time. He has had discussions with representatives of the school. He thinks they would like to fundraise as much as possible and pay that note off as soon as possible. Only time will tell whether they are able to do that. They do have the right to prepay the entire note without penalty based on the offer that they made that is before Council tonight for approval. They could do either.

Chair Soto asked if “refinance” is to pay off or refinance to cash out. The assessed value is one thing. Market value is another.

Councilor Santos said it could be both.

Solicitor O’Neill explained they would not be able to do a cash out finance without the city’s permission. In a standard commercial mortgage, you would need permission from the primary lender, which in this case would be the city. If that were the case, they would have to come back to the city for that kind of permission.

Chair Soto asked Mr. Kahn if the school’s board has any inclination whether it is to buy directly from the city without us financing.

Rashid Kahn said in all transparency, as the Solicitor was saying, if they get approval from the City Council, they are going to go in eastern Massachusetts as far as they need to try to fund raise for this project as much as possible. And whatever they do in fundraising they will try to assess what makes financial sense to them, how much to put down as a down payment, and then to finance the rest with the city. They have no intention at all of refinancing or sell out or anything like that. They want to be on the premises for at least the next hundred years.

Councilor Marsan indicated he spoke to Mr. Rashid Kahn over the weekend and he has had some concerns about the long term of the school and wants to ensure that the city is protected somewhat. That it is an educational facility forever or if we are here and that we maintain the right to use the ballfields because we have that right now and they have agreed to do that. As you are aware the Solicitor came up with an amendment this afternoon to help with the right verbiage to this so he could make an amendment to the resolution this evening. This is a friendly amendment. He spoke with Rashid about it and he sent a letter saying he was in favor of this. The Mayor is in favor of it. The Mayor still has his authority to fine tune the points of this. This is just a friendly amendment so that we retain the use of the ballfield, which he is adamant about. He does not think we should give up a ballfield and that they use the facility as an educational facility forever.

MOTION BY: Councilor Marsan, seconded by Councilor Pesce to amend and add the following language as a new paragraph, Paragraph 1A:

“1A. Authorizes the Mayor to convey the entire property (Parcel ID 614-139A-36) as previously confirmed surplus property by Orders 4254 and 5002 to the Oakland Avenue School Trust for continued use as a day-time parochial school, an evening community teaching facility, and in furtherance of educational purposes as specified in Section 1.3 of the Lease dated December 14, 2011, and further with the written agreement of the Oakland Avenue School Trust that so long as the Trust continues to use the current playground area and baseball field for those purposes, the public shall continue to be allowed to use those areas upon reasonable conditions and to the extent that such public use does not interfere with the normal, regular, and customary use of those areas by the Oakland Avenue School Trust for its parochial school, educational and sports activity uses. The City Solicitor shall ensure said restrictions are incorporated into the deed and closing documents as he deems necessary and appropriate; and”

Councilor DiZoglio said he spoke with Councilor Marsan and Mr. Rashid. He is in favor of this. That was his only concern and with that, he will support this.

Councilor Valley said she has not seen a request for an insurance binder prior to closing. That is a common practice for every mortgage just to protect the asset.

Solicitor O'Neill explained the property is currently insured pursuant to the lease. That will be a standard requirement at closing as well upon the purchase because we will have a mortgage. If we have a mortgage, we will always require insurance as well. It is in place now and will be required as part of the closing.

Councilor Santos asked who is going to be responsible to service this loan.

UPON VOTE: (amendment) UNANIMOUS

Councilor Santos repeated her question as to who would oversee this loan, not only ensuring that the city receives the payments on time but that the property continues to be insured.

CAFO Duprey said as far as making sure all of that is documented that will be part of the Solicitor in the closing documents and making sure that all of timing is set out. As far as collecting payment, that would be the Treasurer's office, Treasurer/Collector, they collect their current payment. They make it annually and if that is not made at a certain time, then we would

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reach out. Whether or not we provide them with annual statements, that is something we can figure out. Normally, we would not need to, but we can put that in writing as part of the closing. There would be dates in there and if they did not meet them, then there would be interest and penalties that would need to be discussed.

Councilor Santos asked who determined the rate for this contract.

CAFO Duprey explained this was an estimate so they could bring forward an estimate of what they were looking to do as part of what it could look like. She does not think they are final numbers. They are not sure if they are going to pay for it upfront or how much exactly they are going to put down, etc. It will be potentially be reconfigured depending on what that looks like when we get to the actual documents of closing. This was just to give you an estimate of current rates that are out there over 25- year period, to give you an idea of what it looks like with the \$5,000 that we get annually.

Councilor Pesce said she supports the amendment. She does not think Methuen has any intention or has used that ballfield in anyway whatsoever. She understands the concern. We must look at what is being done now. It is interesting because, and some of the speakers eluded to it, it was not prime real estate. They inherited a complete mess. They have rehabilitated it. This school has turned somewhat of a diamond out of the shambles that it once was. We need to give some credit where credit is due. It is interesting that the Council has so many questions about financing and she does, in some regards, in terms of legal standpoint. We have heard from the Solicitor that we are able to do it, that we are afforded the same rights that another lender would in foreclosing if we need to. She is sure we will never need to. She has faith and has seen what the school has done to increase their students expeditiously over the years. She does not really have concerns about that. But monetarily if this Council is concerned, right now we are getting \$5,000 a year. Her thinking behind that and she knows there have been a lot of rumors questioning why \$5,000, was this a gift. The state of disrepair it was in perhaps the people who gave it to them might have gifted it to them. we may have paid people to inherit what they inherited to become this school. Now that is prospering. But at \$5,000 a year, she wants them to look at what the city will be getting per month financing this. We are talking about the absorption of financial liabilities for the city and costs we are now spending. We are getting that money. And by the same token we cannot turn around and accept a prepayment penalty clause when we do not want them to finance in the first place. Her question to the Solicitor is if this passes tonight that would allow us to enter into the Purchase and Sales agreement. (Solicitor agreed) Councilor Pesce asked: "At that point would we still have the reservation of rights at the administration to specify financing terms for our mortgage?" "Is that something that comes subsequently?"

Solicitor O'Neill said the way that the lease is structured you have an offer before you that's been made, and so you would be approving the offer, as made, which is basically a 6% loan with a \$200,000 down payment and then the remainder to be financed or an outright purchase. We would not change those terms when we come back. If you are not comfortable with those, you would want to vote "no" and have them make a different offer.

Councilor Pesce said she is talking about the specifics of the financing, like the city's capabilities of foreclosure, whatever note they are signing on our end.

Solicitor O'Neill said those are already agreed to. The city has agreed verbally that it will be a standard commercial mortgage. All of those provisions are always incorporated. "Is there a specific provision she is looking for?"

Councilor Pesce said she has spoken with members of the Council and other concerned residents about the foreclosure, mainly concerned that we do not do them, and we have not in years.

Solicitor O'Neill said you are talking about two different things. You are talking about tax foreclosures. This would not be a tax foreclosure. This would be a regular mortgage foreclosure which is completely different than a tax foreclosure. Tax foreclosure must go through the land court. It is a laborious process that takes a long time. A commercial mortgage, not that this is going to happen, he would say if there were a problem, he could have that property back in a month. It is not that kind of thing. This is a strictly business deal. It will not be a belabored point.

Councilor Pesce noted the city is getting tax revenue, allowing the school to continue thriving and to continue expanding potentially, and making money for the city at an assessed value that is more than fair.

Councilor Simard said 2.6 million dollars if TIA were to pay that off next week, he would be happy for the city. He would be even more happy for TIA because they would save the 2 million to put back into their community. He said he toured the school with Councilor Marsan, and they showed the same pride they showed at the last meeting. They toured the classrooms. Like Councilor Pesce said, they were not given lavish digs. They were given a building that was decrepit. They fixed it and made into a school that was very successful in the community. He is glad they had this day. He trusts Rashid and the City of Methuen that we are all doing the right thing.

Chair Soto passed the gavel. This is a request or maybe an amendment as well. In this purchase, for the CAFO not to have looked at finances and be able to say this is a positive thing and we want it to happen. But, as our CAFO, to not have looked at their financials, she does not understand it. The CAFO should be able to say, "let's look at their financials". She would like to ask the body, at a minimum, for the CAFO to look at those financials and give the go ahead on that purchase.

MOTION BY: Councilor Soto, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to amend "for the CAFO to look at the financials of the school and give her blessing that the city would not be in a position in the near future because their financials don't make sense". As her job would dictate. That is what she is here for.

Solicitor O'Neill asked if this is to be done as part of the closing or prior to.

Chair Soto said she would like it done, you are signing a P & S, so at point the CAFO would look at the finances and would say "this is a go".

Solicitor O'Neill said they did plan to do that. We can look at their finances. But it has always been the case from the beginning that they made it clear they do not have \$2,680,100 in their reserves and they are going to be financing and fundraising to do that. So, they do have money, verbally, somewhat for down payment. Certainly, we would do that as a matter of course. There is no problem with that. CAFO Duprey said she is fine with that.

Councilor Drew said the CAFO is being asked to act as underwriting to ensure that the loan is going to be soluble.

Councilor Pesce: Point of Clarification: like a mortgage contingency clause.

Chair Soto said, in essence, when you are going to finance commercial property, it goes through due diligence and financing. You make sure everything is in order. We understand they do not have all the money up front, that they are going to be fundraising. She would plug all that into the system and be able to tell the probability of success when she does the numbers.

Solicitor O'Neill said they have a credit rating we will look at.

Chair Soto said she is trying to protect the board, the Council, that they are not making a blind decision on financing for city. If the CAFO has the blessing of this is a go, she feels more comfortable with this transaction.

Councilor Drew said in the unlikely even the CAFO feels it is not a solid sale, does that kill this, or does it have to come back to the Council. He asked how that works.

Solicitor O'Neill said he would leave that to the sponsor to tell us how that works.

Chair Soto said the way she feels it would work is Council would look at what their options are. Other municipalities will allow financing for an organization if they are doing that business and they usually hold a silent second. They allow them to go out to the marketplace and get a loan and they hold a silent second so that they could be successful with the financing and not carry the burden of the financing or the risk. That is not the position we are in right now. We are doing our due diligence and job making sure it can happen.

Councilor Drew is trying to clarify if the CAFO says "no", it becomes a – they need to get a second what happens to this property and what happens to the deal? "Is it dead at that point?"

Solicitor O'Neill said that is at the Council's discretion. They can address that issue in short order and come back to the Council. The process of closing is going to take a little while. They will be able to report back to the Council on that issue soon. Council is asking to verify the credit worthiness of the school and the trust to make payments. That is really a credit report, some references, and a balance sheet and asset statement. He does not see any issue with that. They can report back to the Council. If there is an issue or no issue, they will bring it to the Council's attention. He would say that if the city were uncomfortable for some reason with financial issue, they would still have the option to purchase it outright.

Councilor Simard said if he were a betting man, he would say the fact that they were paying \$5,000 a year and now they want to pay 2.6 million, there is a plan in place. There is a lot of smart people in this room. There is a lot of financial wizards also. He thinks that they are going to pay off the 2.6 million.

Councilor Santos reiterated that she supports the sale of this property 100%. She admires them for the work they have been doing in our city with our kids. She wants to make sure that we are protected, that they are protected, and are not setting themselves up for failure. They have two more years into the lease. If by any reason, the CAFO comes back and says “no”, we can come up with a plan and help them be ready by the time that the lease is up so they can be ready to purchase this property.

Solicitor O’Neill clarified that the lease runs for another nine years.

UPON VOTE: (amendment) UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to adopt as amended.
UPON ROLL CALL: UNANIMOUS

Rashid Kahn thanked the City Council for their due diligence, for going through the process, and for supporting the school. Mr. Park thanked the Council as well.

Consideration of Appointments:

- Tristan Hoare, MAA – Assessor MOTION BY: Councilor Simard, seconded by Councilor MacLaren to approve. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 6 No, 3 Yes (Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Simard)
- Daniel Donahue - Assistant Fire Chief MOTION BY: Councilor DiZoglio, seconded by Councilor Pesce to approve. Chief Toto presented background information on Daniel Donahue. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: Unanimous Dan Donohue thanked the Council, the Mayor, his family, the Chief, and his colleagues.
- Traci Lavigne-Milnes, RN - Board of Health MOTION BY: Councilor Simard, seconded by Councilor Marsan. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: Unanimous
- Christine Metzemaekers - Commission on Trust Funds (Reappointment) Solicitor O’Neill said he received clarification. This appointment is under ten years. MOTION BY: Councilor Pesce, seconded by Councilor Marsan to approve. Councilor Drew noted that the interview and talent bank application was in October. He asked why it is coming forward now. Chief of Staff, James McCarty, explained the Mayor was holding off on new appointments until the new Council came in. They started in January. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 yes, 1 no (Clr. Soto)
- Salma Boulal - Cultural Council MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio) Councilor Drew commented he read through the resume and was very impressed. He is glad to see qualified people stepping up and being part of our community and taking the time to volunteer for boards like this. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: UNANIMOUS Selma Boulal thanked the Council for their support.
- Luis Sanchez - Cultural Council MOTION BY: Councilor Valley, seconded by Councilor Simard to approve. Councilor Drew noted the resume did not give a lot of information on this person or their relevant experience to this board. Councilor DiZoglio agreed with Councilor Drew. He would like to know why this individual picked the Cultural Council. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 6 yes, 3 no (Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren)

- Lesly Melendez-Medina - Licensing Board (Alternate) MOTION BY: Councilor Valley, seconded by Councilor Santos to approve. Councilor Valley noted this individual was appointed to the Cultural Council in November and asked if it is possible to appoint an individual to two different boards. Solicitor O'Neill responded, yes. Councilor Drew commented this individual's resume was impressive. This individual will be a great asset to the city serving as an alternate. UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 6 yes, 3 no (Clr. Valley, Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Santos)

Chair Soto declared a brief recess. Council Members present following the recess: Clr. Valley, Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Marsan, Clr. Pesce, Clr. Santos, Clr. Simard, and Chair Soto.

Presentations/Projects/Department Updates: Clean River Project and Illegal Dumping in Methuen, MA – Rocky Morison spoke about illegal dumping. It all triggers back to the Merrimack River. As you can see on the screen, this is the Spicket River. It is a wetlands. Kids go and play. He wanted to bring attention to this. He put it on Facebook so conservation could begin. You can see it in this picture also. Since he reported this there is more trash there now. He is hoping that conservation is down there taking care of some of this because it is our wetlands. As you can see this is Riverside Drive. There was a pile of trash there. He asked the owners of the property to clean it up nicely and they just looked at him like he had three different heads. The next weekend someone dumped off these toxic barrels. The city came down and took control of this. They hired an outside firm to come in and contain it, stand them up, and close it. They were leaking all over. He does not know what is going to happen from here. The company that owns the property is going to take care of this. But, its – his eye is on the environment what is going on that helps the city. This is the cemetery in Methuen. There is a dump there and they are burying the items. There's tires and mattresses. He brought this to light last year. It is still going on today. He wanted to bring that to the city's attention too so they could investigate all this dumping going on. Going back to the Merrimack River, cruising down 110 whether you are in Haverhill or whether you are on the Dracut line in Methuen, you look over the guardrails, you'll see tires, mattresses, you see all the stuff because people illegally dumping, you don't. You do not see it until you get out of a car. You look down there. Several of the residents are from Methuen. They live on one channel and it ends up in the river. People do not want to pay for their mattresses or pay for their tires. They will pull over and they will chuck them down the embankment into the river. He has been doing this for 22 years. Nothing shocks him anymore because he sees it coming down the river. They have put these booms in for the past fifteen years. This is what they call a "catch and keep boom". It has a mouth on it. It takes it in, goes through the belly and stays there. The wind does not blow it back and forth. After doing this for so many years they have it down to a science. As you can see the system, there's 300' that they use for one system. They have a marker for nighttime, for traffic. The next picture is Andover. They have a catch and release boom. It is a 1,000'. It blows back and forth. They have been doing this for three years. They know it is wrong, but they just want to put a boom out there and say look it we are doing something. There is no science to it. It just

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goes back and forth. Some of the residents here they see it, they live on the river. They know. He has a true system where they collect stuff. They do not fill up garbage bags. They fill up dumpsters. They have a big river monster that grabs this stuff. He is here to ask if they could put an RFP together so they can get their equipment in the river and start cleaning. They patrol it, go up and down and get in the bushes, hand pick all the trash out of there. They have barrels up and down the river for fishing spots. The funding that they get from the city allows them to do all this. They have over 300 kids, different schools, Methuen, Lawrence, Andover. They come to the facility. They take them on one of 30' boats and teach them about where their drinking water comes from and what's in those boats, microplastics tool that waste CSO matter. They go to the schools and talk to the kids too. The funding that they get from Methuen really goes a long way for education also. He is here today hoping they can move along with this, some sort of RFP to put together. He provided a pamphlet to Council that talks about that and the illegal dumping that ends up in the Merrimack River. He is here to make his plea to move forward. The previous Mayor was a big advocate for the environment. He is hoping they could do something this year.

Chair Soto recalled a presentation made in 2024 by Mr. Morison. At that point she also thought there were cars in the river. It was explained how many cars they have taken out of the river. Because this is what you do, she knows this was a two-part presentation, the booms, and the illegal dumping. The illegal dumping, particularly at the cemetery. She asked if he knew who was coming in from Methuen, maybe not. "Is it from our own city or outside the city?"

Rocky Morison said he thinks some of it is from the employees at the cemetery. You cannot hide the fact that there are mattresses and couches at the bottom of the hill where they are dumping sand over. They know it is there. He thought last year they would grab an excavator and start pulling those items up. But they did not. There is new stuff there. And now they are burying more stuff. He would say maybe they could do an investigation, maybe conservation needs to go down there and talk to the staff, maybe cameras need to be put up. It is a mess down there. He only showed a fraction of what is there. It is a mess.

Councilor Marsan said he witnessed the dumping at the cemetery last year when Mr. Morison brought it up. He called him to try to get all the facts. He asked if Mr. Morison remembered their conversation. Rocky Morison said he did not introduce himself properly. Councilor Marsan said he asked Mr. Morison about the dumping and he asked (I gave him my name) what do you do for a living? He asked him out of the blue. He responded he is a contractor and was told "maybe you did the dumping down there". He turned it around and put it on him and now he laughs about it. He does a good job cleaning the river. But he is not the almighty and it is not right what he does. because he was just a citizen talking to him and as soon as he said he was the Chairman of the city council, he changed "oh, I was just kidding". Councilor Marsan said he was trying to find out and help with the dump. It sours you when you try to fix something and help him. Then he does not want help, but he blames you for it. He was not very happy about it and still not happy about it. He never apologized.

Rocky Morison said he apologized on the phone. Usually when you answer a phone you say, hi, I am so and so from the City of Methuen. On Sunday, he was sitting there watching TV and the phone rings and it is a guy, hey where is this dumping, where is that dumping. He is sorry that he did not understand who he was talking to but if the Mayor called him, he would say he is the Mayor from Methuen or Lawrence and he would know.

Councilor Simard said if you are cleaning rivers and trash and illegal dumping you have got an edge to yourself. He can understand that. He has been in Lawrence quite a bit and it is the same problems. Illegal dumping is a huge problem. "Do you know if you were to get an RFP, would you coordinate with the police department to get some cameras put down there?" He knows most municipalities, their laws, are not strict when you catch someone illegally dumping you cannot even arrest them unless it is a breach of the peace. But, most of the time you must make them take it away. But if they do, they are just going to dump it somewhere else. As a City Council if we do not have strict laws on the books it is going to continue, and we just must make examples out of people. He thinks that is important too, not just cleaning the river, but also prevention. It is an ongoing problem in both Methuen and Lawrence but that would be his suggestion, is to get cameras, go in there with the police department and enforce the laws because people just don't want to pay when they have an apartment, a three tenement, they don't want to go to the dump. They just want to dump it on the side of the road because they do not care because they are saving money and saving time. It is a problem, and he would hope that you would address that, not just cleaning it but prevention.

Rocky Morison said he works with Inspectional Services out of Lawrence. When they see illegal dumping working down there, his guys will go through the bags and look for mail. A lot of times, illegal dump sites, they will clean a house and leave mail in there, someone's address, a lot of mail. He usually gets Inspectional Services involved, take pictures, work together, and then they do their investigation. They go after these people to clean it all up. He is not sure if Methuen has a task force like that. He would like to join it. He loves what they do on the river. It is safe for the first responders. They know that it is kept clean and appreciate what is done there.

Councilor DiZoglio recalled about ten years ago when Mr. Morison started the Clean River Project, he went down and saw their facility. It has grown over the years. He is in full support, especially when they take the bikes out of the river and refurbish the bikes to give to kids. There are many factors here. The question is, we are hoping though that we could turn a leaf and make a fresh start with everybody. They have a great program, but we have to all work together to make this work. He is hoping that if we do support it, an RFP, everybody works together. He wants that to be very clear.

CAFO Duprey noted that an RFP put out would be open to any vendor that would want to come in. As a reference, fiscal year 23 the cost was \$35,00, fiscal year 24 the cost was \$35,000, and last year the cost was almost \$76,000. An RFP would be appropriate.

Chair Soto said she did not recall the reason for the increase.

Mr. Morison said it comes down to expenses. You must pay the employees. You are working with hypodermic needles, working with toxic wastes, etc., from the drainage. They must pay insurance, liability insurance, workmen's comp, and everything else. All their prices, including fuel, went up. They must hire a staff and pay them to do this. They cannot get "free" volunteers to do this. It has got to be spread apart to pay five employees.

Chair Soto said there is an item on the agenda this evening that is with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. She asked if he has worked with them.

Mr. Morison responded, no. He knows about the booms that they put in. It is a trial program where they put in two booms. The gentleman who is doing it does not have any experience. He has got a pair of pickers, a net, and has a little boat. He goes up there and cleans up. Mr. Morison said he is talking massive cleanup. They bring their machine out, grab everything. This is a trial program. They are going out for two months. They do not when they are going to put them in and then after they are done with this program, they are going to give the booms to the fire department or the city to use. The neighbors on the river can tell you it has been catastrophe starting last year. What they did in Andover and Haverhill is they put the booms out. They went back in the winter to get them and they were frozen in the ice. They are about to get ripped out. They were going to get ripped out in Haverhill. He applauds them for giving some equipment to each city and town. But they should have hired someone with experience. He tried to reach out to them and tell them he would be available to explain how to do this, but they could not see eye to eye on a budget and so forth.

Chair Soto asked Mr. Morison to email the Mayor's office with his recommendations for an RFP to be put out and what that would look like. We have some that Mayor Perry put out previously. Based on the pictures and the concerns, send that to the Mayor's office as well.

Mayor's Report: The Mayor's Chief of Staff said the Mayor would send his report to Council via email

CAFO Report

CAFO Duprey said she left a packet on everybody's desk. She is not going to go through every detail here but will briefly go through what is in the packet and why it is in the packet. She will answer questions either tonight or after the meeting or later this week. It starts with the budget schedule. The first thing that is in the packet is a copy of the fiscal year 27 budget schedule. She and the Chair have expedited what this looks like. All the budget schedule is included in month of May. The last few years have been very similar. Those dates are not necessary what happened in the past. They are about two weeks earlier.

The following two documents are the two MMA handouts. She thought it would be helpful because for some this is their first budget season. There is a huge financial pressure just in nature right now in the state of Massachusetts in municipalities. She is sure it is not just the state of Massachusetts. But the Mass Municipal Association is an excellent resource. They have put out two different documents in the last six months. One was an analysis of fiscal pressures

on municipalities in Massachusetts. Then they followed it up with possible recommendations. She thought it would be helpful to them to approach that just because she thought it was a really good read and it gives more information. It gives a little bit of background perspective. Sometimes I think we get caught up and its us with a lot of things. It is a Methuen problem. Whereas this gives you a good idea that its statewide and some problems everybody is addressing, and we all must address it. There are some good ideas that we are looking at internally but should be part of these discussions. She thought some casual reading would be helpful.

The next document is her Capital Improvement Plan project status report, the same update as we have had. Progress is being made. A lot of the projects, the later projects are being spent down and we are making great progress there.

AARPA status report – she has not provided this in a couple of meetings. She wanted to give Council an update and a reminder that all AARPA money needs to be spent by the end of this December. Any money that is not spent at the end of this December needs to be returned to the federal and state government. What she wanted to do here was show Council we have many projects that have already been completed, that we have spent money. There are a few projects that we have anticipated, or we know of already that have funds that are going to need to be returned for one reason or another. Out of 46 million dollars, we are on target to spend almost all of it, which is great. We have completed over half of our projects and are on target to complete the remaining amount on this list. We have plenty of time before December.

- Request of detailed accounting and clarification regarding the email from the CAFO dated 2/18/2026 Stadium Improvement Project (Chair Soto)

The next document she sent out via email. This was the response to the stadium improvement funds from the Chair who had asked about the billboard money. She had provided that with all the detail and attachments. But the second page of that, she wanted to provide that so Council would have that again. That is our schedule of the billboard payments. Anything that we have right now that we are currently getting money for is on this sheet, as far as billboards go is on this sheet and that is the schedule of when we are going to receive those funds. You can see how much we get each year. She added a summary there briefly to show which payments went to which projects. The fiscal year 16 to 19 payments, about \$950,000, they all went to the stadium improvement project that occurred during that time. From fiscal year 20 through July of 2022, about \$540,000 came in for billboards and that went to the track project. Anything that has come in after that point and anything that comes in in the future, unless something has changed here at the Council, is going to go into the stadium and parks stabilization fund. So far, we have put a little over \$800,000. These are the remaining payments that you will see here they are all scheduled to go there as they come in.

- Request of the CAFO to provide updated Searles Estate expenses, including acquisition costs, outstanding or upcoming obligations, including but not limited to insurance, bond principal, bond interest, and any related payments or renewals. (Chair Soto)

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The last thing that she provided is the Searles Estate updated expenses through Friday. That shows you where we are at., just under 3.850 is what we are at to date. That includes insurance payments as well as utilities. The current cost right now that is ongoing that is continuing to hit our budget at this point is the utility costs, the gas, the electricity. We are also having to pay for our insurance to cover that property, which is critical and important. Also, very expensive. Another portion was \$100,000 and that will take us over another six months. That is a very expensive piece that we need to be aware of.

Chair Soto: regarding the stadium dollars, attached to your email, she asked if that is the projected sheet.

CAFO Duprey responded, yes. That is what we have under contract with those companies for monies to receive and what has been received for the billboards is on there.

Chair Soto said there is \$100,000 remaining from the old numbers.

CAFO Duprey said there is \$100,000 remaining.

Chair Soto you said in your report there is \$100,000 remaining.

CAFO Duprey said there was a \$100,000 remaining that rolled into the track project and was used for that.

Chair Soto: on the list of accounts the CAFO sent over which she circulated to the Council, he original revenue accounts stated General Revenue Toll Brothers. Then that was repurposed with the billboard revenue name, the Outdoor Corp. It is the same account number. She wants to make sure she is understanding that correctly. It is account 43-1000009815060. Originally that is when they received the \$300,000. But then when it turns into the billboard revenue, Total Outdoor Corp., there is a \$50,000 difference. That is where she was wondering if Toll gave you \$300,000, but you only moved \$250,000, what happened to that \$50,000. She could not find. The documents sent to her by the CAFO, circulated to the Council, she could not decipher the \$50,000. That might very well be the rolling numbers that eventually end in the \$100,000. That was before the CAFO's time.

CAFO Duprey explained the 43 was the Capital Project funds and this was in our prior financial statement. The account numbers look totally different. 43 was the Capital Project fund that was specific for the stadium improvements and any revenue that went in there to fund that went to that revenue account. Whether it was Toll Brothers because they gave a surety deposit that went towards the project or it was billboard revenues that came through from ION the Ball or Lamar or Outdoor or American Tower, all of those revenues, multiple different sources went in there. That was just one account that they just had one revenue account in that Capital Project fund at the time.

Chair Soto the title that you see at the top of the document she circled the numbers. One has a name but below it has the same account number with a different name.

CAFO Duprey explained that is not the name of the account number. That is where the revenue came from. The account number that you have circled is the same account number all the way down, its just breaking down where the revenue came from.

Chair Soto indicated she would take that off the agenda as it is has been clarified.

- Projections on past and future funding sources as well as overtime on the Mayor's Executive Order # on Paid Parental Leave (Clr. Pesce)

Councilor Pesce said she has not seen these numbers, but she is completely in favor of this. In the interest of transparency to the taxpayers, she would have liked to see worst case scenario for these numbers. She was just looking to see what it could potentially cost the city much like the CAFO has done in the past. Again, just for the sake of taxpayers especially with where it was done outside of collective bargaining which she thought was a little unorthodox just because of the groups. Usually it is done as a collective bargaining tool. She just wanted to get that for transparency to the taxpayers.

Councilor Drew to Councilor Pesce's point, why have not we asked the questions to what she is looking for prior to this. This has been on the agenda for almost two months. He does not understand why the Council has asked and has not received.

CAFO Duprey said she was of the understanding that at the last meeting it was said that it was going to come off. It was not something we were looking at still. She will get that. They did investigate the numbers as far as past goes. In the last three years we have had five maternity leaves, three of which is this year in 2026. We had 28 males that took time in the past three years. All have taken as personal time off, whether it was sick, vacation, personal leave. It was not impacted from financial aside from overtime. Council will see overtime impacting fire and police specifically because they have coverage that is needed. Whereas somebody in another department, they may not need to have that overtime coverage. She would be happy to calculate a projection of what that might be but would like to touch base with you to make sure I am using the right parameters.

Councilor Pesce said when she proposed something that did not impact many people, she was given and the Council was given worst case scenario sheet, a projection if everybody under a certain circumstances, what it would like to the taxpayers. She is looking for a little bit of conformity. If this comes before Council, she wants to see worst case scenario, understanding like you said, much like my proposal it probably won't happen but just worst case scenario if everybody who qualifies for this took it at the same time, what it would cost to taxpayers.

Chair Soto: you mentioned with the AARPA funds that we must return funding. Could you let Council know how much we have returned.

CAFO Duprey said the city has not returned anything.

Chair Soto: on the Searles Estate, the insurance conversation – when we acquired the property, we gave a \$100,998 March of 2026, we paid \$100,000 for the commercial property insurance.

CAFO Duprey explained that is what the city paid now. The city paid another payment back in September to cover the property.

Chair Soto: which was part of the inflation for the price because we bought it for 3.25 million. She remembered it was inflated by \$250,000 to cover some of these expenses.

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The CAFO agreed.

Chair Soto: to the CAFO: looking at these numbers what do you foresee in the near future that the Mayor is going to come in front of Council for expenses that we are depleting from those \$250,000 that we budgeted for? Do you have a rough estimate of what that may look like soon?

CAFO Duprey said right now we are covering the electricity and the gas through our general fund budget. She does not think they are going to ask for additional funds there. However, we have asked the Council already for additional funds at one of the last Council meetings. We transferred money into our utilities, within the budget, so we did not use additional funds. But we did that and part of was it was driven by using additional funds in there for this. She would anticipate they would need at least another \$100,000 of insurance in the next six months. We just paid one. These are six-month insurance coverages. If you are talking about expenses that have already been incurred, she would say that right now we're covering what we can but that last insurance payment is one that she is still trying to figure out how we are going to cover.

Chair Soto said it is \$200,000 a year to keep the property insured. The CAFO agreed.

Chair Soto said understanding that the payments for utilities are way below the threshold of what the Mayor needs to come in front of the Council for. It is coming from a general fund; it is taxpayers' dollars that are paying for the monthly expenses of the Searles Estate. The CAFO responded yes.

Councilor Pesce asked why the Purchase and Sale Agreement line item is \$56,000.

CAFO Duprey said it is a deposit.

Councilor Drew to the CAFO – on the AARPA we were just talking about what is going to be sent back. Looks like we have 5.7 million dollars encumbrances open. And then it is the unencumbered balances available, we would end up going back \$171,000. CAFO yes

Councilor Drew with that \$171,000 can those dollars that are there on each one of those line items be reallocated to different lines or are those specific lines that is what we must spend.

CAFO Duprey said unfortunately they had to have everything allocated as of the end of 2024, which they did. But things changed. Our AARPA construction manager did not work out. So, the city had allocated funds under contract for those but, unfortunately, they cannot reallocate those at this point because of the timing of how that worked out. Some of the little ones are just something came just under budget or things of that nature. Because we have passed that time frame, the city cannot reallocate anything.

Councilor Valley said she did not see the bond information, principle, and interest. She asked if the CAFO had another.

CAFO Duprey said they have not had a bond payment yet. We issued a bond anticipation note, that is for a full year. We do not need to pay that back or roll it forward until the end of this fiscal year. She put it at the top, the 3.5M, just to show how much was authorized, pluses and minuses. That has not happened yet. She has a question out to our bond counsel as far as what the different options would look like. The city could bond it. She thinks it is premature to bond it since we are not quite sure where we are going to land on that. She asked them to show her what that might look like. She has also asked them to show her what that would look like to roll the band into. The bands are a year or less. The city could have to pay some sort of interest on that. But she is still waiting on those numbers and will share it when it comes in.

Requests of Councilors

- Echo Lane Sewer Connection – Update on the proposed sewer connection for Echo Lane, including whether there is a tentative schedule for when the project will begin, so residents can be kept informed (Request of Clr. Valley to the Mayor and DPW Director)
- What is the status on the plan to rebuild or replace Police/Fire/DPW buildings? (Request of Clr. Santos)
- Request for the Report done by the State on the Oakland Avenue Bridge (Req. of Clr. Santos)
- Status of New Trash Barrel order delivery and distribution (Req. of Clr. Drew)
- To the Solicitor – Rail Trail Overhangs feasibility (Req. of Clr. Valley)
- Update on construction project on Lowell and East Capitol Street when it will resume and expected completion. (Req. of Clr. Marsan)
- Update where we are with collection of fee for second and third trash bins residents purchase. Specifically, on year 2,3,4, and how many are out there? (Req. of Clr. Marsan)
- Discussion and possible action regarding lack of restroom access at youth baseball fields, including delayed water service, public health and sanitary concerns, and request for administrative response. (Req. of Chair Soto)

Public Service:

Grants: None

Licenses: None

Contract(s):

C-26-80 Seacoast Harley-Davidson, 17 Lafayette Road, North Hampton, NH 03862 for 2026 Police Road Glide FLTRXP in Black in the Amount: \$29,870.00 MOTION BY: Councilor DiZoglio, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

C-26-81 Telemedicine Group DE, LLC., 3400 Douglas Blvd. Suite 170, Cardiac/Metabolic Screening in the Amount of \$32,340.00, 35 @ \$924.00 Contract is one year with 2 one-year extensions subject to appropriation per fiscal year MOTION BY: Councilor DiZoglio, seconded by Councilor Pesce to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Other Officers and Committee Reports

Councilor Simard reported the Veterans Affairs Committee met tonight. They welcomed Clr. Drew. He. Clr. DiZoglio and Interim VSO Tim Sheehy was there. They spoke about the opening of a Clerk III as his assistant in the office. The job is posted and up for six more days. They discussed benefits for the disabled veterans, flag replacement on May 16th from 8:30 a.m. to noon at the Elmwood Cemetery. The Junior ROTC will be running the show along with the VSO. Anybody who wants to volunteer may contact his office. Heavenly Donuts, Ellie's Farmhouse and Shaw's are donating supplies for that. He thanked them for their donations. He announced the Memorial Day Parade is May 25th. They are trying to get more clarification on the Rail Trail to discuss later.

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Councilor Pesce reported the Memorials Committee met this past Tuesday (Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Drew (via Zoom) and Clr. DiZoglio joined her. They were able to vote on an item to come before Council shortly, the naming of a field for someone who has been very integral to the softball efforts in the community.

Councilor Drew reported the Parks subcommittee met this evening (Clr. Valley, Clr. MacLaren, and Director Angelo) Tim from the Rail Trail gave a speech on the current status of the Rail Trail and what was going on over there and what they are looking to do with the overhang and trying to make that a component. We are going to do what we can to assist. The other items discussed were parks, an audit update, he received from the Mayor that is currently in the office for procurement. That RFP should be out shortly. Councilor Valley asked a question on the little libraries. We are going to do what we can to try to facilitate more small little libraries with the Methuen library, to reach out to them and get more of those around the city to help the kids, especially over the summer. There will be a city cleanup day on April 25th from 8:30 a.m. to noon that the city is facilitating. There will be a sign up for any volunteers on the city website by the end of the week to share with everyone. As of now, they will be cleaning up six parks, potentially seven. Councilor Valley requested Forest Lake to be one of the parks. The other parks are Riverside, the Tenney, Rail Trail, Neil Playstead, Veterans, and the Osgood Park. The city will provide the pickers, the bags, and gloves. They are working diligently to try and beautify and better our city as best they can.

Councilor DiZoglio reported that Councilor Valley and Chair Soto, Police Chief MacNamara, himself, and Disability Commissioner Wanda Santos went down to the bird sanctuary last week. The idea is to gain access for police officers and other people to gain access to the Rail Trail, not only for public safety but also to kind of clean up the area. He went to the Disabilities Commission last Thursday night to them that we are also trying to make that handicap accessible for them as well. They are joining him tomorrow at 4:00 p.m. Council members may join him. DPW Director Pat Bower is also attending to see what we could do for cleaning up. He sent a post out the other night if we had a garden club, which he found out we did at one point. He also has been getting messages of people volunteering for cleaning up the bird sanctuary. He must go through conservation to make sure they do not clean up something that they are not supposed to be cleaning up. Good things are happening.

Councilor MacLaren reported the Adhoc Committee for the audio visual and lighting met today at 4:00 p.m. in the Great Hall with the Chair, Director Hayden, and Director Santiago. They reviewed survey data regarding a multi-facet assessment of the technology in this hall. They discussed Director Santiago's findings regarding studio lighting and window coverings, which continue to be in progress. They discussed earpieces, microphones and speaker options, all adjustments they will be making in the interim. All of that is still in progress. They have a variety of assignments on all those fronts for their next meeting.

Unfinished Business

Resolutions:

TR-26-24A A Resolution Approving the Oakland Avenue Trust's Offer to Purchase the Oakland Avenue School with Such Other Conditions and Terms as Are Further Determined Appropriate by the Mayor and Authorizing the Mayor to Execute Whatever Documents Are Required to Close the Sale and Convey the Property (Requested by Mayor Beauregard) (remove

from the table) ***Note from the Mayor:*** While the City Solicitor indicated that the original 2001 Notice to Abutters satisfied the ordinance's requirements because the 2001 notice also contained the option to purchase, in the interest of transparency, I voluntarily chose to send my own abutters' notice of the proposed sale so that abutters could attend the City Council meeting with any feedback or concerns. Additional supporting documentation is attached. **TAKEN OUT OF ORDER**

TR-26-26 A Resolution Amending the City Council Rules Regarding Moments of Silence (sponsored by Councilor Michael Simard) (as amended) (remove from the table)
MOTION BY: Councilor Simard, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to remove from the table.
UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor DiZoglio, seconded by Councilor MacLaren to approve.

Councilor Simard said there was a lot of discussion last meeting on this, which was not his intention. He does not think it was anyone here's intention to deliberate for that long. At the encouragement and recommendation of the Solicitor he went back and massaged the amendment and came up with something a little bit softer, a little bit broader. The main thing is he does not want it to be political. We want to keep it just relevant to Methuen, people who contributed.

UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 7 Yes, 2 No (Clr. Valley, Clr. Marsan)

TR-26-30 A Resolution Authorizing Expenditures Not to Exceed \$16,920 from the Edwin J. Castle Fund for Methuen 300 (Requested by Mayor Beauregard and the Commission on Trust Funds)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Santos to approve.

Chair Soto asked if anyone from the commission was present. There was not. Previously she saw that this came in front of Council for flyers.

CAFO Duprey said it is for a specific website, to establish a specific website, print some ads, and hand out some mailers.

Chair Soto: to hand out mailers – passing out for people to attend. Previously there was a request for \$35,000 for the mailers and that body had rejected that stating the fund is used for educational purposes, not for so much marketing.

The CAFO agreed. She asked the same question. What happened was, when they rejected the first request, they said go back and figure out, clarify your request. Council has already approved some funds for Methuen 300 and that is why this is coming separately because this is clarified.

Chair Soto said the original request for the website was \$50,000.

CAFO Duprey said the original request for Methuen 300 was pushing \$100,000 (75,000 or 80,000 dollars) and they only approved maybe three out of the four things. There was one or two things that they said “no” to but they pushed back on them meaning the commission pushed back on Methuen 300 and said if you can go back and reestablish and clarify what you are asking for and come back. Then we will reassess it. She believes that is what happened. The CAFO said she just received a message from one of the commissioners and she said they specifically made their requirement more to the historic piece of this to qualify.

Chair Soto said the website \$4,000, in the age of AI, that is exuberant, in her opinion. The print ad \$2920 and then the handouts \$10,000.

Solicitor O'Neill said he did not review these specific requests, but the Castle Fund can be used for these purposes. It is at the discretion of the Commissioners of Trust Funds to be

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comfortable before they vote. As the CAFO said, earlier they questioned some of the expenses and made them pare it down and demonstrate that it met the educational requirements of the trust. If it is before Council, it means the Commissioners on Trust Funds are satisfied that it met the requirements.

Councilor Drew said, as someone who has recently worked with the body to procure Castle Funds to do an event like this, at the end of it there will be receipts that have to be submitted. Anything that is over and above this allocation will have to be sent back. When they had to pull together items for the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the education component was the key driver to it before they could get it approved.

Chair Soto asked how many flyers were given out. Councilor Drew responded they bought a few thousand. Chair Soto said she also requested from the president of the Methuen 300, accounting since day one and never received it. That is why she is questioning these numbers and where they are going.

Councilor Drew explained there must be a full accounting. The resources will be allocated to the body. They must provide backup. If not, they must get the money back from them. It must be a fully accounted line item. There is a procedure in place to make sure the money has been captured.

UPON ROLL CALL VOTE: 8 yes, 1 no (Clr. Soto)

TR-26-31 A Resolution Authorizing Expenditures of \$290 from the Edwin J. Castle Fund for Historic Methuen (Requested by Mayor Beauregard and the Commission on Trust Funds)

MOTION BY: Councilor Pesce, seconded by Councilor Drew to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS.

Ordinance(s):

TO-26-9 An Ordinance Allowing Residential Cottage Food Production (sponsored by Councilor Patricia Valley) (amended)

MOTION BY: Councilor Santos, seconded by Councilor Pesce to approve, as amended.

Councilor Valley motioned to amend to include a pilot plan. She discussed it with Councilor Drew. There is not that much demand for that type of permit. She feels as though we are penalizing the residents that want to start this new business, a limited pilot program is a practical way to move forward. This is about creating opportunities and what is starting small today can grow into jobs and revenue.

MOTION By Councilor Valley, seconded by Councilor Drew TO ADD: Letter K which is going to be "Pilot Program". Regardless of any provision of this ordinance that state otherwise, prior to full implementation and effective date of this ordinance, the Methuen Board of Health is authorized to issue two residential cottage production permits as part of the Pilot Program. The Board of Health may establish reasonable conditions for such a pilot program to ensure public health and safety.

Councilor Drew said the reason he spoke with Councilor Valley on this is they want to make sure that the people that are invested in this have the opportunity to get this up and running with the Farmer's Markets and other items that are happening coming this Spring and Fall. This will

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help with the roll out with the health department so suddenly when this passes in six months, they must figure it out. This will give them a soft opening to getting this moving.

Solicitor O'Neill requested the amendment be read again.

Councilor Valley read: Letter K "Pilot Program" Regardless of any provision of this ordinance that states otherwise, prior to full implantation and effective date of this ordinance, the Methuen Board of Health is authorized to issue two residential cottage production permits as part of the Pilot Program. The Board of Health may establish reasonable conditions for such a pilot program to ensure public health and safety.

Chair Soto asked how that would interfere with Letter J – where it reads this ordinance shall become effective upon issuance of regulations by the Methuen Board of Health and upon the hiring and commencement of an employment of at least one. Are you saying that the pilot program will begin regardless of that employment, or post that employment? It should be clarified. K comes in at – you are going to issue the pilot program, but it will be in existence once the person is hired?

Councilor Valley responded, no, regardless of the staff being hired or not.

Solicitor O'Neill said the amendment could be passed. But it will not work that way. The Board of Health must meet and vote on that. You are asking them to implement a pilot program. They still will need to meet to adopt reasonable regulations for the pilot program. He suggested Council put a time frame on it instead of just leave it open ended.

Chair Soto said the clarification is "upon the hiring and the commencement of the employment of at least one additional health inspector". They must meet to make the rules and regulations.

Solicitor O'Neill said if Council wants a pilot program they should say "prior to implementation, or something like that they could establish a pilot program with temporary regulations within a period. Then can-do temporary emergency regulations to implement this program and then move for more public input about the regulations and finalize it. You want to speed up the process.

Councilor Drew said he thought she cleared that up in the beginning statement of the amendment. "Regardless of any provision of this ordinance that states otherwise, prior to full implementation and effective date of this ordinance, the Methuen Board of Health is authorized to issue two residential cottage food production permits as part of a pilot program and the Board of Health may establish reasonable conditions for such pilot program to ensure public health and safety". The beginning part says you can circumvent the original.

Solicitor O'Neill said if Council wants it done in a specific time frame Council should state it. If they want the pilot program to be done by April 30th or by May 30th or another date, Council should state that. The Board of Health only meets every other month, Council would want them to move faster.

MOTION BY: Councilor Valley, seconded by Councilor Pesce to add at the end "By April 30th" which is going to be the deadline (after the word safety)

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Councilor DiZoglio said he is in favor of this amendment because he said we should roll this out quicker because of the Farmer's Markets, etc. to do April 30th its two weeks away. We should also ask the health inspectors if they can manage to do that within the next couple of weeks before we put a deadline on it. He does not want to be forcing the health department to roll out a pilot program quickly and they come back to us and say we really cannot do it. They are doing inspections, etc., and they are short staffed. Maybe before Council puts the deadline of two weeks away, we should ask them if they can do that.

Solicitor O'Neill said Council could frame it in the form of a request.

Councilor Valley said she would like to leave the amendment April 30th and then she will reach out to the department head.

UPON VOTE: (April 30th deadline) UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Santos to adopt amendment, as amended.

UPON VOTE: 8 yes, 1 present (Clr. DiZoglio)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to adopt, as amended.

UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

New Business:

Resolutions:

TR-26-32 A Resolution Accepting Sections 21 to 23 of Chapter 32B of the Massachusetts General Laws for the Purpose of Evaluating Health Insurance Options (EPA REQUESTED) (Req. of Mayor Beauregard)

MOTION BY: Councilor Santos, seconded by Councilor Valley to adopt.

MOTION BY: Councilor Pesce, seconded by Councilor Santos to table considering what Council heard from the teachers and the Mayor's absence.

Solicitor O'Neill addressed deadlines and some of the comments made. If Council reads the section as indicated, this only provides the city with an option. This is not a requirement to move to the GIC. It is not a requirement to change health insurance. It provides the city with two additional options to address the skyrocketing costs in health care in the city. There are deadlines that go along with this that the Council should be aware of as it deals with this issue. No decision, that he is aware of, has been made by the administration as to how the costs of increased cost of health insurance will be addressed, whether it will be through maintaining plans and switching plans, changing co-pays, or going to the GIC. But without adopting this section, Council would foreclose the city from being able to do that. In order for this process, under Section 21, 22, and 23, to move forward – if the city does decide that moving to the GIC is a viable option and would result in costs savings, in order to do that, in order to move to the GIC, we have to go through this entire process. They must give notice to the GIC by June 30th to join the GIC for next January. If we miss the June 30th deadline, the next opportunity for the city to do that will not be until January of the following year for joining next July. Council needs to factor in all the information as they consider because that will effect changes where there will be

any savings over the next year from doing so. This does not circumvent collective bargaining. The process that's laid out in Section 21, 22, and 23 requires us to provide an analysis and proposal to the public employee committee, which is the public employee committee there is a representative from each of the unions on that committee. It is a weighted committee where the teachers have the largest number of employees. They have the largest vote. Retirees have a 10% vote. The other unions have a relative percentage vote based on their membership. The city must develop a proposal which has not yet been developed as what they would like to see for costs savings. Once that proposal has been developed and the city gets the opportunity to do that first, before bargaining begins. Council can read this in the sections attached. Once the city does that, it comes up with a proposal, it has to cost it out, whether that proposal is to change health insurance by moving parts around with what we currently do, increasing co-pays, changing drug coverage, or going to the GIC. We sit down and negotiate. Under this proposal, if you accept Section 21, it gives the city the opportunity to present that. They must present the cost analysis, then bargaining begins. The unions are free to bargain back, come up with different proposals, and ask for different things. This limits that bargaining period to 30 days. There is a limitation. That is designed to accommodate those deadlines that the GIC has going forward. If the city does a cost analysis and decides the GIC will save this much, and we decide that makes sense as a proposal and we cannot reach agreement. What happens under this scenario is that the impasse will go to a three-person independent panel. One appointed by the PEC (union committee), one appointed by the Mayor, and then ANF gets to choose the third party to adjudicate whether the move to GIC makes sense. That is the process in this. It does not side-step the union. No matter what when we present a proposal for cost savings, if there's cost savings moving to the GIC or elsewhere, we're still required to return 25% of those cost savings in some form to lessen the blow of this change, whatever that may be, once proposed. There will be changes coming to the health insurance because we are over budget, over claims, and this just is not in Methuen. It is across the state, everywhere. For many years, there was no interest in going to the GIC. This year there are over thirteen communities in Massachusetts considering this process and considering going to the GIC. There is renewed interest in this because of the costs. If the Mayor chooses that option and demonstrates cost savings, the one benefit to the city is that there is never going to be a health insurance deficit that must be paid by the city. Those health insurance deficits when they go over plan on the GIC are automatically paid by the Legislature through appropriations. There is no charge back. Those are real costs to the city. He would say they are in the realm of half a million plus per year and consistent. Those are real dollars that the city must spend to breach those gaps and those occur because as best we can estimate, the administration tries to estimate what the cost of claims will be, because we are self-insured. Sometimes they go over.

Councilor Pesce removed her motion to table. Councilor Santos removed her second to the motion.

Councilor Simard said he is a union advocate, and he values what Kara Black says. But she is doing her due diligence as a union rep to come here and tell Council where the teachers' union stands. Down the road when there is a change or a request to change, we are going to see more people here to either agree or disagree with what the city wants to do. We are obligated, to at least explore for the taxpayers, cost saving. If we do go to GIC or another, it would have to go through the Council eventually.

Solicitor O'Neill clarified it will not. The way that this works is if the city decides to go this route, they still negotiate with the PEC to see if they can reach an agreement on either

changes to the current plan or a transfer to the GIC. We could do both at the same time. They can all be considered together. If we cannot reach an agreement on those, then it would go to the third-party panel which is independent. One member from each of us and then a third. If the two parties can agree, they can pick the third member for themselves. That rarely happens. If they can agree the Secretary picks the third person. The three member panel reviews the to make sure there was a cost savings and that at least 25% of cost savings is being returned to the members in some form, whether that's through a better cost split or it's through benefits, additional benefits, or sometimes it's through just cash payments to offset any increase, if there is any increase. There are lots of variables that go into that. You still get to negotiate the split, whether you are going to pay 70/30, 75/25, 65/35. If a municipality moves to the GIC you are no longer going to be negotiating about which plan that you are selecting because the GIC purchases those in bulk. We must go along with what they purchase. We still get to negotiate whether the city will pay 62%, 65%, 75%, 70%, whatever it is. That cost is still within collective bargaining. That would continue to be set every three years by the PEC in a collective bargaining process. This does not obligate the city to do any of those things. It just puts that option on the table for the Mayor to decide we are going to go down this road instead of just potentially bargaining for ever and not getting anywhere.

Councilor Drew noted Councilor Pesce had mentioned a table. You said this was a time is of the essence issue. He heard that June 30th was that deadline. There is an EPA on this. If Council tables this, it goes to the next meeting and the Mayor should be able to have this discussion. "Is there some time frame between now and this next meeting that we're hurting in the municipality and their ability to look at this vs. just tabling this for the next meeting?"

Solicitor O'Neill explained the process needs to be complete if indeed the city desires to transfer to the GIC. Say that is ultimately there is a study, there's cost savings that is compelling and that is the decision that the Mayor proposes. And they can't reach agreement with the Public Employee Committee, all of that process and it has to go to that third-party independent panel, all of that must be completed by June 30th with official notice to the GIC to transfer as of January 1st 2027. If you missed that June 30th deadline it will be July 1st of the following year. The 30-day window is closing. "Is there additional time?" Probably. There is a meeting in two weeks.

Councilor Drew – when you say the 30-day window, is it 30 days after this passage or when it is presented to this Council.

Solicitor O'Neill said they cannot start bargaining until the city has an actual proposal. There is not one yet. The 30-day time clock won't start until the city comes up with an actual change to the current health insurance, cost that out with a cost analysis, and then transmits both of those pieces of information to the PEC so that they can respond. That has not happened yet.

Councilor Drew asked the CAFO if there is a time is of the essence component to this. There is an EPA on this. He asked if there is a reason behind that.

CAFO Duprey said the city solicitor explained the reasoning behind that. It is to get things in line so that we have all our options on the table. We could work in parallel, as far as getting cost analysis about the GIC, etc., with waiting for the next meeting for this and still getting that information done so that we do not waste time from that perspective. They would have to do that either way.

Councilor Drew Council is to get this moved so that the CAFO has more time on the budgeting side forecast and work on figuring out what we have.

CAFO Duprey said the health insurance issue is a big order as far as not just what we have to do internally, but discussions with the PEC and making sure we get that. We are very

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aware of that deadline as far as June 30th goes. The more time the better. We can start moving on the analysis parallel to this, which they would have to do anyway before they could have the 30-day start. To delay it until the next meeting would be okay.

Councilor Drew noted June 30th is approximately 90 days from now, between the 30-day negotiation with the unions, 40 days of compiling all your data, it seems like you have more than enough time. He does not understand the need for the EPA.

Solicitor O'Neill said Council is not going to meet until the 20th. If the Mayor decides this is something that makes sense and get a cost proposal by the end of April and serves that to the PEC with the cost analysis. We are required by law to negotiate at least for the whole month of May, perhaps into the first week of June. If they cannot reach an agreement, they will have to send it to the independent committee. They are going to need some time in June to issue a ruling. You are leaving yourself three weeks in June and hoping that they get it done by the end of June. He is being realistic and yes, it is up to the administration to move it along and get them over to the other side and start doing that. He does not know the status of that yet. He knows they are being worked on. Time is short. An emergency preamble, whether it is tonight or the next meeting, is to make sure this option is realistically in place for the city. The CAFO can provide as part of the cost analysis whatever plan there is, what the difference will be between doing it as of January 2027, or waiting until the next fiscal year, is going to look very different.

Chair Soto reminded the Council they could also call a special meeting if they must. Based on the commentary from the teachers' union and her speaking with the fire and police department and some employees at city hall, it is going to be hard for them to get rid of that Cadillac and jump on the Toyota. That is something that we are going to be struggling with. Is the \$500,000 mentioned the gap or is it more than that?" "Is it millions of dollars when we are talking about the insurance?"

CAFO Duprey said he was talking about past deficits the city had. Now it is much more.

Councilor DiZoglio said, as a GIC member in the City of Lawrence, there is good and there is a lot of bad when it comes to their insurance. They do not really have a say. For people who need to get treated, the bills pile up quickly. The last time he checked, he heard the GIC was running on a deficit previously. There is a question that it might be going into a deficit this fiscal year and that the Legislature is going to appropriate money to bail it out.

Solicitor O'Neill said that is true. It happens approximately every other year that there is a significant deficit at the state level with the GIC and the difference is here, when we have a deficit, you must pay. But, if you are in the GIC, the Legislature appropriates that and does not charge back the municipalities for that deficit. That is the difference. It does happen approximately every other year. It is significant.

Councilor DiZoglio said he does pay for it because he pays the state his taxes and everybody else in the state pays taxes to the appropriation that gets appropriated to the GIC. Essentially, we all pay for it.

Solicitor O'Neill said he was referring to the fact that the city does not have to appropriate money to close that gap.

Councilor DiZoglio said realistically we are paying through our city taxes or paying it through our state taxes. Most likely he will vote "no" on it because he knows where it is going eventually. Everything is going up. But until he knows that the GIC is beneficial to our union members, he cannot vote "yes" for it.

Solicitor O'Neill clarified this is not transferring anybody to the GIC. This is only creating an option for the city to explore whether that makes sense with an expedited mechanism

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to do so. It has not been proposed yet by the Mayor. It is not something that Council votes on, regardless of the health insurance. Even now the way the health insurance works now we proceed under Mass General Law under Section 19. They meet with the PEC members, negotiate with the PEC to resolution or impasse. He has not been here that long; but he has been somewhat involved in that process before. For many years it has been an amicable process. But, at some point the deficits become so large and the cost increases become so large that it is going to be difficult to reach agreement. Regardless of what is done, this Council will, this budget season, be called upon to close a very large deficit. Council should get ready to be able to have as many tools in the toolbox to be able to do that. It is at the Council's discretion. But they are not voting to transfer anybody. It does not require the Mayor to make any proposal. Section 22 allows the CAFO and the administration to make certain changes with its own plans to try to do cost savings. Section 23 would allow a proposal to transfer members to the GIC. Its two sections, both of which put more tools in the toolbox to try to address it. It is at the Council's discretion as to whether they want the city to have those tools.

Councilor MacLaren said she would hesitate to compare health care to the quality of the vehicle that one drives. The car is always going to get you from point A to point B. Health care, we are talking about the quality of care that they get. None of them can make uniformed assumptions on exactly what kind of changes they would see in the health care of these union members should this occur. It is important to remember the human aspect of this, that we are talking about the quality of car for people who are integral to our city. Time is of the essence. We are talking about deficits, none of that can go without consideration. But, given the fact that the Mayor is not here to have this conversation with the Council, given the fact that the union members were not provided the opportunity, in fairness to them, to discuss with the Mayor before this was presented, she doesn't feel fully informed to vote on this.

MOTION BY: Councilor MacLaren, seconded by Councilor Drew to table for further consideration. UPON VOTE: 8 yes, 1 no (Clr. Marsan)

TR-26-33 A Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of Funding from the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) for the Merrimack River Cleanup Initiative [EPA requested] (Requested by Mayor Beauregard and Director Wilson)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to approve the EPA. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS.

TR-26-34 Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of a Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Firefighter Safety Equipment Grant of \$34,988.02 (EPA REQUESTED)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Pesce to approve the EPA. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

TR-26-35 A Resolution Authorizing an Expenditure of \$1,700 from the Castle Fund to the American Legion Post 122 for the Memorial Day Parade (Requested by Mayor Beauregard and the Commission on Trust Funds)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor DiZoglio to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

TR-26-36 A Resolution Proclaiming Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month in the City of Methuen (Sponsored by Chair Soto, and Councilors DiZoglio and Valley, and co-sponsored by Mayor Beauregard) **Taken out of order and approved**

TR-26-37 A Resolution Transferring Custody and Control of the Currier School to City Government (Requested by Mayor Beauregard)

MOTION BY: Councilor Simard, seconded by Councilor Santos to approve.

Councilor DiZoglio said he spoke with the Solicitor earlier. He was going to file an amendment on this resolution. He was on the School Committee when they were going through these buildings and he supports it. It was supposed to be directed towards Veterans and Senior residents as well. He is concerned because he does not want more people coming in with families right now in our city. Our schools are burdened. He believes there are different things that could go to Pleasant Valley School, such as a fire station or potentially other things, other than residential because it seems like Methuen can easily put in a building or twenty-nine houses. But we can never build anything else commercial or fire stations or those type of studies. He is concerned with it. But the Solicitor said the Mayor will have to bring it back to Council. It is just giving him the ability to have in city control.

Solicitor O'Neill agreed. This does not surplus the property for disposal by the Mayor. When and if the Mayor decides to bring a proposal before Council, if they are going to build housing or if they're going to build a fire station, they would need to come back to Council to transfer it to another city agency or to surplus it for RFP or redevelopment, or whatever it is. It will need to come back for a Council vote for further disposition. This only transfers it from the schools to the Mayor's control.

UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

TR-26-38 A Resolution Transferring Custody and Control of the Pleasant Valley School to City Government (Requested by Mayor Beauregard)

MOTION BY: Councilor Simard, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve.

Councilor Drew said like the other building, there are going to maintenance costs that we must build into our budget this year. "Do these building have school items in them, and will they be coming out of those schools?"

Solicitor O'Neill said the Pleasant Valley School has been out of use for a while, several years. The city is storing records there. It is not in great shape. There will be some maintenance costs. The other school, Currier, has been closed for quite a while and he thinks it is vacant. He does not think anything is happening in there at all. It is a very small school.

Councilor Drew said his concern is the School Committee requested that a garage be built on Branch Street for their equipment, etc.

Solicitor O'Neill said he believes they are still using the garage. He cannot see the Mayor telling them they cannot use the garage until the city decides what they are going to do with it. He would be surprised by that.

Councilor Drew noted we are taking the ownership and the burden is on the city side.

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Councilor Pesce asked how long it has been out of the city's control. She was on the school committee when they were looking for uses for it then. She does not think there is much in the Pleasant Valley.

CAFO Duprey said there are some historic archive items there but does not think the schools have anything there. The school district has been covering the maintenance costs and the electricity costs. That would transfer over to the city. The school has been paying those costs for as long as she has been here.

Paul O'Neill said they do have the garage there.

Chair Soto asked if the CAFO has analyzed what expenses will be transferred to the city from the school side. They surplus it. We take over and are responsible for those expenses. She asked if she analyzed the last item to find out what expenses are going to be added to our budget.

The CAFO explained for fiscal year 2025 costs, because it was a full year, that is what she utilized. For the Currier they spent a little over \$16,000 for utilities and a little bit of building maintenance. The Pleasant Valley was about \$30,000 for those things as well. She would anticipate taking on probably \$50,000 in utilities and maintenance, as necessary.

Solicitor O'Neill commented "it is all one budget". It is not necessarily be a cost savings for the schools or in the negative to the city because it is going to get adjusted in the budget process. Even though they have a separate budget, it is still all one budget.

Councilor DiZoglio said from the school side, that's how they would address it, because they took those into account that students are attending schools and they were concerned how these properties being redistributed back to the city would do if it was to be built. Being on the city side, he is concerned with residential building in Methuen. That is what Methuen tends to do for the taxpayers, where its at 80% residential and 12% of commercial. That is why it is very concerning to him of how these buildings are distributed. The last time he checked it was 80%, how taxes are levied in Methuen. That is where his concern is about these buildings, where we could use these buildings efficiently.

CAFO Duprey said all valid discussion points would be better discussed during a surplus conversation vs. this is just transferring between the schools and the city. Those are valid discussions when appropriate.

Solicitor O'Neill said the Council will have the opportunity to address those concerns if the Mayor brings it forth for disposal and surplus just as you have done with other properties.

UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

TR-26-39 A Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of an FY26 Green Communities Grant Award from the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (Requested by Mayor Beauregard and Director Wilson)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Santos to approve. UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

TR-26-40 A Resolution Accepting Section 9A of Chapter 200A of the Massachusetts General Laws Relating to the Disposition of Unclaimed Property (Req. of Clr. Valley)

MOTION BY: Councilor Drew, seconded by Councilor Valley to approve.

Councilor Valley said this resolution allows the city to adopt Section 9A of Chapter 208 of the Massachusetts General Law, giving the city ability to manage and retain certain unclaimed funds rather than sending them to the state. The city is currently holding \$700,000 in unclaimed funds, information received from the CAFO. By accepting this provision, the city established a

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lawful, transparent, and local process to close out these accounts and ensuring proper notice and compliance with the state law while allowing the city to potentially retain and reinvest these funds for public benefit.

UPON VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Ordinances:

TO-26-11 An Ordinance Requiring Pest Control for Demolition, Site Clearing and Commercial Waste Activities (Req. of Clr. DiZoglio)

Removed from the agenda this evening

Any Other Business for the Good and Welfare of the Community

Councilor Drew reminded everyone that April 25th they will be doing a city cleanup. Please watch for signups that will be available. He urged individuals to volunteer and become part of making our city beautiful.

Councilor DiZoglio reported two residents of Methuen received two scholarships over this last weekend at the Valley Patriot Bash. One was for \$13,000 and the other was for \$11,000. He congratulated the residents and thanked Tom Duggan for doing this for our residents.

Adjourn

Chair Soto adjourned the meeting.

I do hereby certify that the foregoing minutes were approved by the Methuen City Council by a unanimous vote on April 21, 2026.

Linda Gagnon

COUNCIL CLERK