

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
WOBURN CITY HALL
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.**

Voting Members present: President Michael Concannon, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Joanne Campbell, Councilor Richard Gately, Councilor Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Lou DiMambro, and Councilor Charles Viola. Absent: Councilor Joseph Demers and Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen

Also present: State Sen. Cindy Friedman, 4th Middlesex District; State Rep. Michelle Ciccolo, 15th Middlesex District; State Rep. Richard Haggerty, 30th Middlesex District; City of Woburn Economic Development Manager Casey Hagerty

* * * * *

Reading of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to waive the reading of and to approve the minutes of September 25, 2023; approved, 7-0.

.

* * * * *

Resolve for Committee on Liaison to meet with the mayor to discuss migrant families:

President Concannon said the committee met a few weeks ago with the mayor and relevant department heads and there was a conversation about the migrant crisis. He said it was a good conversation. He said it was decided to invite the state delegation to see how the situation is progressing and to share the concerns of the department heads. Rep. Haggerty thanked the committee for the invitation. He said the delegation has received some questions from the committee, and he is hoping to go through those. He said one of the questions about the lack of interpreters. Rep. Haggerty said the National Guard has translators on site. He said there is at least one interpreter at each hotel. He said Google Translate has been an effective tool. He said Gov. Healey in August declared a state of emergency. He said last week further steps were taken to cap the number of migrants that are being accepted. He said Lt. General L. Scott Rice was appointed as the state's Emergency Assistance Director and he will oversee the program in its entirety. He said the National Guard is coordinating with local law enforcement. He said he communicated with the administration and Police Chief Robert Rufo about a week ago. He said he was told things are improving. Sen. Friedman said reimbursement has been \$104 per student per day. She said she thinks there are 83 students from migrant families projected to attend schools in Woburn in November. She said the schools just applied for an emergency grant from the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education. She said Woburn applied last week for another \$70,000 from DESE. She said Woburn is getting the maximum amount of

reimbursement funding. She said the state has increased transportation funding for students who qualify to attend school under the McKinney-Vento Act. She said there is a newly established fund for donations. She said a regional representative meets once a week with local volunteer coordinators. She said local volunteers have taken an oversized responsibility in Woburn and they are doing an amazing, amazing job. She said the focus is starting to be on more normal activities. She said the National Guard is taking over. Sen. Friedman referred to a question about whether the state's Right to Shelter law has been misappropriated and said she is not totally sure what the issue is. She said all the migrants who are staying at hotels are here legally and under the authority of the U.S. Government. She said all the migrant families have children who are under 21 or women who are pregnant. President Concannon said the inquiry about the misappropriation of the RTS law has more to do with it being adopted in the 1980s, and housing migrant families was not the intention. Sen. Friedman said the people who are here meet the qualifications. She said the biggest issue is getting the migrants to work. She said if the migrants are not allowed to work, then they can't leave where they are. She said she is not totally clear what that is looking like with the state. She said there is a system being set up to match employers under the Learn to Earn program. Rep. Haggerty said getting people to work is a big piece of the transition. President Concannon said the delegation's response to the committee's questions is pretty good and he appreciates that. He said there was a sense of frustration at the committee's previous meeting about this issue. He said there have been some things that have happened since that meeting. He said hopefully some of the frustration is abating. Councilor Campbell asked if there are any steps being taken so the brunt of the responsibility for housing migrants doesn't fall on only the cities and towns with hotels. Sen. Friedman said there was a briefing last week. She said the state is looking at larger facilities like the joint base on Cape Cod and at UMass-Lowell. She said the legislature has been told there will be no more housing available at hotel rooms as of November 1. She said the governor has said the hotels are at capacity. Councilor Campbell said that is good news. Sen. Friedman said there are still some issues that need to be worked out. She said there are concerns about where for instance a 5-year-old child will go. She said the state is trying to move people from emergency shelter situations to more permanent housing. She said by state law the migrants are entitled to money, so people don't end up homeless. She said housing prices are so high. She said there are a lot of moving pieces. She said it's going to be a while. Rep. Haggerty said 150 communities are housing migrants. He said there are 158 families in Woburn. He said there are 7,000 families across the commonwealth. He said he does think Woburn is accommodating more migrants than other communities because the city has hotels. He said the situation in communities without hotels is more complex. He said the McKinney-Vento Act requires migrant children to go to school in the communities in which they are settled. Councilor Campbell said there are 350 communities in Massachusetts and she thinks the migrants should be equally settled. Sen. Friedman said there are some communities that do not have hotels. Councilor Ferullo said there are 62 communities in the state that do not even have police departments. Councilor Campbell said some constituents are concerned about the situation at the hotels. She said it is difficult for authorities to find out information about the migrants. She asked how residents are supposed to feel safe. Rep. Haggerty said the migrants have been vetted by the federal government. Councilor Campbell said Chief Rufo had some concerns about migrants that had security anklets and that he couldn't get any information. She said he found that troublesome. Rep. Haggerty said that is a fair criticism. Sen. Friedman said it would be nice for the state to identify what is known about the migrants. She said things are happening so fast. Councilor Campbell said Chief Rufo said he

could not get answers. President Concannon said Rep. Haggerty said he hopes some of the communication issues have been cleared up by now. Councilor Campbell said it is still concerning. She said she wants to be able to go back with answers to people with whom she has talked. She said she feels like this has been dropped on the city. She said the volunteers are getting exhausted. Rep. Ciccolo said the legislature has had as little notice as the city has. She said people are coming too quickly. She said unfortunately this is a fluid situation and it is not ideal. Sen. Friedman said everyone was caught off-guard. Councilor Gately said the city can't take care of all these people. He said kids want to go to school. He said there are good, caring people in the city. He said there are two big vacant buildings in the city, the former Hurl and Wyman schools. He said dozens of people could be put in there. He said winter is coming. He said there are places right there. Rep. Haggerty said the real hope is to find more permanent situations. Councilor Gately asked where those would be. Sen. Friedman said the state is open to all ideas. Councilor Gately said there are a lot of nice people coming in. He said some of them are not doing well. He said they are afraid of what's next. He said he has been thinking about this for over a month. He said this train is not going to stop. He said it is something to think about. Councilor Dillon thanked the three members of the delegation for coming here tonight. He said he has called all three legislators and gotten timely responses. He asked if there is a way to speed up the work permit process. He said there are businesses in the city that close early due to lack of help. He said if the migrants have jobs they will start to feel like they are part of the community. He said his other thought has to do with safety. He said he wants to make sure the residents and migrants alike are safe. He said the whole process came up quickly. He said he finds most of his information from the newspaper. He said people would be more at ease if there was more information. He said people are questioning the transparency. Rep. Haggerty said the members of the council can reach out to the delegation for more information. He said the legislators also have questions they are looking for have answered. He said the governor is administering the program. He said they want this to be an open process. Rep. Ciccolo said the Dept. of Public Health is gleaning more information through its health screening process. She said this is a promising development. Councilor Viola asked if the city is recouping its local hotel/motel tax. Rep. Haggerty said local hotel/motel taxes are being covered. Councilor Viola said the hospitals are stressed. He said migrants are using emergency rooms. He asked if the state is going to help with the hospitals. Sen. Friedman said they are being more pro-active about medical care. She said medical personnel are going to the hotels and motels. She said there is a program that involves the schools and medical students. She said there is a lot of work being done in the health care realm. Rep. Ciccolo said the state is providing pediatric exam vouchers so the migrants do not have to go to emergency rooms. Councilor Ferullo said one of the public safety issues is the requirement to disclose criminal history is minimal to abysmal. He said he does not think this is as big of an issue as it was at the outset. He said he talks regularly to Chief Rufo. Councilor DiMambro said the Sonesta is in Ward 6. He said it is kind of a small facility. He said it was mentioned it is important to get the migrants into the labor market. He said he believes they need documentation and that process takes in excess of 18 months. He asked if the migrants will be staying in hotels for 18 months. He asked how the migrants will transition to permanent residences once they are in the work force. He said Massachusetts has one of the most expensive real estate markets in the country. He said that is a big concern. Rep. Ciccolo said there is not an easy answer. She said there is a housing crisis in Massachusetts. She said Woburn is doing its share to provide affordable housing. She said the governor filed a bond bill last week for over \$4 billion that will include affordable housing. She said there are tax credits that will bolster the

market. She said the state is going to look at all options. She said people can't stay in hotels forever. Sen. Friedman said the state is setting up a program that will expedite requests for work permits. She said the migrants will be eligible to work. She said the state is setting up a program with employers to start hiring. Councilor DiMambro said it seems like there will be plenty of employment opportunities. Sen. Friedman said the trick is matching employers with employees. Rep. Haggerty said the state recognizes housing is expensive. He said half of the migrants are in hotels and the other half are in other types of housing. He said the goal remains to transition the migrants out of hotels to more permanent housing. Councilor DiMambro said it will be burdensome on the state. Rep. Haggerty said it will still be cheaper than hotels. Sen. Friedman said there is a belief that when you get people making money, there will be collaboration. She said once you get money in people's pockets, they band together to make it work. Councilor Campbell said she works with St. Vincent de Paul. She asked when the state will stop accepting migrants. Sen. Friedman said the state will be at full capacity as of Nov. 1. She said after that there will be no places to put anyone. She said she know the Speaker of the House and the Senate President and the Governor met to determine what capacity is. Councilor Campbell said it is a wonderful thing to see the volunteers getting together. Their concern is being able to prepare. She said it would be beneficial for the volunteers to know how many migrants are coming and when. Sen. Friedman the state just doesn't know. She said the legislature has asked those questions as well. Councilor Campbell said it would be helpful to let the council know so they can advise the volunteers. She said the volunteers are exhausted. Councilor Gately said his concern is the migrant being fed and clothed and warm during the winter. He asked if they are going to have transportation. He said he doesn't want the migrants to be outside when it is 30 degrees. President Concannon thanked the delegation for coming in. He said the council appreciates their time. He thinks the council has gotten some clarity on this issue.

* * * * *

Order authorizing Mayor to participate in Massachusetts Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (PACE Massachusetts): Economic Development Manager Hagerty introduced Robert Dolan, Vice President of Green Finance, MassDevelopment, 99 High St., Boston, MA. Economic Development Manager Hagerty read from a prepared statement as follows: "Today, I am here to talk to you about an initiative, the MassDevelopment PACE Program. PACE, the Property Assessed Clean Energy program, is designed to promote sustainable development, energy efficiency, and environmental conservation in communities across the State. PACE offers commercial property owners an innovative way to finance energy improvements. Through special betterment assessments on their property tax bills, property owners can fund these improvements. It's essential to note that no public funding is used in this program. Participation in the PACE program is not only straightforward but also potentially transformative for our city. It requires a one-time opt-in vote of the City Council. By allowing local businesses and property owners to access low-cost, long-term financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, PACE can stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and increase property values. This program aligns with the City's commitment to environmental sustainability. It encourages energy-efficient upgrades and renewable energy installations, a crucial step towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, decreasing energy consumption, and contributing to a cleaner and healthier environment. By opting into the PACE program, we can position Woburn as a forward-

thinking and environmentally conscious community. Woburn can be a leader in promoting sustainability and responsible development. I'd like to emphasize that key department heads who would be most involved with this program have met with Mass Development and are supportive of the program. They understand the potential benefits for our city. Now, I would like to introduce, Rob Dolan, Mass Development's Vice President for Green Lending. Mr. Dolan will be able to provide you with some more detailed information about the PACE program and answer any questions that you have about the City's involvement." Mr. Dolan said PACE is a relatively new program for which commercial property owners, residential developments with five units or more or non-profit entities are eligible. He said it is designed to encourage energy improvements to HVAC systems, solar panels and the like on existing commercial properties and new construction. He said the PACE program works similarly to a commercial loan. He said PACE financing is tied to the property and not to the person who is doing the renovations. He said the financing is transferred to a new property owner if sold. He said a municipal opt-in is required. He said PACE personnel work with the Treasurer/Collector's office to update tax software. He said there are usually two primary questions, the first of which is what it means for the staff. He said staff will be trained how to add the assessment to the tax bills. He said there will not be ad hoc billing. He said the city or town is acting as a pass-through. He said the second question is what the expense for the city or town is. He said the city or town is not involved in collections. He said property tax collections remain at the front of the line. He said PACE is subordinate to local tax collections. He said 69 cities and towns have adopted the PACE program, ranging from small communities like Dudley and Ashburnham to large cities like Cambridge and Boston. He said there is a real cross section of communities involved. Councilor Dillon said he did some research into the PACE program and it looks good for both businesses and the city. He said there seems to be no downfall. Mr. Dolan said they want to work with the city and town staff so they are comfortable with the program. Councilor Dillon asked if a 20-unit apartment building would qualify for the program. Mr. Dolan answered affirmatively. Councilor DiMambro asked if the program is geared more toward high end, state of the art development or if there is a broader spectrum. He said he wants to know how broad the program is. Mr. Dolan said there is a requirement to show a developer is reducing energy consumption. He said that is all part of the application process. He said the application requires a review of the energy system. He said the lenders are also project managers. He said there are no on-site visits, but there is back and forth communication. Councilor DiMambro asked if the end goal is to save energy and utility money. Mr. Dolan answered affirmatively. Councilor Viola asked if any communities have had to hire personnel to accommodate the PACE program. Mr. Dolan said he has not seen that. He said if a city or town does not move forward with this, it's because there is no project in the pipeline. He said there have been no issues from a staffing perspective. Councilor Dillon asked Mr. Dolan to explain what the stretch code is for people not in the construction world. Mr. Dolan said the stretch code details what standards need to be met. He said the code is becoming more stringent. He said the objective is to move toward the use of passive energy rather than fossil fuels. President Concannon said he has a couple of questions. He said he was concerned there would be a tax that was assessed unilaterally. He said clearly it is not. He said it is completely up to the business owner to determine if they want to participate. Mr. Dolan said it is almost like a private loan. President Concannon said he also had a question about whether there was a percentage fee. He said there is not. He said he is fine with this as long as there is no additional burden. Motion made by Councilor Dillon and seconded by Councilor Viola that the order "ought to pass;" 7-0.

* * * * *

Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Viola to adjourn;
approved, 7-0. President Concannon adjourned the meeting at 7:16 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees