

# **REGULAR MEETING OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL**

## **Minutes dated March 1, 2021**

Meeting was called to order by Council President Johnson at 7:01pm in the Auditorium at the Agawam Junior High School. Per Governor Baker's order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, the public is not allowed to physically access this meeting. Members of the public will be able to access the meeting on Cable Access Channel 15 as well as watch live streamed on the town's website.

### **Item A. Roll Call**

#### **ROLL CALL – 10 PRESENT, 1 ABSENT**

Roll Call was taken with the following councilors present: George Bitzas, Cecilia Calabrese, Paul Cavallo, Christopher Johnson, Dino Mercadante, Robert Rossi, Rosemary Sandlin, Gerald Smith, Anthony Suffriti and Mario Tedeschi. Councilor Letellier was absent. With ten present, there was a quorum.

### **Item B. Moment of Silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.**

There was a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Item C. Citizen's Speak Time**

Yesterday I forwarded the Council a spreadsheet regarding the EV Charger situation prepared from documents provided to me by Solicitor Buonoconti pursuant to my public records request. I also sent my thoughts on how to address the issue which I am again sharing here with the public.

It appears that Chargepoint, and especially Eversource, didn't disclose to Agawam how high the operating costs - especially the energy delivery costs - would be, particularly in the initial phases of operation. It seems that this lack of transparency by Eversource may have set Agawam up for the current challenges with stiff costs right out of the gate.

The EV Charger pinch points appear to be the costs associated with 1) the Chargepoint subscription and 2) the energy delivery fees assessed by Eversource. It seems as though it is these costs that are impairing Agawam's goal to make this a self-sustaining program which does not have taxpayers being responsible to pay for other people's fuel.

But, before you abandon Chargepoint as West Springfield did (and apparently other communities are contemplating), I have suggestions on making the project financially viable. The first is to renegotiate Chargepoint's fee structure so that the risk of loss is not totally saddled on Agawam as is the case with the current flat fee. Instead, perhaps tie the subscription fee to usage levels, starting off at zero until a "sustainable" level of use is reached. This sustainable level could be where the Eversource per kilowatt cost for energy supply and distribution (as described below) becomes less than the per kilowatt fee assessed to Charger users. After that point, Chargepoint could then be paid the difference between the Eversource per kwh cost and the Charger fee collected from users until such time as Chargepoint's full annual subscription fee is covered.

Looking over the spreadsheet, the Eversource **supply** fees appear to be consistently about \$.10/kwh. In contrast, the Eversource **delivery** fees appear to be negatively correlated to the level of use. In other words, the delivery fees are very high for the first few kilowatts coming out of the charger and decrease as usage increases. A fee structure like this could hamstring and starve any startup effort. It seems from my read of the documents that while Eversource was offering to assist with installation fees, it did not make any commitment about operating costs like energy supply and delivery, or even give Agawam a heads up about what Eversource might charge.

Eversource's early failure to disclose these energy costs I believe provides Agawam with an opening to seek to change them -- to ask Eversource - just for service to charging stations - to reverse the delivery fee structure. Agawam could seek to start off with a combined cost of supply and delivery low enough to allow the town to attract and build up users -- I suggest that it be something less than the \$.21/kwh residential rate. Then, as usage increases beyond the point where Agawam is able to cover the Chargepoint annual subscription cost as described above, you might agree to a gradual increase in Eversource's delivery fee. But even then you may want to ask Eversource to still limit their energy costs for the Chargers to a level competitive with residential rates.

Since taking over Columbia Gas after the Merrimac Valley debacle, Eversource has been looking for ways to connect with communities in Western Massachusetts and cast itself as friendly and green. Let's give Eversource that opportunity here in Agawam and allow Eversource to lift the risk of failure off of the Town's shoulders and take it on themselves. Certainly Eversource has the deep pockets to easily absorb this expense and would probably benefit greatly from it in their public relations.

### **Item D. Minutes**

#### **1. Regular Council Meeting – February 16, 2021**

Motion to approve made by Councilor Cavallo and seconded by Councilor Suffriti. Voice vote unanimously approved.

### **Item E. Declaration of Council President**

#### **1. State of the City Address – Mayor William Sapelli**

Council President Johnson expressed delight to have Mayor Sapelli here for his State of the City and welcomed him. Mayor Sapelli greeted everyone and went on to present his State of the City as follows:

### State of the City

I am not sure anyone could have predicted what 2020 would have in store for us. Even as 2021 kicks off, we are still dealing with the ramifications of the COVID-19 virus.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our healthcare workers, education and school personnel and parents, fire, police, DPW and all other town departments and employees, elected officials and residents as well as all of our local businesses, for their extraordinary effort, resilience and support throughout this pandemic.

Despite facing many challenges this past year, Agawam has made significant strides in all areas.

#### Planning and Economic

##### 1. New Grants

- a. \$360,000 in total Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for Agawam small businesses;
- b. \$178,000 in Green Community grants to retrofit existing energy related items at Agawam Junior and Senior High Schools; i.e., lights, generators and ventilation. Annual energy reduction is estimated at approximately \$58,000/year.
- c. \$217,000 in Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grants to create a Stormwater Master Plan, which was recognized by state officials as a model MVP program to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

2. LED streetlight retrofit completed in 2020 at an anticipated savings to the town of \$200,000/year.

3. Installation of 7 EV charging stations at School Street, Borgatti Park, Agawam Library, High School, dog park and Senior Center.

4. Planning Department, together with Senior Center Director Michael Squindo and Age Friendly Agawam subcommittee, working with PVPC to create action plan to address senior issues.

5. Development of former Tuckahoe Turf Farm property to passive recreational use.

#### Public Safety

1. All public safety remained fully operational during entire pandemic

2. Centralized dispatch operations for Police and Fire Departments successfully implemented

3. Paramedics provided to each school daily to assist with Covid-19 assessment

4. Community Covid-19 testing site coordinated by Health and Fire Departments at Six Flags New England

5. Mutual aid cross staffing agreement with 6 other communities adopted in the event of a critical staffing shortage due to Covid-19

6. Yearly toy and food drives remained successful

#### Parks & Recreation

1. Youth tennis, track, golf, field hockey and men's softball offered within Covid-19 guidelines

2. Tennis and pickle ball courts as well as skate park saw increased use

3. Perry Lane Pool opened to Agawam residents with purchased pool pass

4. Borgatti Field renovations included new fence and backstop installations

5. New playground installed at Granger Elementary School

6. P&R Director and staff instrumental in scheduling local resident vaccinations to assist Health Department

## Seniors

1. First Senior Center in Greater Springfield Area to offer "Grab-N-Go" curbside meals. Over 12,000 meals provided to seniors
2. One of the only Senior Centers to partner with PVTA to provide transportation for over 2,500 rides
3. Entertainment converted to online and cable programming through Agawam Media. Holiday show created together with other area Senior Centers and aired on MasAppeal in mid-December, along with weekly TV Bingo (TINGO)
4. Outreach program continued to provide assistance to our seniors
5. Partnership formed with Foodbank of Western MA to provide Brown Bag food distribution. Groceries made available monthly to seniors needing assistance during Covid-19
6. Senior Center Director and staff instrumental in scheduling local resident vaccinations to assist Health Department

## Public Health

1. Health Department managed all town operations related to Covid-19.
2. Provided safety guidelines to all Departments, businesses and residents on a continual basis through a myriad of constant changes and adjustments
3. Worked with the Mayor's office, Building Inspection, Law, Police and Fire Departments to ensure local restaurants and businesses adhered to all mandated guidelines
4. Provided weekly community Covid-19 statistics, including infection and recovery rates together with nursing home data
5. Held unnumberable informercials through online and Agawam Media cable programming to keep community informed regarding latest issues and updates
6. Provided vaccination services to regional Emergency First Responders and workers, as well as Agawam residents 75 and older.

## Infrastructure

1. Safety improvements scheduled for Suffield/Rowley/Cooper Street intersection, as well as O'Brien's Corner and North Agawam
2. Major reconstruction of Feeding Hills Center to provide for efficient traffic flow and safe access to Granger School
3. Improvements to Pine/South Westfield Street intersection for purposes of safety and drainage
4. Morgan Sullivan Bridge completion date moved up from May 2022 to August 2021 or sooner
5. Improvement to Springfield and Walnut Streets in conjunction with Morgan Sullivan Bridge project for smoother traffic flow and access to businesses

## Education

1. Offered hybrid model for attendance with full remote option since the week of September 13, 2020
2. Grades K-1 and 9-12 full in person 4 days per week
3. Career Tech Educational Collaborative (CTEC) programs offered in person
4. Grab-N-Go meals provided for those in need at no cost to the student
5. Building maintenance has addressed constant mandated physical plant adjustments and modifications in addition to thorough regular disinfecting and HVAC services
6. Safe uninterrupted transportation provided to any student requiring same
7. Modified athletics and extracurricular activities allowed within guidelines and mandates
8. Live broadcasts of activities provided by Town and School IT Departments in coordination with Agawam Media Services
9. Chrome books available to all remote students

## **Closing Remarks**

Throughout the many challenges we have faced during this pandemic, the daily town operations and responsibilities have continued with minimum disruption. For residents' convenience, many services have been expanded and are now provided online. Drop boxes have been installed at DPW and Town Hall, along with a ballot drop location for added convenience during the 2020 elections. Town buildings remained open by appointment only. The Municipal Golf Course opened, and saw steady revenue. The Public Library provided curbside delivery and continues to provide services also by appointment only. Agawam secured CARES funds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Coronavirus Relief Fund,

which were used for Covid-19 related expenditures such as PPE, requisite signage, cleaning and disinfecting, social distancing measures and building modifications.

In a year where we have seen the unexpected happen, we have also seen many individuals and organizations step up to make the required adjustments not just possible, but smooth and uneventful. Everyone stayed connected, caring for our elderly and vulnerable. Neighbors helped neighbors, exhibiting a special kindness, strength and resilience and a vision of a better 2021. We have learned as we continued to deal with this pandemic and will take those lessons into a successful future full of optimism and hope.

Mayor discussed schools. We had a lot of key positions filled during this pandemic and no one skipped a beat. Businesses were hit hard and this body along with Mayor's Office set things in motion to waive permit fees and expediting outdoor dining process allowing restaurants to continue to make money and stay in business. Mayor discussed the new growth within Agawam. Morgan Sullivan Bridge project was originally set to conclude in May of 2022 however with some extra funding from the state the new date is August of 2021 if not earlier. Feeding Hills intersection has adjusted very well with the reconfiguration. Will be moving soon at O'Brien's corner to make that a safer intersection. Advances we have made as a town during this pandemic has been inspirational. Residents and businesses have really stepped up to help each other. Social media can be our best friend or our worst enemy and for the most part there are so many positive posts.

Mayor Sapelli closed with saying we have learned a lot of lessons this past year and thinks we can take those lessons learned and successfully move into the future with a lot of optimism and hope. We are on a good path. He is so proud of our community. He thanked the elected officials including the School Committee but specifically the City Council for their support that the Council has given him and the community. Mayor Sapelli enjoys working with each of the members of the City Council and he noted we make a good team. He believes if we continue to work together we will make it through this – there is light at the end of the tunnel. He mentioned the expression 'this isn't my first rodeo' and said this IS everyone's first rodeo and we have learned a lot. He thanked them for their time and for their support. Council President Johnson thanked the Mayor for an outstanding year during extraordinarily difficult times. He has said this before but wanted to say it again - he thanked Mayor Sapelli for his cooperation and communication with each and every person on stage noting we do, in fact, make a great team. Mayor Sapelli is the leader of that team and we greatly appreciate your leadership. Keep up the great work!

## **Item F. Presentation of Resolutions**

- 1. TR-2021-15 - A Resolution to appropriate Thirty Six Thousand and Four Hundred and Six Dollars (\$36,406) from the Agawam Golf Course Retained Earnings Account to fund the Agawam Municipal Golf Course Operating Accounts (Mayor Sapelli) (Referred to Finance Committee)**

Motion to approve made by Councilor Sandlin and seconded by Councilor Cavallo. As Chair of the Finance Committee, Councilor Mercadante provided his report stating that Mayor Sapelli thanked the Council for supporting increased revenue for the golf course which means they are spending more and doing better business. Auditor endorses the use of the funds for this item. Tom DiRico explained the extra business requires extra money. Things will be tight they will stay within their budget. Council Vice President Calabrese asked if the ground equipment was in good shape and it is in pretty good shape. Councilor Sandlin mentioned banquets can start as of March 1<sup>st</sup>. Councilor Cavallo inquired about the cell tower and noted revenues related to the cell tower and Councilor Rossi noted

he was in favor of the transfer. Motion to send a positive recommendation to the Full Council made by Councilor Cavallo and seconded by Councilors Sandlin and Calabrese. The vote was 5 Yes, 0 No.

Councilor Tedeschi said the only thing he would add to the Mayor's State of the City address is how well the golf course is doing. He would like to personally thank Tom DiRico for his hard work and management of this course and he feels confident the golf course will be able to support itself. Councilor Bitzas supports the resolution and is happy to see how well the golf course is doing noting we have to spend money to make money. Council Vice President Calabrese has always been skeptical about spending money at the golf course however Mr. DiRico has changed her mind and attitude with his excellent management. She is excited to see how the golf course will closed at the end of the fiscal year because the projections are looking very promising – there is something special going on up there. Councilor Rossi as an avid supporter of the golf course supports the resolution as well. We have the right man with Tom DiRico – he has brought the golf course a long way. He came so far in so little time and deserves all the credit in the world because Mr. DiRico has certainly demonstrated that he has earned our support. Councilor Cavallo reiterates the previous comments stating that Tom is a leader and a great manager who works long days. He has brought this course a long way and expressed his gratitude to Tom for doing an excellent job. Councilor Mercadante wanted to reiterate that the money that is being used here is money that the golf course has already made – this is not something that is being taken from the taxpayers.

The vote was 10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT (Councilor Letellier) approving the item. Council President Johnson thanked Mr. DiRico for his strong leadership and also to Dan Shay because he has kept the course in tremendous shape. Together they have done a great job in pushing the course forward.

#### **Item G. Elections**

None.

#### **Item H. Public Hearings**

None.

#### **Item I. Old Business**

- 1. TOR-2021-1 - An Ordinance to amend Chapter 103 of the Code of the Town of Agawam for electric vehicle charging station fees (1 of 2 Readings) (Mayor Sapelli) (Referred to Legislative Committee) (Tabled 2/8/21)**

Council President Johnson spoke with the Councilor Suffriti, Chair of the Legislative Committee, and since we didn't receive the additional information, it made sense to keep this item on the table so that the Legislative Committee would have time to review the latest information received from the Administration and hold a sub-committee meeting.

Motion to leave the item on the table made by Council Vice President Calabrese and seconded by Councilor Mercadante. Voice vote approved.

- 2. TO-2021-2 - An Order granting or renewing a Class 2 Dealer's LICENSE to 57 Auto, LLC, 371 South Westfield Street, Feeding Hills, MA (Clerk) (Referred to Administrative Committee) (Tabled 2/16/21)**

Motion to remove the item from the table made by Councilor Rossi and seconded by Councilor Cavallo. Motion to approve made by Councilor Rossi and seconded by Councilor Suffriti. As Chair of the Administrative Committee, Councilor Rossi provided his report stating that because the applicant does not have Dealer plates specific to this business, he needs to apply to the RMV however in order to apply he must submit an approved Class 2 Dealer's license. The Law Department agreed that it would be okay to conditionally approve this application with the following language: *\*conditional upon receipt of valid Dealer License Plates related to the business as listed in the application and as approved by the Massachusetts State Police by no later than June 1, 2021\** It is the understanding of this committee, that if the application is approved, the license shall be issued on a contingency basis with the understanding that the owners of 57 Auto shall apply and produce valid Dealer plates issued by the Massa RMV along with copies thereof to be filed in the City Clerk's Office by June 1, 2021. The Committee originally wanted April 15<sup>th</sup> however after speaking with the Solicitor and due to COVID protocols and delays, the date of June 1<sup>st</sup> was best. Failure or non-compliance of said understanding shall result in the revocation of the Class 2 Dealer's License with prejudice and all sales and related operations shall cease and desist on June 1, 2021. Motion to conditionally approve was made by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilor Cavallo. The vote was 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilors Letellier).

#### Amendment

Motion to add that the granting of this license be *\*conditional upon receipt of valid Dealer License Plates related to the business as listed in the application and as approved by the Massachusetts State Police by no later than Jun 1, 2021\** made by Councilor Rossi and seconded by Councilor Mercadante. Councilor Suffriti understands why this has to be but asked if this is a temporary license we are approving or how would that work. Councilor Rossi explained the process. Councilor Suffriti also asked if we get a copy from the RMV or State Police but that would go directly to the City Clerk. We will be kept abreast of all of this information and it will not be forgotten. Councilor Smith inquired about the date of April 15<sup>th</sup> which was discussed in the sub-committee and now using the June 1<sup>st</sup> date. Councilor Rossi explained he had suggested the earlier date however the Law Department suggests the latter. Council President Johnson noted that with the pandemic the State Police are slower to come out to these types of appointments so it makes sense to give them a little extra time. The vote was **10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the amendment.

The vote was **10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the Main Motion *as amended*.

#### Item J. New Business

- 1. TR-2021-16 - A Resolution accepting a grant in the amount of Two Thousand Two Hundred and Seventy Two Dollars and Seventy Three Cents (\$2,272.73) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to the Town of Agawam Fire Department (Mayor Sapelli)**

Next Agenda.

- 2. TR-2021-17 - A Resolution authorizing the Town of Agawam to solicit and enter into an Agreement exceeding five years for the operation and maintenance of the wastewater and water pumping facilities (Mayor Sapelli)**

Referred to Community Relations Committee, next Agenda.

- 3. TR-2021-18 - A Resolution accepting payments from CES Agawam Tuckahoe Solar LLC to the Town of Agawam in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 59 §38H(b) (Mayor Sapelli)**

Referred to Community Relations Committee, next Agenda.

4. **TR-2021-19 - A Resolution authorizing the Mayor to enter into a Lease Agreement between the Town of Agawam and CES Agawam Tuckahoe Solar, LLC regarding a solar energy system at 0 South West Street, Feeding Hills, Massachusetts (Mayor Sapelli)**

Referred to Community Relations Committee, next Agenda.

***Item L. Any other matter that may legally come before the City Council***

Councilor Suffriti thanked the Mayor for his State of the City address. Council Vice President Calabrese mentioned House Bill 4905 supporting state funding for after school robotics which kids hands on experience to robotics. She hopes to draft a resolution in support of this Bill in the near future. Councilor Cavallo expressed extreme satisfaction with the town's vaccine program at Bethany. Outstanding job to all involved. Councilor Bitzas also thanked the Mayor and was glad he mentioned the schools. He hopes they open as soon as possible noting our kids have lost an entire year of education and socialization. Council President Johnson again thanked Mayor Sapelli for his presentation.

***Item M. Adjournment***

Motion to adjourn moved and seconded all around. Meeting was adjourned at 7:44pm.

**\*Please note that this meeting will be live-streamed on Channel 15 as well as on the town's website\*  
([www.agawam.ma.us](http://www.agawam.ma.us))**

*Approved*

TR-2021-15

**A RESOLUTION TO APPROPRIATE THIRTY SIX THOUSAND AND FOUR HUNDRED AND SIX DOLLARS (\$36,406.00) FROM THE AGAWAM GOLF COURSE RETAINED EARNINGS ACCOUNT TO FUND THE AGAWAM MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE OPERATIONS ACCOUNTS**

**(Sponsored by Mayor William P. Sapelli)**

**WHEREAS**, several golf course accounts need additional monies to prepare the municipal golf course this spring for the 2021 season; and

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 150E, Section 7, the Agawam City Council must appropriate necessary funds; and

**WHEREAS**, the necessary funds for the Agawam Municipal Golf Department must be appropriated from the Agawam Municipal Golf Retained Earnings account; and

**WHEREAS**, the certified amount of thirty six thousand and four hundred and seven dollars (\$36,407.00) in the Municipal Golf Retained Earnings Account is available to meet budget appropriations; and

**WHEREAS**, it is in the best interest of the Town of Agawam to appropriate the necessary funding.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Agawam City Council that thirty six thousand and four hundred and six dollars (\$36,406.00) be appropriated from the Agawam Golf Course Retained Earnings Account as follows:

65261	51020	Temporary Salaries	To	20,000.00
65263	52220	Food & Service Supplies	To	4,620.00
65264	52050	Other Equipment	To	11,786.00

DATED THIS 1<sup>st</sup> day of March, 2021.

PER ORDER OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL

  
Christopher C. Johnson, President

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY

  
Stephen J. Buoniconti, City Solicitor

*DRG - TR CLK  
CC - Council  
CA - Auditor  
CC - Treasurer  
CC - Golf*

TO-2021-2 Class 2 Dealer's License was also conditionally approved.