

METHUEN CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 @ 7:00 P.M.

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1. **Roll Call - Roll Call – All members present – Clr. Pesce, Clr. Santos, Clr. Simard, Clr. Valley, Clr. DiZoglio, Clr. Drew, Clr. MacLaren, Clr. Marsan & Chair Soto**
2. **Acceptance of the Agenda - Motion to accept by Clr. Pesce, seconded by Clr. Valley – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**
3. **Pledge of Allegiance/Invocation/Moment of Silence** – Chair Soto recognized Clr. Pesce for words of wisdom, “Theodore Roosevelt said, speak softly and carry a big stick. You will go far.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. **Santos for the invocation**, “I would like to read Palms 2713. I remain confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Waiting for the Lord. Be strong and take a heart. And wait for the Lord to come.”
4. **Public Participation**
 - **Lisa Yarid Ferry, 5 Tanglewood Circle, Methuen** – “Thank you, Councilors, for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. I'm really proud to be here. First Church Congregational is having their 144th George Washington birthday dinner this Saturday, November 21st. I've invited all of you to be my guest. We'd love to have you come and enjoy this community dinner. Thank you.”
 - **Linda Soucy, 10 Kirk Street, Methuen** - “I'm just here to talk about the Shannon grant and the CDBG grant. Both of those grants help fund our programming at the Lena Lahey Community Center down on Tenney Street, and I'd appreciate your vote in favor of passing both of those. It's money that comes from the state. It doesn't come out of the budget here. Thank you and have a good night.”
5. **Organizational Business - none**
6. **Reading and Acceptance of Minutes from Previous Meetings:**
 - January 20th, 2026 regular meeting - **Motion to accept by Clr. Drew, seconded by Clr. Pesce – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**
 - February 2, 2026 regular meeting – **Motion to accept by Clr. DiZoglio, seconded by Clr. Valley – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

Proclamations/Correspondence: Citations for Sandy Wood Lehane and Bernardo Peña - Chair Soto recognized Clr. Valley, “The Methuen City Council proudly recognizes **Sandy Lehane** for her extraordinary dedication and perseverance in completing the World Marathon Challenge, running seven marathons on seven continents in seven consecutive days, after training for over a year. A veteran of 14 Boston Marathon races, Mrs. Lehane undertook this remarkable challenge to benefit a Hopkinton Respite Center serving individuals with disabilities and their families. Her commitment to service, resilience, and community pride is an inspiration to Methuen and beyond. Congratulations, Sandy. I also would like to say that she's the 77th woman in the world to complete this marathon, and she raised over \$100,000 for the charity. Congratulations. We're so proud of you. Thank you.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. Santos, “The City of Methuen proudly recognizes **Bernardo Peña** for his real estate property investment and commitment to the growth and vitality of our Central District. Through his investment, Mr. Peña has demonstrated confidence in Methuen’s future and contributed to neighborhood stability and economic development. His efforts reflect civic pride and dedication to strengthening the city. Thank You and Congratulations.”

7. **Consideration of Appointments:** Traci Lavigne Milnes – Board of Health (Alternate) - **Motion to appoint by Clr. Pesce, seconded by Clr. Valley – UPON VOTE - unanimously approved.**

8. **Presentations/Projects/Department Updates - none**

9. **Mayor’s Report – Chair Soto recognized Mayor Beauregard, “Payroll Report Update -** Regarding our annual posting of the city payroll reports, the cityside report is finished and the report for the schools is being completed – once that’s done, we’ll have those reports posted on the website. **RFP Update -** Regarding some RFPs that are in progress. The RFP for grant writing services is up until March 5, so we’ll aim to bring a contract to you shortly after that RFP closes. As I’ve mentioned, the RFP for trash and recycling services is open. Questions were due today and the RFP also closes on March 5th. We have some new RFPs in the works – **we’re going out to bid for solar, environmental and river cleanup services, and a retail incubator program.** These RFPs cover a wide range of areas, from generating new revenue by way of grants and energy savings to economic development and environmental protection, so we’ve got a lot of exciting initiatives in the works. **Acting VSO Update -** I recently appointed Tim Sheehy as our new VSO, our former fire chief, to serve as acting VSO. I thank former VSO Paul Jensen for his outstanding work on behalf of our veterans. Acting VSO Sheehy is a Marine Corps veteran and a veteran of Operation Desert Storm. He’s being supported in the office by Jessica Kalil from our procurement team – the veterans’ services office has been hopping lately. Their door is always open, so I encourage our veterans to stop by the office or reach out for help. Our new acting VSO brought a veteran with limited mobility to go grocery shopping, so there’s no limit to the help he’s willing to provide to our veterans. We’re forming a search committee to lead the way in terms of finding a permanent VSO, so I’ll continue to keep you posted as that process unfolds. **Cardiometabolic Testing Update -** I recently established a new policy regarding cardiometabolic testing for sworn police officers in our city. This is an initiative that was championed loudly by Chief McNamara. We are currently assessing up to a 10% administrative fee on private police details, which goes to the General Fund. We’re committing to include funding in the budget proposal that we’ll send to the City Council in a couple of months to cover a voluntary cardiometabolic health screening program. We’ll be using a rolling three-year model, so roughly one-third of our officers would be eligible for screening each fiscal year – starting with the most senior one-third of the department each year. I want to thank Chief McNamara for his advocacy on this issue. Our commitment to cardiometabolic testing, along with our new wellness policy, will make for meaningful improvements to the way we take care of our police officers. **Update Regarding Emergency Alerts -** I want to remind residents to stay informed by registering for the City’s emergency alert system powered by vendor **Hyper-Reach**. It’s a system that delivers important notifications directly to your phone or via text message and email. The alerts include weather emergencies, road closures, public safety updates, and urgent community notices. To sign up, visit Methuen.gov/emergencyalerts. **Unaccepted Ways Map –** Clr. Valley has this on the agenda. The new GIS map of accepted, unaccepted, and state roads is nearly complete – DPW is putting some finishing touches on it before it goes live. I shared a preview of the map with Councilor Valley – thank you, Councilor, for continuing to follow up on this. It’ll go live soon and I’d be happy to share the preview link with any other Councilors who might want to check it out. **Methuen Cultural Council Updates -** The Methuen Cultural Council is holding an event at the Methuen Memorial Music Hall on Saturday, March 28 from 1 to 3 pm. It’ll be a celebration of their 2026 grant recipients. This year, they’ve granted nearly \$39,000 to 26 grantees that’ll work to enhance the arts and

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provide cultural experiences at the Methuen Senior Activity Center, the Music Hall, the Methuen Rail Trail, the Nevins Library, the Arlington Neighborhood, and our public schools. **Special Shoutouts** - I want to give a shoutout to someone who was recognized earlier tonight, **Sandy Lehane**. As it was mentioned, she's a Methuen resident who took part in the World Marathon Challenge, where participants ran seven marathons on seven continents in six days. She did it to raise money for the Michael Lisnow Respite Center, which provides physical and emotional support for children and adults with disabilities. It's a remarkable accomplishment, and I'd like to join the City Council and congratulate and recognize Sandy tonight. **Upcoming Events** - Regarding upcoming events, as Lisa mentioned, the **George Washington Birthday Dinner is scheduled for this Saturday at 4 pm at First Church Congregational**. The **Dominican Independence Day Celebration will be held on Thursday, February 26 at 10 am at City Hall**. We'll have a flag raising and a traditional breakfast will be served. **Read Across America** is happening during the **first week of March at the Timony, the Early Childhood Center, and the Marsh** – information about event dates and locations have been sent to the Council, so be sure to check your email. The **Methuen 300 kickoff luncheon will be held on Friday, March 6th at 12 pm at the Nevins Library**. The **Methuen 300 Firebird Pops Orchestra concert is scheduled for Saturday, March 7th at Methuen High School**. Finally, and not to sound like a broken record, the **St. Patrick's Day Parade**, organized by Councilor Drew in partnership with Councilor DiZoglio, is just over a month away on Saturday, March That'll do it for tonight's Mayor's Report. As always, I'm happy to answer any questions." Chair Soto asked Mayor Beauregard to send the email about Read Across America to the City Council Office. He agreed to do so.

10. **CAFO Report** – Chair Soto recognized CAFO Duprey, “Thank you. I just passed out two pieces of paper that I'm going to refer to. Our Free Cash was certified by the state at just over \$20 million. What I wanted to do is provide something that some of you may have seen before, but it's just kind of a historical summary of where we've been with **Free Cash** and where we are currently, starting with 2019 when we were in a deficit. So, there's a great amount of progress that you've seen there. I'm looking at the Free Cash historical summary just so that you're looking at the same one. A huge improvement over our reserve there. I do also want to notice, though, that in **2019 that total general fund budget was \$171 million, and now in 2026 we're at \$220 million**. So, while our reserve has grown intentionally and painstakingly, our budget has grown significantly as well. So, there's always a balance there. **So, what you'll see there is the Free Cash is a total percent of budget. The goal is to be about 10 percent, and so you can see we came from a negative number, and now we're sitting right around 9-10 %**. So, we're right where we want to be and just kind of trying to stay the course with what that looks like. I will note as well we did use \$1.8 million or almost \$1.9 million to balance the budget for FY'2026, and so I just I know you're going to get irritated with how often I say that out loud, but it's a concern for me going into FY'2027 budget, so I just want to make sure that we all have that in the forefront. The other page that I have given you is a little bit more information on our **reserves**. Again, this is something that you may have seen already, but for our new counselors it's not something that you've seen before, and I thought it would be helpful to have and to be aware of. These are all our different **reserve funds** that we have. All have different purposes, all have different funding sources, and all have different uses that we're allowed to use with them. So, I'm going to quickly run through them, but then I'm happy to answer any questions. That first line is what I was just mentioning is our Free Cash number. That's the same line that we were just looking at. The following line, **retained earnings**, that is a similar item to Free Cash, only it's specific to our **enterprise fund, our water sewer funds**. So, they have their own Free Cash,

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can only be used for the general funds, so enterprise funds have their own. This is a concern for me, and I just want to have everybody kind of mentally note this. You'll see a significant drop in **FY'2026 certified retained earnings**. This is a big concern because we've been using our retained earnings to balance the enterprise budget for multiple years now and doing that in lieu of raising rates and we've got to a point now that we can't continue that way, at least not as status quo. So, I do anticipate that we're going to be **bringing rate increases for water sewer forward** before the budget process. What that looks like exactly, I'm not sure yet, so we'll be forthcoming with that, but I just wanted to kind of set the tone for why that's going to come forward and I know we talked about rates last year and we talked about rates the year before, so that's not a new conversation, but I just wanted to point that out because it's a concern. Also, that's a positive number, so we have \$600,000 in reserve. That's a good thing and I don't want to say it's not but just based on how you can see the number drop that way; it's just something I want to bring your attention to. **General Stabilization**, that's our, exactly what it is, general stabilization funds. So that's something that the Council can use. They call it a 'rainy-day fund.' We tend to go to Free Cash or general stabilization for items throughout the year as needed with council's approval. The funding source for general stabilization for the past few years was the meals tax revenue. We had a hundred percent of our **Meals Tax Revenue** for multiple years going there to build up that stabilization fund. So, you can see back in FY'2019, we had \$1.6 million in there. We grew it all the way up to over \$8 million. A decision was made during this last budget process to temporarily rescind that, so currently there's 0% going into the stabilization fund. So, that \$5.8 million that's currently there, there's going to be nothing that's added to that this year. So that would be the balance, unless we need to utilize it, that'll be the balance at the end of the year as well. **Public Safety Stabilization Funds**, this is funded by **our Ambulance Certified Public Expenditure Program**. We get about \$400,000 to \$450,000 a year from that. The Fire Department does amazing work by putting all of that together and requesting those funds. We've been able to purchase fire trucks, ambulances, and other public safety equipment out of that fund. In fact, I think that we have used it to help support the budget at one point as well. So that's been an incredible reserve that we've been able to utilize. You'll see right now that there's a much smaller balance and that's because we have right now with fire trucks and ambulances, the lag time on ordering those is extreme, years. So, we had the opportunity during this year to be able to put money toward ordering two different ambulances, so those are coming. So that's why there's that big drop off there. We only get that revenue once a year and that's usually in June. So, we'll see that balance go up hopefully before the end of the fiscal year. **Stadium and Park Stabilization Fund**, this is funding for **Nicholson Stadium**. It's meant to be like a maintenance fund for that. I think the grand idea is for it to build up enough that we can redo the track or things of that nature. That's a very expensive project so we're slowly chipping away what that looks like. We anticipate about \$145,000 **Billboard Revenue** to go in there. That's where all our Billboard Revenue goes into. We really haven't used that fund, again anticipating slowly being able to put most of that towards the track when it's time. And so, we anticipate that being over \$800,000 before the end of the fiscal year. The Opioid Stabilization Fund --- that is a settlement, a legal settlement that we, not just us, national, international, I'm not even sure, but a settlement that we got and we have received, we tend to receive about \$150,000 to \$300,000 a year. It fluctuates depending on when the payouts come through the companies. We're anticipating about \$144,000 for FY'2026. There's very specific things that we're able to use those for related to addiction and things of that nature that would have been caused by the use of opioids. So, there's very specific things that we can use that for, but we have been able to utilize that for our public safety in supporting one or two fire and police positions. So that's been great that we've been able to do that and continue to do that there. And the last thing is the **OPEB Trust Fund**.

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This is to fund long-term retirement costs. We don't have a current funding source that we have going there each year. So, we have put money there sporadically over the years and then we have interest going there. So, you can see small increases there that's really being driven by interest increases. We should have a plan at some point to fund that, but on the priority list here we haven't been able to get there yet. But that was a whole lot of information, but I think it's important and I just wanted to make sure that you guys had that and I'm happy to answer any questions either now or later when you're thinking about it.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. Marsan, “Thank you. So, you told us that we use the meals tax, the revenue for general stabilization. What do we use for Free Cash? How did we go in seven years that we saved \$20 million?” CAFO Duprey said, “So Free Cash, well we've changed the thought around Free Cash from prior to 2019. When the state came in to help right the ship a little bit, they were very direct with how we should be using Free Cash and how we shouldn't be using Free Cash. We're trying to balance conservative budgeting with conservative use of budget and trying to not use Free Cash for everything and anything. Really using it when we need to for things that we really need to get after, whereas before I don't think the balances were as high and they weren't as specific with how they were being used. We're not utilizing it quite as much as it used to be based on the total amount. For example, if you look at 2019, Free Cash certified was \$3 million, they used \$4.5 million. So, on the Free Cash historical summary. I tried to show the use of Free Cash based on each year and how much of that Free Cash did they use during that year. So, we are up ticking how much we're using but our balance is significantly more. So, the percentage that we're using is much less than it was.” Clr. Marsan said, “So, you didn't answer the question. What's the revenue source?” CAFO Duprey said, “Oh I'm sorry. The revenue source is just the remaining amount of the budget. So, any revenue that we receive over what we budget and any expenditures that wasn't spent in our budget falls to the bottom line and it increases Free Cash.” Clr. Marsan said, “Because people keep asking where do we get our \$20 million from.” CAFO Duprey said, “That's a much easier answer.” Chairwoman Soto recognized Clr. Pesce, “Thank you. Just a question about the Stadiums and Park Stabilization Fund. Why the black boxes? And the reason I'm asking is that I thought that billboards, or at least maybe this combines them all and I'm going completely going from memory so forgive me, but I thought that billboards were set up in 2016-2017, around then. Somewhere along the line, to preserve the turf. With that in mind it may be collectively we've done something else with it. I'm just wondering what happened in 2019-2020-2021 --- they're blocked off.” CAFO Duprey said, “We didn't have a formal Stabilization Fund for those at that time. So, we didn't establish that until TR-20-31.” Clr. Pesce said, “So, I guess where's the money then from the original? Because I think originally when the billboards signed on, they gave like a very large deposit and then they gave a certain amount. And then I think they had to give so much every year. So, I guess where's that money?” CAFO Duprey said, “It's there.” Clr. Pesce said, “It's part of that \$81,000?” CAFO Duprey said, “That's what we had at the time, yes.” Clr. Pesce said, “So did we spend it?” CAFO Duprey said, “Prior to that, I would have to look and see what happened before then. This is when it was a formalized stabilization fund. So, we may have had on other funds that had that money in there. I'm just including it from when it was formalized.” Clr. Pesce said, “That's fine. Can you get me the information on the fund that it was prior and what the original contributions were? Because the reason I'm concerned is we all know the turf is going to need replacement soon. And I think that was set up primarily for that. And I would just like to make sure that wherever that money is somehow gets to here to offset the cost. Especially because I think it's going to be high.” CAFO Duprey agreed. Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, “So, about the Stadium and Park Stabilization Fund. One of the things I want to say was because it said it was for Nicholson Stadium too, not just the turf. Or could it be used for other things at Nicholson

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Stadium?" CAFO Duprey said, "I think it's the stadium overall. I think that there's park language in there as well. I could provide the actual resolution." Clr. DiZoglio said, "The reason why I asked is because the stadium itself needs a paint job. And the fact that we have \$706,000, instead of it letting it continue to look like it hasn't been done in 20 years when we just did it eight years ago? And it needs another paint job. I'd rather use it this year to do that when we have the money to do it. I know the turf is important but at the same time we want to also have our stadium look presentable. And if we have the funds to do it, we should sit down as a Council and say maybe we should be doing that this year. So, if you can get that resolution, if it's just used for the turf, then we'll figure out another way. But if it's used for the entire stadium, then we should consider using that money for that. Thank you." CAFO Duprey agreed to send the resolution. Chair Soto recognized Clr. Drew, "I just want to clarify to Councilor DiZoglio. We spoke today at the Parks Subcommittee meeting. Superintendent Angelo had talked about having it painted this year. It is on his CIP list to be done this year to have it painted. So that is something that is done. Madam CAFO, my question goes to the Free Cash historical summary. The use of Free Cash, what are you forecasting for 2026 to be expending? Right now, it's blank." CAFO Duprey said, "So, we haven't spent any yet because we have just it just was certified. So, we're not allowed to use it until the state certifies that it's available. So, we haven't used any of it." Clr. Drew said, "So we don't have anything that's like all right this is where it's going to come out of so far like your earmarks?" CAFO Duprey said, "There is conversations that the Mayor is having with myself and his administration. I am sure that we'll bring something forward." Clr. Drew said, "I'm looking at the way this is forecasting and trending. I mean it's not looking good. So, I just want to know if we're going to keep trending upwards with 10%. Next year's probably going to be 12% to 15% if we keep on the same trajectory. So, I just want to make sure we have some sort of information. That's my question about that. And then the other one was the Enterprise Fund that you've alluded to. That's a big concern. I know to the community we're going to see rate increases. Do we know roughly percentagewise what we might be looking at?" CAFO Duprey said, "No. So I just wanted to kind of tie that together with this just so that it's when we do bring it forward it's not the first time that you're hearing about it. And that there's an understanding that there's a basis around why we would be bringing it forward. So, we have not finished that or finalized what that will look like. It's just kind of a determination. We've used \$1.8 million in FY'2025 and \$2.5 million in FY'2026. You can see that gaps are getting bigger and we only have \$598,000 to use. So, we're just anticipating a problem." Chair Soto recognized Mayor Bearegard, "If I could add to that just something else to keep in mind. So, the last time this was a subject of interest and frankly controversy and Methuen was I think in early 2024. And the issue is that there have been at least five years that had gone by where there had been no adjustments to the water rates. And so, when it came time to tweak them to right the amount. Anyway, the issue is that the City had gone for over five years not raising the rate at all. And so, when it came time to make that adjustment, it was significant all at once. And so one of the things we've been talking about is trying to see if we can have a more predictable schedule so that we're not surprising people with a sudden adjustment to the rates after not doing it for five, six, seven, years. And so that's something that we're talking about just so we can have some predictability and not a shock for residents when that does happen." Chair Soto said, "So just a question in regard to --- you see 2020, 2021 to 2022 on Free Cash certified. For context, is that COVID dollars 2021 to 2022 --- that jump of about \$8 million? And then you have another jump of about \$4 million?" CAFO Duprey said, "So there's no there's no COVID money that's included in this. So that big jump was perhaps driven partially by COVID because we had no idea what was going on. We didn't know how long it was going to last. We didn't know what the state was going to give us for the next budget. So, it was a

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very tumultuous time when we froze everything because we were really unsure. People were working from home. So, we were extra conservative at that point. And then we ended up ending the year with a lot of surpluses because of that. Also, we couldn't do a lot of things that we would have done had the city been open. But because of COVID, we weren't doing them. So that's really what drove that. So, in essence yes. But there's no actual COVID money --- federal or state --- that is included in this." Chair Soto said, "So that's an interesting exercise to look at where you have. And I sent an article over to the Mayor and the Council regarding what's happening in Lowell. And so, if we look at that time frame and how we became conservative if we can take anything from then. Obviously, we weren't in the building and operational as you just stated. But what can we take from that time to slim down. And I guess that's a question directly to you because you would know." CAFO Duprey said, "My immediate reaction is not do things. You know some of it is really that we weren't doing things you know --- recreation. We did nothing for recreation during that period because no one was allowed to leave their houses. So, like things of that nature. Not necessarily the answer that people are going to want to hear is really do less." Chair Soto said, "But we could do an analysis as to what are the things that we could go without. I mean I wouldn't say go without recreation." Chair Soto recognized Mayor Beauregard, "Something to add to that. So, one of the issues that other municipalities had is every municipality used their ARPA money the American Rescue Plan Act money differently. And so, in some municipalities they may have created new programs and things like that right. And they use ARPA to fund that. But the challenge is now that ARPA is a thing of the past it's already allocated. It's got to be spent completely. I think by the end of this year --- if I'm not mistaken --- for some of these projects. The challenge for cities like Lowell is they use their ARPA funds to stand up some new programs which are great for Lowell. But the challenge is that those programs now have to be absorbed in the municipal operating budget in order to continue. Now that the ARPA funding source has subsided. And what's different from McEwen is that we used our ARPA funding for specific projects. For instance, Burnham Road sewer pump station. The Arlington neighborhood infrastructure project. And so would be an issue if we had set up some new programs with that ARPA money. You know getting to that point where okay that money's gone. How do we keep those programs going. Well, we would probably find ourselves in a precarious position like, say a Lowell. But because of the fact that we've used them on most of those one-time projects that have been neglected for many years. It's not something that we need to sustain. Like we're not going to have to worry about maintaining the Burnham Road project year after year for instance in our planning. So, I think that speaks to some of the nuances in municipalities that use the ARPA funding to create something that they're now relying on. And now to fund otherwise they're running into some trouble." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Drew, "Just one more question on the Free Cash summary. So, what is your expectation or your comfort spot percentage wise versus our budget? You know right now you were at 9.1% of our budget in Free Cash. Is it 15? Is it 20? What is that number?" CAFO Duprey said, "10 % is my happy spot." Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, "Through you, Madam Chair. So, can you explain the enterprise fund revenue to me? Because I heard and everybody's concerned about it. I still don't understand it. Can you explain why that's important?" CAFO Duprey said, "So, enterprise fund retained earnings is like fund balance. It's the amount that they have available in their fund balance amount. So, if they're if it's not as important if we're not using it to fund the budget but we are. And so that's where the concern is because we're not raising enough revenue annually through our water sewer rates. So, we're supplementing that with retained earnings. But if we don't have enough retained earnings to supplement then we don't have enough to balance our budget in water sewer." Clr. DiZoglio said, "So if I'm

right, it's based off of our water and sewage. This is where the money's coming from? OK, thank you. That just makes more sense.”

11. Requests of Councilors – Chair Soto recognized Mayor Beauregard.

- **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)** – Mayor Beauregard said, “Councilor Valley asked about the Echo Lane sewer connection. So, this was something that we included in the CIP. So, the funding is there. It's a matter now of DCW they have some initial cost estimates for that project. But now the whole focus is going to be on coordinating with the abutters. There's been talk of maybe something like a betterment some way that there is that buy-in from residents. Because at the end of the day this is a project that is benefiting one particular street. And so, we have to confirm with legal about exactly what that looks like. But the next step is to really put the funding to use. It's there. It's a matter now of implementing the project. So, this might be something that we can follow up on and keep on the agenda. Because it is extensive progress. It's been talked about for a long time. And so at least now we have the funding, and we can go from there.”
- **An update/explanation and potential cost to City (if any) for the Executive Order by Mayor involving FMLA. (Request of Clr. Pesce)** – Mayor Beauregard said, “Regarding clarification about the parental leave. Some very good questions. A lot of common misconceptions floating out there. So, right out of the gate I want to mention that there is a program at the state level. It's the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act. The City of Methuen does not participate in that. Municipality cities and towns are exempt from participating in that program. And so, we've just never opted in at any point. We do provide FMLA which is separate. With FMLA it allows for up to 12 weeks of unpaid, unpaid, in essence job protected leave each year. So, let's say hypothetically you go out for some issue that is tied to FMLA. It doesn't have to be a birth or an adoption. It could be like a family health issue, something like that. There's a little more of an extensive set of criteria for that. What it does is it in essence allows you to take that leave and know that when you come back at the end of say your 12 weeks there isn't going to be somebody else sitting in your chair at work. In essence it protects your job. It doesn't provide you with compensation. And so, because we don't participate in PFML, the Paid Family and Medical Leave program at the state level, we only offer FMLA. There's no compensation for the leave. So, the thinking is that with providing paid parental leave we're able to do two things. First, we're able to match what the teachers received in their collective bargaining agreements last year. This is something that the teachers have had since that time. But also, now on the city side if you are going to be going out on leave to either give birth or say adopt a child and that use is limited where it's not open to all the other FMLA you know criteria. This is only relative to say birth adoption. You can have up to four weeks of paid leave instead of having to bank all of your sick time and hope that you're not getting sick you know as you're leading up to the point where you would be giving birth. And so, the whole purpose is we're changing that with this new policy from the administration. But there is that misconception out there where folks say well people have FMLA right? There is a benefit already. That's true but the issue is that nobody receives compensation as a result of that benefit. It only protects your job.

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This goes a little bit further. The main impact this is actually a great question. I'm glad the vice-chair asked about the financial impact.

The CAFO shared that she had provided some information that hypothetically let's say there was somebody in the police department, the fire department that needed to utilize this. We might be looking at some overtime tweaks that would need to be made but ultimately you know when you have all that time in the lead-up to somebody say giving birth or adopting a child there's a lot of time to plan for that in terms of your staffing needs. And so, I think there's ways that we can be strategic in terms of limiting that cost but that's what we would be looking at in terms of a hypothetical expense. Now just I guess for the sake of illustration this isn't something where you have you know a whole host of employees needing it at any given time. Like right now I think there maybe have been two people over the course of the past few months at least here in this building that would utilize this or potentially benefit from it. So, it's not widespread. It's limited I think in terms of impact. So, it's something that I think it is the right thing to do. I think it makes us a more competitive employer, especially when you look at the private sector and how you know they offer this type of incentive. I think that it helps us from a competitiveness standpoint." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Pesce, "Mayor I agree with everything you say. I'm so confused by this for a whole bunch of reasons. One you know you said things like there's a hypothetical expense. This almost sounds like my old insurance argument that came up that I was like hung out to dry for right hypothetical that the CAFO came back with hundreds and hundreds of thousands of hypothetical expense to people even though it was never utilized and we know historically it was never utilized. Now we've got something and let me preface this by saying I would give everything to our employees. They work hard. If we have the money, I am not putting it down. I am just so frustrated with how this came out and to me now, you're saying that the school side has it but I'm assuming it was part of a collective bargaining agreement that they did that not by Executive Order am I correct in assuming that?" Mayor Beauregard said, "So, it is in their CBA, but we did a lot of strategizing about the exact way to roll this out and this is perfectly fine to do it this way." Clr. Pesce said, "Even if it's fine wouldn't it have made more sense to do it as a collective bargaining agreement and get something for this? It just to me it just seems very strange you know and again you know we're put in a tough position because now I'm speaking out against something that is wonderful for our employees where you mayor issued this Executive Order with a whole bunch of kudos online. So, it's tough because the one thing I learned from trying to equalize the law that we are not equally applying by making insurance equal for all part-time employees was that the residents are not happy with their taxes. So, I'm looking at this and I'm thinking of a potential cost. If this were a Councilor's proposal and the CAFO had to write this up, this would have millions and millions of dollars implication in the same way that she wrote the potential for the insurance. So, I'm just confused and I'm sorry if I seem a little frustrated because I was hoping that you said and this is why I asked the question because I had some residents call me and there was confusion around it right the PMFLA versus the FMLA and so forth. So, I was hoping that it was just we were opting in because now they don't have to use their sick time either. So now, not only are we compensating for something we're also going to end up paying for sick time on the back end that they don't have to use. So while I think it's a wonderful benefit for you to sit there and say the reason we can afford it is because we're going to plan for it just it just seems like a strange strategy where I mean we can plan for anything right. I really don't get it. I don't understand how it didn't come before the council when this is going to have a huge impact on our budget potentially and I'm confused by it and while I think it's a great idea if you're sitting there saying, hey listen, this isn't going to impact us at all and this is going to be wonderful and it's going to have zero

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impact to the budget then great. I just don't see any situation where that's going to hold true." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Simard, "Thank you Madam Chair. I agree somewhat with Councilor Pesci on that because we don't know what the cost would be is and I've never given an Executive Order so let me ask the CAFO this could we obviously an Executive Order could it be rescinded if it becomes too costly for the city because that is a great point that she does bring up and what if you have two firefighters that are married and who don't work road jobs or details who now we're going to get a month off each and what is that going to do to the overtime in that department so my question is can we reassess this and can you rescind an Executive Order down the road if it becomes too costly when maybe we can reduce it maybe one parent at a time or tweak it somewhat to be less costly if it does rise to that level." Mayor Beauregard said, "I could rescind it or the City Council if you if hypothetically the school committee sued me for a recent Executive Order about consolidating IT so hypothetically that is an option too." Clr. Simard said, "The question is about rescinding the Executive Order.

If we see that it's too costly and that we didn't anticipate, like she said, it's just uncertain as what the cost could be down the road even a year from now if we assess it." Solicitor O'Neill said, "Only the Mayor can rescind his Executive Order. The Council can't force the Mayor to do that. I will note that an Executive Order is not permanent. If there's a new Mayor or the Mayor changes his mind, they can rescind the Executive Order. These types of things --- if it becomes a permanent solution, that people think is right for the community and works should be put into ordinance at some point. If the if the will of the city is for it to be a permanent benefit and change." Clr. Simard said, "If I may just finish with that --- just for the record --- I am in support of a paying medical leave but at a cost. That's all." Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, "Thank you through you Madam Chair. So, for my understanding though the only way they could --- obviously people have some issues with that --- would be during budget season. They would have to --- I'm pretty sure that would be on a line item, and they would have to vote on that line item to cut it, correct?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "Right now, the Executive Order only extends additional leave paid leave and so that's generally accounted for in the budget that you've already voted on. So, there are certain situations which require additional money such as Police and Fire because under contractual obligations with our union contracts. We have minimums --- certain trucks can't go out without a certain number of people. So, if a certain person that's critical has to be out then there may be a requirement to backfill that position so that would be an additional expense. I do think, from a practical standpoint, this is not extending this benefit to a wide swath of people. It's a limited group of people." Clr. DiZoglio said, "I just want to recognize that I am for this. I just wanted to explain to the public that for that to happen. You can't rescind the Executive Order. The most likely outcome is to cut the item for next year's budget but I'm in all favor of this. Thank you." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Santos, "So I just want to add to what Councilor Pesce was saying regarding my feelings about this Executive Order. It just feels that our opinion wasn't considered into making this decision. Yes, I do agree that the employees deserve that and a little bit more if needed but at what impact is that going to create in our budget when there's so many other areas in our city that needs help." Clr. Pesce said, "Just one last question to the Solicitor and I don't know the answer to this. I'm hoping you do. I know that there must be very specific mechanisms or reasons for issuing an Executive Order. Are they limited and is this something that would fall under that or would it have been better served as a collective bargaining agreement, like the school side did?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "I can't really answer that. The Mayor has broad power to issue Executive Orders on any issue within his authority and his authority under the Charter is very broad. With respect to this particular Executive Order, he's entitled under the Charter to set the salaries, compensation and benefits of those he's appointed so long as it's within

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appropriation and so right now it is within appropriation I think Councilor DiZoglio is correct. At budget time, you have the ability to modify those appropriations as you see fit and certainly that's one way to deal with it. You could adopt another ordinance that changes this benefit --- an ordinance would override an Executive Order --- if you decided to do something different. So, there is a check and balance that goes back and forth. As an idea, I think that Executive Orders are like a test. Like I said it's not permanent; if you want to make something permanent, you're better off doing it in an ordinance and then it survives until such time as the ordinance is changed." Clr. Pesce said, "I didn't know if it had specific requirements." Solicitor O'Neill said, "There's no specific requirements in the Charter about the scope of executive power. It's generally linked to whatever broad powers are contained within the Charter. I did look at that, and I do think that it's within the Mayor's authority to do this on this limited basis. We had discussions with the CAFO and did some projections as to what the costs might be but if it were something that were way outside the current appropriation then it probably wouldn't be within his authority to do but that's not the case here we looked at I mean you're essentially giving somebody who's already salaried you know time off from work and they continue to receive the salary that's already been appropriated you know other than the unique situations where there has to be a backfill there may need to be an additional appropriation for that specific purpose and I mean I think it makes sense in this case for and I'm sure that this will occur that the mayor and CAFO will track the use of this over whatever period and report back to the council and you know they can create a mechanism for that maybe there needs to be a separate budget item to show what's actually being expended for this particular item." Clr. Pesce said, "Could we, Madam CAFO, please get those projections that the Solicitor referenced when you guys were working this out so that the Council can see the projections. And then, can I ask Mayor, if we could move this to a separate line item on the budget so that we can see how it plays out and then we can at least assess it. Because again I think we're all in agreement; We'd love to give the world to our hard-working employees. I just want to make sure that the taxpayers can sustain it. Thank you." Chair Soto recognized Clr. MacLaren, "This sort of goes off of the conversation that was just being had. I am in support of this. I think it improves equity in the workforce. I think that it makes us a more competitive employer. It'll help us to attract and retain talent which is important. But obviously, the overwhelming concern of the Council is the financial impact. I'm curious, do we have some sort of compilation of existing data for exactly how many city employees take that kind of leave as it is? Because I have a hard time imagining that it's this huge number that's going to cost us millions of dollars. I'm sure there will be a financial impact that we need to account for, but I'm just curious, do we have any way of looking back at past fiscal years and just how many employees would foreseeably be taking advantage of this?" CAFO Duprey said, "Yes, we could look at past FMLA instances." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Drew, "My question isn't so much with this. Mr. Mayor, I applaud you on this and what you did with the Police. My concern is really that we've seen two Executive Orders come out in the last couple of days. I found out about it on social media. I didn't know anything about it. I never had a chance to discuss it, so I got blindsided by some people who called me and asked questions. Just don't know why we wouldn't have had this conversation as a Council to bring it to us because these are great things at this Council that these people should get. It is an excellent item for both the Police, and this paid family medical leave thing. I just would have liked to see that so that we could have had it as a body. You know, we want to have this bridge where we can work together, and we talked about picking up an oar and going in the right direction. This is one of those things that we need to trust this Council and the Executive Branch to work together to move this city in the right direction. So, when we talk about these things, we would like to see this kind of come through." Mayor Beauregard said, "It's a fair point. So, what I've been doing is

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utilizing this tool as a way to set forth our administration's policies as it relates including funding for testing in the budget, dealing with leave and such. So, what I think might be helpful is anytime I make an adjustment to any of our policies, I obviously send this to all the Department Heads so that they're able to go ahead and implement whatever I'm asking them to implement. But what I could do also is maybe just Cc the Council and that way you're able to have that same communication that I share with the Department Heads and then ultimately, you'll get a sense of where I'm trying to steer the ship in terms of these administration policies." Clr. Drew said, "I just look at these two items, and, in my opinion, they should have been ordinances because they are great things that we should be offering our employees which would be great. But I'd love to see the actual impacts that we're going to see on them, and they would have been able to stay long term so that that's my concern with that. The other item is you know we've heard before about things that we can't buy we can't do because we have to find a funding source. What is the funding source for this? You know if we have to backfill employees where's that funding source is coming from and we've talked about the expected pay for the year but those are my questions." CAFO Duprey said, "For FY'2026, it'll have to come out of each Department's overtime budget as necessary for or as it comes up in those Departments." Clr. Drew said, "So, we don't know if that's going to hinder those Departments. Let's say somebody goes out in the Police Department and then that hurts his overtime budget. And now he's going to have to come back looking for more money for his overtime." CAFO Duprey said, "Potentially." Clr. Drew said, "Okay and did you explore --- I know we said that the municipality doesn't have to opt into PFMLA. Did we explore what that cost is for the city when we're doing this in comparison to just doing this one item as a blanket across the city in all departments?" CAFO Duprey said, "The HR director investigated that, and we looked into it in the past when it came out originally and it was much more complicated, complex and so this was the best way financially and complexity wise to go forward. It was much more expensive to do the other way." Solicitor O'Neill said, "It's very expensive. The community that both workers have to contribute and the city has to make a contribution to that and it allows for a much more generous benefit that people can take for not just parental leave but for any of the FML reasons and also you can take it every 12 months and be out for a much longer period of time. So, some communities there have not been that many municipalities that have adopted it because it tends to be very disruptive to their workforce in terms of how many people are out." Clr. Drew said, "I agree. I just wanted to make sure that we've looked at all of this and ensure that it's been apples to apples if this was a savings on this part of it or not."

- **What is the status on the feasibility study for the police, fire, and DPW facilities? And what will the process be to determine the location of these facilities? (Request of Clr. Santos)** – Mayor Beauregard said, "Clr. Santos had included some requests about the public safety complex or talking about some type of variation of a new Police- Fire-DPW facility. So, as we referenced earlier, we were talking about anytime we order a new fire truck, for instance, we have to have that fire truck custom made because the Central Fire Station was built in 1899. This is something I've referenced previously how the doorways --- the entryways for that fire station in order to fit a truck in there has to be custom made because that building was built at a time when the main method of transportation was in essence horse and buggy type situation. So, now of course, we're a world away from that and our needs have changed immensely over the past 125 plus years. One of the things that I have been looking at, and I guess I'll give you a 30,000 foot view and walk you back from the start. So, Mayor Perry had been exploring some ideas related to a Joint Public Safety facility where we would have Police and Fire under the same roof. And then, we have this issue with the DPW building which is a disaster as well. There has been some thought in the past about getting after, at least, the DPW building and so the city contracted with a firm called

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Weston and Sampson. This goes back to 2018. They have been looking at these concepts for okay what we do in terms of DPW? They hadn't done anything with Police or Fire at the time. And now, at this point with Weston and Sampson, we are in the process of expanding the scope with them so that rather than just having them focus on a feasibility study for DPW, we're asking them to also factor in, okay let's look at Police and Fire as well. Because there's, I think, ongoing conversation in the context of Police where we do have some prime real estate right there on Hampshire Street right off of Broadway and near Route 213. Does it make sense to maybe try to build a new police station there, but then the issue that I keep coming back to is that well that's the leaves Fire and DPW. What do we do about that? And so, I floated an idea some thought I was a little crazy but it's something that Weston and Sampson has included on their list of possible locations to house a municipal complex and one of those spots is the site of the current Days Inn property. That's something that they are taking a look at just so we can have a sense of how that might fit into the list of options. But the challenge that we have as a municipality is that we don't have a very extensive amount of land to work with. We don't have a ton of options by way of space to utilize. And one of the discussions that have been underway was about using the Battye property over off of Pleasant Valley Street as a possible site for a DPW complex. And then finally the engineering firm to get into that space. They're finding that there are all of these tremendous issues with using that site --- environmental problems. At one point, we learned that it had been used as a dumping ground for debris from the Big Dig back many years ago. I heard a rumor --- I don't know if it's confirmed or not --- that it was also one point a burial ground for the Winter Hill Gang --- Whitey Bulgers gang back in the day. So, we think of okay how about we utilize this space or at least look at it and we find that, holy cow there's all these crazy issues with it and so at this point I think the most realistic path forward is to take a look at some of these locations that are centrally located. I still personally love the Days Inn idea. I think it would solve a host of issues and it's such an ideal location but that would, of course, involve other considerations that I don't want to get into at this point. The long and short of it --- Weston and Sampson is our go-to for this study. We're in the process of finalizing an arrangement where they're taking on an added scope to cover Police and Fire. This is something that I want to get after as soon as possible because it's a series of issues that have been talked about for literally decades. The Central Fire Station, as I mentioned, 1899 when that was built so fixes to this have been a long time coming and we're committed to getting that ball rolling now. So, the long answer to your question is that we do have an arrangement with Weston and Sampson that we're taking advantage of have a concrete study and some options to look at." Clr. Santos said, "Do you have any time frame because this is not the first time I have brought this subject to the table. Do we have any time frame to know where this building is going to be either rebuilt or replaced. If we're going to have to just rebuild these buildings in the same spot they are and how long do we need to wait to get a result back from this study? That's my main question. Another thing is that a feasibility study was done between 2018 and 2019 and I just would like to get a take a look at it. No one knows where it is. How do I get that information?" Mayor Beauregard said, "We can provide a copy of that to you. The issue is that it only deals with DPW. It doesn't take into account Police and Fire. And so, at the time, this was I think during the Jajuga years where one of the options that had been discussed, was trying to have some type of a setup where the DPW facility was adjacent to Route 213 and there would be this, I guess, a separate ramp on Route 213 that provided access. And that just wouldn't work in terms of planning with the state. So, the issue that they ran into, back at that time, was I think this challenge with space but ultimately the answer to your question about time frame is going to be determined by the Weston-Sampson process. But I will say it is we're already roughly two and a half months into our new Council here and into our new administration and I think

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that it's very productive. That we are so intentional about getting after these issues that have been issues longer than many of us have been alive. So, it's something that we're getting after as soon as we can. I think in terms of the ultimate scope with Weston-Sampson, once that's finalized, that will give us a much better sense of what we can expect in terms of timing.”

Clr. Santos said, “This is something that has been going on since 2018. I totally understand that at the time you were not the Mayor but this is something that needs to be taken care of. I was at the Fire Department – I toured the Fire Department and the Police Department. I was at the DPW building today and it was very scary. This is something that’s serious. Have you reached out to any higher authorities to see how we're going to get the money to get this work done? I was just in Washington DC last week and I was able to speak with Senator Markey’s office, and they said there are available funds, but we just need to submit the request. Has any request been submitted for this?”

Mayor Beauregard said, “Well, so, oftentimes it's not advised to submit a request until you have done a feasibility study, and you have a plan in place based on that feasibility study. What we would want to do is be cautious about putting the cart before the horse. We wouldn't want the state, for instance Senator Markey or Senator Warren, that hey we're ready to go with this project but if we don't have all of it laid out, I think that would be an issue and this is something where we would want to measure twice and cut once as the saying goes. So, I think that it's important for us to put one foot in front of the other in that context. In terms of funding opportunities, I've had some meetings recently with Senator Markey and Senator Warren's people and one of the things that I drive home is that we have Phase I of this infrastructure project in the Arlington neighborhood where we're getting after this work of separating the water and sewer infrastructure. They've had these issues with combined sewer overflows for many years. The infrastructure, in terms of the roads and everything, are just in terrible shape. And so that's a project that is many decades in the in the works and so we were able to use ARPA to fund phase one of that. The challenge that we have going forward is that we need Phase II and Phase III and Phase IV funded. And the issue that we have is that Senator Payano did an outstanding job in locking in \$5 million for that project in the Governor's Economic Development Bond bill which is certainly helpful. But the issue is that we then get the call from the Governor indicating that because of all of the uncertainty at the federal level, with say Medicaid reimbursements and all these different cost pressures that the state is facing, she informed us that she's not able to release any of the earmarks. So even when our Senators, etc. are securing funding for projects like the Arlington neighborhood infrastructure efforts, then you get the notification that well, hey, it's set aside but we can't give it to you because we don't know about all these other issues. That's a challenge that we're having in terms of the state with that. But speaking to what you had referenced at that event in DC, I think that we have these ongoing conversations with Congresswoman Trahan, Senator Markey, Senator Warren, they're outstanding partners for us in Washington and so once we have our feasibility study in place and we have more of a sense of the next steps to take, we can provide them with a plan. I think they'll be all over it in terms of working with us.”

Chair Soto said, “Okay we have spent 12 minutes on this line item. If you'd like to keep it on the agenda.”

Clr. Santos said, “That would be great.”

Chair Soto said, “Mr. DiZoglio, Chair of the Public Safety Committee, could work in collaboration with you Clr. Santos so that you can get that on his agenda and we can start working with the Mayor's office to push that initiative you so care about.”

12. Public Service:

Grants: None

Licenses: None

Contract(s):

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C-26-71 Revised and Updated Legal Services Retention Letter – Special Counsel - KP Law - Motion to approve by Clr. Valley, seconded by Clr. Pesce – Discussion – Chair Soto recognized Clr. Marsan, “So as discussed, Mr. Solicitor, you gave us a spreadsheet here so can you give us another column to tell us where the expenditures went please?” Solicitor O’Neill said, “We certainly can do that. Just for the Council’s edification, this contract doesn’t obligate us to any specific amount of money. It just gives us our new hourly rate going forward. Of course, that hourly rate is going up from \$240 per hour to \$295 per hour. I will tell you that the spreadsheet --- we have been working and making a concerted effort to use less and less outside Counsel and so if you look at the spreadsheet that I provided, and I thank the CAFO for providing these numbers for me. In 2024 we used \$82,649.12 just for KP Law. In the next fiscal year in 2025 it was down to \$43,166.12 and this year we’ve only expended \$15,200 which is still outstanding for the first half of the year. This is why we need this contract so that I can pay that bill and those bills are primarily related to only two matters. One has to do with Murphy’s Farm development that the city has been fighting all year to make sure that the city is taken care of in terms of mitigations. That permit was granted by the Town of Dracut. It’s sort of over the city’s objections with no inclusions in the 40 B plan to provide any mitigation whatsoever for the city of Methuen even though the entire access for that project is through our city. As a result of that, the Mayor asked that an appeal be filed and so that continuation is responsible for most of that \$15,200. They have been handling that case even before I became Solicitor, so it made sense to allow them to continue to do that because they have specialized knowledge in that field. The other issue that they continue to handle for the city is also a specialized issue and it has to do with cable relicensing and negotiating better terms for the city with its cable relicensing. And so, they continue to handle that and there is a commission that they work with that is handling that currently. So, in this letter, you’ll see, they anticipate potentially up to \$35,000 for the rest of the year. I would say it will be less than that. We are trying to engage in some mediation of the Murphy’s Farm case and if that’s successful that obviously will reduce fees for that for that piece and we’re hopeful that we will be able to resolve that case amicably, but we will know that in short order so certainly report that back. You’ll see on the contract, in addition to the general rate of \$295, attached to the second page, are the specialty rates for specialized services. And so, some of that I do anticipate we will need. I did inform the Chair of some additional needs. As you know, the RFP for the Searles Estate is pending, and we are hopeful that we will have live bidders that will want to do that and hopefully that is the case. And I anticipate that there will be some legal work surrounding that. If we have a successful bidder and that contract is awarded. And so there will be some of that. It may or may not be KP Law. We do have other folks that we use for that. But there will be some additional outside counsel expense for that because that’s a pretty complex process to make sure that we’ve negotiated all the correct historical preservation and development agreements. And we do have some of that in the RFP but just a preview for that, but again, this doesn’t obligate the city in any amount other than the amount that’s already been charged and it allows us to pay that that money to them.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, “So I have one question and I just want to be very clear. Are we doing less outside work --- is it because your office is taking on more of that load or we’re getting sued less?” Solicitor O’Neill said, “So it’s a little bit of both. I would say our office has taken on a lot of things that had gone up to outside Counsel. Some of them were --- we did have significant outside Counsel bills during the time of the Superiors contract and things like that. So, in years past, there was a lot of outside Counsel use. It was also only, at some point there was no Solicitor, at some point there was just a single Solicitor and so there is a good amount of work here. If you do look at these numbers, they represent pretty good reductions --- a 48% reduction in use of KP law from it FY 2024 to FY2025 a 65% reduction --- from FY 2025 to FY 2026, we’re down 82%. We are

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making concerted effort to do that. But you're right. It does depend on what comes through the door. We do have insurance policies that cover us for a lot of things which is helpful. Just so you know, those policies do have defense deductibles of up to \$25,000 and another \$25,000 for settlements. Even though they cover the majority of defense in some cases, they don't cover all of it. As we go forward, we do have a few cases pending and some of them are going to be going on for a while. So, you will start to see some of those bills but fortunately most of those will be covered under those insurance policies. And I will say too that I discussed this with the Chair. I do plan to do an RFP for outside Counsel and try to develop a pool of attorneys that can service the city with preferred rates. Many communities do this and we won't write a contract for any amount with any of them. They will just give us preferred rates for specific tasks and then if those tasks arise and we need to use them, we'll have a more competitive rate because there are definitely firms out there that are willing to do that that have good expertise. Thank you." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Drew, "Mr. Solicitor, as I look at this, I mean there's a 20% increase in the hourly rate --- it goes from \$240 to \$295. What is driving that? We're not using them enough? Are they seeing that? It just seems like I mean negotiating 20% up, that's a lot." Solicitor O'Neill said, "I have no idea. I can certainly ask them. I think that that's true across the board --- every firm sets its own rate. I can't tell you that we haven't had a rate increase in a few years so it may be that. It's a double increase from years past but it's still, I will say a pretty good rate, for outside Counsel but there are folks that we use for similar things that have given us a better rate and that's why I want to go out and do an RFP which I do plan on doing. Legal Counsel doesn't have to be procured under 30-B, but it always makes sense to me to do that because people will compete for that business, especially the mid-sized firms that aren't large firms. You're always going to pay more for a larger firm." Clr. Drew said, "I understand the overhead and stuff but was this negotiated? Who negotiated it? Was it yourself? Was it was a procurement office?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "This was not the result of a of a competitive procurement. I did discuss it with them but that's the rate that they're quoting." Clr. Drew said, "So, we didn't go back and say maybe like \$275? They gave us \$295 and that's the number?" Solicitor O'Neill agreed that was the number. **UPON VOTE – 8 yes, 1 no (Clr. Drew)**

13. **Other Officers and Committee Reports** – Chair Soto recognized Clr. Marsan, "Thank you. The **Economic Development Committee** had a meeting. We had Mr. Wilson and he explained a lot of the ongoing things that he's doing for our businesses in the city. He's trying to attract new businesses, how he's filling spaces, how he's being more proactive with that. We also had --- Katie Cook came from the Methuen Business Alliance. She's going to help us. She told us what she would do to help us and one of them was to create a database for us. So, that's a task that we gave to her for that to help us with our businesses here and to help with the growth. We don't have an agenda for the next one yet." Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, "Hi. We met on February 9th for the **Public Safety Committee**. We had a great discussion about the Rail Trail for public safety use. I am currently going to be meeting with the Mayor on Thursday. We also discussed fire hydrant. It was brought to my attention by one of my constituents saying that the Fire Department was going online to talk about shoveling out fire hydrants, but they couldn't find their fire hydrant. So, I talked to DPW Director Pat who said they usually do that in the springtime, but they usually would like to get kids to do it for some type of community service and hopefully he will pick that back up come the springtime. The third was from Councilor Valley talking about cameras in the Great Hall. Her concern was due to recent events that have occurred. She would like to make sure that people inside the building are safe. We haven't scheduled our next meeting yet but I will be meeting with the Councilors to talk about I put you guys on the email for that meeting at 12 on Thursday. You're more than welcome to come. I'm going to see if we

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could get you on Zoom. I will talk to the Mayor and see what we can do. The **Veterans Affairs subcommittee**. I would like to congratulate Clr. Simard. He is going to be Chair of the Veterans subcommittee. I just felt like he's a veteran --- I'm not. The committee should be run by him. We only talked about one item about the Rail Trail. I did not bring this up to the Public Safety subcommittee. I know the Councilors know this. One of the ideas that I want is to have part of the portion of the Rail Trail to be a Veterans Memorial for all of our fallen veterans that are from Methuen. That was one of the ideas and I'm going to give the credit to Clr. Drew as he brought up this issue. What we'll do is dedicate a plaque. And I know I'm going to be bashed for this, but you know he deserves the credit, Tom Duggan approached me about how Councilor LaPlante from Lawrence is doing a QR code for veterans as well around the community where you hit their QR code and it tells a story of that veteran. I figure that maybe we could do the same with our plaques as well. I was always brought up being told that I have crazy ideas. The tunnel is near the Fire Department. That's where my goal is to put that portion inside. Have the artists of Methuen to go paint historical stuff of veterans and rename that tunnel the 'Tunnel of Freedom.' Doing Tunnel of Freedom will be artists of all the historical stuff through our history of veterans. So, when they go into it and go out of it people will look at that and say, 'Wow, it's honoring our veterans.' There are grants that we continue to put towards that and yeah it seems like everybody's really on board with this idea and hopefully we could get it off the ground soon. Thank you." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Drew, "All right. Today, we had the Recreation Committee subcommittee meeting --- it was me, Clr. MacLaren and Clr. Valley there along with Superintendent D'Angelo. We also had the Softball and Lacrosse Directors who attended. We reached out to them to try to have those folks who are stakeholders in the community with the fields and so forth and our parks and be part of this so that we're not operating in a vacuum. We're going to work as a team to try to better the fields as best as possible. Both of those sports --- lacrosse and softball --- are looking for more people to join their teams. They are currently having open enrollment so please take a look online for that. We discussed the Rail Trail lighting that was sent over to us to discuss because it is a park and recreation item. Clr. Valley has that on her agenda to discuss with the DPW director --- trying to find an RFP in the process --- on how to further take that take that ball and run with it. A couple other items --- we discussed: at the fields we looked at some of the quality-of-life issues that we saw that were brought up by those directors and Superintendent D'Angelo. Superintendent D'Angelo is going to get a list of what he's going to get done and take care of some of those low-hanging fruit items to try to fix that stuff for the athletes. But the status update on all of our fields and what we're doing there. The other item is we're looking to do a City Councilor cleanup on Saturday, April 25th. We're hoping that every Councilor will take a problem area in their district and gather some volunteers and so forth. And we'll make a concerted effort across the community. That is something that we're going to be talking about in the next couple of weeks --- trying to pull some things together and we'll be commenting back to you. We do have another meeting scheduled, I believe it was April 6th was what we discussed, so that we can kind of get on board before the next for that Council Cleanup. Other than that, we ended our meeting with no issues, no problems. Thank you." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Valley, "Thank you, Madam Chair. **The Unaccepted Ways Committee** met on February 9th. We discussed concerns regarding discrepancies in the city's roadways records including the streets that were renamed, misclassified, or accepted by the State without proper city documentation. The DPW and the Legal Department are now working together to verify these records and obtain formal legal opinions that were needed. We also discussed prioritizing these streets, especially those with existing resolutions, and making a public map and list available on the city's website. Our goal is to establish an accurate legally sound roadway inventory and create a clear path toward acceptance in future infrastructure

improvements.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. MacLaren, “Yes, so, at our first **Ad Hoc Great Hall Audio-Visual and Lighting Committee** regarding the issues with all of those things in this here in Great Hall. Two main action items emerged, which are the development of a survey by director Hayden of MCS to be filled out by a combination of city employees and the public. We discussed QR codes to access that etc. --- basically to collect public opinion and data on the lighting, sound and visual concerns in the Great Hall. CIO Santiago is looking into options for updates in that regard but obviously nothing super specific until we've collected that feedback, pending that it is vetted by the members of the Committee before we send it out. There is no follow-up date for the next meeting just because we have to review that first.”

14. Unfinished Business

Resolutions:

TR-26-9 Resolution Authorizing Acceptance and Expenditure of FY'25 Massachusetts Community Development Block Grant Community Development Fund - **Motion to approve by Clr. Drew, seconded by Clr. Valley – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

TR-26-11 Resolution of the Methuen City Council Requesting the Mayor to Conduct an Analysis of Department Head and Non-Union Supervisory Salaries (Req. of Clr. Ryan DiZoglio) (remove from the table) - **Motion to remove from the table by Clr. Drew, seconded by Clr. Pesce – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved – Motion to approve the Main Motion by Clr. DiZoglio, seconded by Clr. Pesce – Discussion** - I understood from the last meeting people were worried about this. The whole point that I'm trying to make with this resolution as the Mayor directed last meeting, is that salaries have been out of whack. And that's because again, Councilors approved positions or people would put people in positions and have salaries, and we don't know where they're getting these salaries from. And my point of this is especially when it comes to the budget season, where we'll have positions in front of us and say, okay, well how did you get this salary? Because of this budget as I just heard just previously when it came to the Mayor's leave, people are worried about the cost. Well cost also comes with what the pay was too and when it comes to people maybe getting overpaid in which was a concern that I heard from Councilors, I'm not saying we reduce their pay. But also at the same time, we might have to make a decision as we saw in Lowell that's happening, we might have to do a pay freeze. And, if they're getting overpaid, they're not going to leave and if they do then we'll find someone with the right salary to go into that spot. But how are we supposed to know that if we don't have that in front of us? We could go do the homework but as we did, we were just saying to the Mayor, he should have brought this forward to the Council when it came to leave. Well, he should be bringing salaries when he's proposing or when I asked for salaries of his Department Heads that are under him, he should be bringing. Why should I approve his Department Head salaries and if people are underpaid, don't you want to keep those people that are working hard that feel like they're underpaid. Or we're losing the person that says, well I could go find a better job somewhere else because I'll get paid more. The whole point of this thing was that I could do my homework. Yes, putting accountability, as we were just saying, on the table and that's what I'm asking for. I'm not even forcing him to do it. I'm asking him to do it, and we should want him to do it. Especially the Finance Committee, should want that but everybody keeps talking about new positions. What's the difference between a new position and old position? When it comes budget season I'm going to stop looking at the budget and I want to be looking at salaries.” Chair Soto recognized Clr. Pesce, “Clr. DiZoglio, you almost talked me out of supporting this just now for a couple of reasons. However, I'm glad you had a private discussion with me and answered my questions on this. So, I'm going to pretend I didn't hear everything you just said because I don't agree with all of it. However, what I have extrapolated from what he said, and our

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discussion is I don't disagree that would be nice to have an analysis on hand. I'm hoping, if you do choose to do this and how you do it --- if we can have items like the hire date, years of service, and the current rate --- to have that as a kind of barometer for us. The part I'm joking about but honestly the part I disagree with is what I was looking at when we first discussed this, too far in the future. I'm trying not to think of what we're going to do with this list so much, but I would agree with Councilor DiZoglio. I would like to have this list, at least for right now, as that first step. I just think we might differ in how we may want to use it in the future." Clr DiZoglio said, "In response to that, like I said, I don't know what we're going to do with that but at the end of the day when it comes to budgeting, we have to make difficult decisions, and I want to make sure we have all the tools so we can make those decisions." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Santos, "Adding to that list, not only the hire date but also the qualifications for the position ---will be a good idea to have in there." – **UPON VOTE – 7 yes, 2 no (Clr. Simard & Clr. Marsan)**

TR-26-12 Resolution Authoring an Expenditure from the Edwin J. Castle Fund for the St. Patrick's Day Parade (Requested by the Commission on Trust Funds) - – **Motion to approve by Clr. Pesce, seconded by Clr. DiZoglio – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

TR-26-13 Resolution Regarding Lighting Improvements on the Rail Trail, Including Blue Lighting (Req. of Clr. DiZoglio) – **Motion to approve by Clr. Pesce, seconded by Clr. DiZoglio – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

Ordinance(s):

TO-26-7 An Ordinance Allowing for Continued Service on Boards and Commissions by a Two-Thirds Vote (Six Votes) of the City Council - **Motion to approve by Clr. Simard, seconded by DiZoglio – Discussion** – Chair Soto said, "I have a question, a clarification. This is to the Solicitor. At the last meeting you made a statement that this was specifically to those boards. Could you rename the boards that it was specific to? Was it Community Development, Zoning, Board of Appeals?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "I'd have to look at the ordinance now, I don't have it in front of me. But it's defined in the ordinance and it's only to those specific boards that are in the ordinance." Chair Soto said, "So in separation to that, any other board to that doesn't require this?" Solicitor O'Neill said yes. Chair Soto said, "Okay. Or cannot do more than ten years?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "No, they can do more than ten years. The ten years, it would, this ordinance only applies to I believe four specific boards and it's like Zoning, Public Health, I think, Community Development." Chair Soto said, "Because the reason I'm asking, Mr. Solicitor, is there was an appointment that came in front of us that was 30 years on the board. And so, my question was, does this ordinance allow that person to serve to year 31?" Solicitor O'Neill said, "Well, it depends on what board they're on. If they're on one of the boards that is enumerated in the..." Chair Soto said, "So like, and that was the District Health, what, Mr. Mayor, you put that up..." Solicitor O'Neill said, "That board is not covered under this ordinance. Okay. So, you wouldn't need six votes to allow them to continue to serve. So, the intent of the ordinance was only to include the specific boards which have more robust authority, like Zoning Board, Community Development Board, those kinds of things. I mean if you decide later on, you can change the ordinance to include other boards. But you always have, the council always has the authority to simply vote no on any appointment. And so, if the Mayor puts forth an appointment and he doesn't get his five votes or his six votes, then he has to submit somebody else and try again." Chair Soto said, "Thank you for that clarification." And recognized Mayor Beauregard, "I'm going to state something now, and you might all think I'm crazy, but just going off of the practice that we've utilized over the past. Since I've been on the Council since January of 2020, we just had an across-the-board two-thirds requirement for anybody who was over 10 years. I'm okay with that. I think it actually makes some sense where, you know, it maintains that protection, but it's just across-the-board versus regarding handfuls. So if there, say,

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was an amendment to this to tweak the language and have it apply to all boards and just keep it simple, I think that actually is a good thing. I'm fine with that. Just a thought." Chair Soto recognized Clr. DiZoglio, "I just have one question, especially with the boards. When I applied for a board a long time ago and never got a call back for, but the question I have for you is, what are we doing to promote these boards? Because I had to go looking for them. So, and also, I know it's more volunteering and etc., but I just feel like we're not promoting them out enough to bring in people. So, I don't know what you, Mr. Mayor, have anything in the pipeline to promote that?" Mayor Beauregard said, "Yes, so it was more recently we've actually been promoting it extensively. We got a pretty wide swath of applicants with a lot of good experience that we've been able to bring to the Council and the Council, thankfully, has seen fit to appoint them. And so, you know, we had a big push on social media, I think, late last year. That's something that we could certainly every now and then just kind of build into our posting cadence, so to speak, having, you know, just a quick reminder to people about the opportunities. But that was something that we were really intentional about and the results of that were fantastic. And not to mention, too, something that, you know, all of the returning councilors, I've had this conversation with Councilor Drew as well, where, you know, all of us come to the table here with our own networks, right? If you know people who might have particular interest in, you know, say one area or another, you know, we have that link for people to apply. I would say leverage your networks if you have folks who might be interested in giving back and sending them our way and we'll take a look. But that's something that, you know, we've been intentional about it, and it doesn't hurt to continue doing that." Solicitor O'Neill said, "So, just for a clarification for the Council. So right now, the only boards that this applies to are Community Development Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Licensing Board, Housing Authority and Conservation Commission. So other boards are not covered by the ordinance. They would be able to continue to serve over 10 years with just a five five votes. So if you wanted to change the ordinance, you would change Section B to change that definition in whatever way you saw fit." Chair Soto recognized Clr. Simard, "Thanks, Madam Chair. If there's no more discussion, I'll make a friendly amendment. So, reference to T.O. 26-7, it would read an ordinance allowing for continued service on all boards and commissions by a two thirds vote, six votes to the City Council." - **Motion to amend by Clr. Simard, seconded by Pesce to insert the word "all" in front of references to board and commission in Section 3-80 of Chapter 3 of the Methuen Municipal Code – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

15. New Business:

Resolutions:

TR-26-14 A Resolution Authorizing Acceptance of a FY26 Shannon Community Safety Initiative Grant (Requested by the Mayor and Chief of Police) - **Motion to approve by Clr. Pesce, seconded by Clr. DiZoglio – UPON VOTE – unanimously approved.**

WITHDRAWN - TR-26-15 Order Authorizing an Amendment of Order No. 5754 Borrowing to Pay Costs for FY23 CIP to Reclass \$19,359 Between Enterprise Capital Projects (Requested by the Mayor and Director of Public Works)

Any Other Business for the Good and Welfare of the Community – Chair Soto recognized Clr. Simard, "Thank you, Madam Chair. Moving forward, I noticed past meetings during a moment of silence, which is a solemn tribute, I think, to our residents of Methuen and those related to Methuen, that we limit our honorees, for lack of a better word, to Methuen residents or people that are associated with Methuen. Moving forward." Chair Soto said, "So, Councilor Simard recommended that for a moment of silence, that it be a resident of Methuen. Would you like that voted on, Councilor, in the future? Or just would you like that amended into the Council rules?" Clr. Simard said, "Yes, if we could do that without a vote, I think I know I spoke to some of the Councilors that

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were in favor of that also, but I just think it would pay more tribute to the people of Methuen.” Chair Soto said, “So, Mr. Solicitor, if your office could tell us where we would add that amendment in our council rules and procedures, that would be kindly appreciated so that we could have it on the agenda for March 2nd for Councilor Simard.” Solicitor O’Neill agreed. Chair Soto recognized Clr. Pesce, “And I, thank you, just want to add, too, if we can create a sort of blurb, too, for the Clerk because a lot of these requests come in via public participation or emailed to us. So, could we have a written summation that explains to them that we’re no longer doing that? So that she has an automatic response.” Solicitor O’Neill agreed. Mayor Beauregard said, “Just a heads up, Madam Chair, if you go back, I know we’ve already passed it on the agenda, but in my email of Tuesday, February 10th, with the agenda items, just so you know, TR-26-15 is the fourth attachment in the email, just so you’re aware.” Chair Soto said, “So, we did receive the order, Mr. Mayor, we did receive the TR-26-15, you are 100% correct, but we did not receive the order number 5754 that you’re asking this Council to amend.” Mayor Beauregard said, “Yes, that’s not relevant to anything that the Council would actually vote on. You would vote on the actual TR-26-15, not the original fiscal year 23 CIP.” Chair Soto said, “So for context of what the Councilors are voting on. So if I may ask the Solicitor, since we’re still on the floor, your TR-26-15 order authorizing the amendment of the order number 5754, borrowing to pay costs for CIP 23 to reclass the \$19,359 between enterprise capital projects, the order of 5754, we did an amendment to that previously for I think almost \$400,000 was it, or \$300 and something thousand. Even then that order was attached. We didn’t receive it on this order. So, in my opinion, it is incomplete. Are you saying that it is not? Because when I look at the document, you give me the piece of paper. These are all new Councilors. They didn’t see that Mr. Mayor previously. So, I’m requesting that it be provided to the Councilors so that it could be voted on March 2nd.” Mayor Beauregard just asked that TR-26-15 be put on the March 2nd CC agenda with an EPA attached. Chair Soto agreed.

16. Adjourn – 9:01 PM

**Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Yarid Ferry
Assistant Council Clerk**

At a meeting where a quorum was present, the foregoing minutes were approved by the Methuen City Council on March 2, 2026 by a unanimous vote.