

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMERS
WOBURN CITY HALL**

Voting Members present: Chair Charles Viola, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Joanne Campbell, President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Robert Toro, Councilor William Pappalardo, Councilor Lou DiMambro, and Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen

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Discussion of the FY 2025 Budget: Mayor Concannon said he would like to make a couple of quick comments before the committee starts discussions with the various department heads. He said he will not read the cover letter he submitted with the budget last week. He said he appreciates the time and attention the City Council puts into this effort. He said the council is aware of the proposed increase to the budget. He said the city-side increase is 3.38-percent. He said he thinks what the City Council will hear from the department heads is their budgets are relatively lean with a few exceptions. He said he appreciates the input he got from the department heads and their ability to manage their department. He said he wants to give sincere thanks to all of them. He said he had pretty direct conversations about what is needed and what the city can afford. He said he thinks the city is in a position where this is the best it can do for this year. He said he also wants to thank City Auditor Charles Doherty for his expertise. He said Auditor Doherty is a tremendous asset to the city of Woburn. **Treasurer/Collector –** Representing the Treasurer/Collector's Dept. was Treasurer/Collector Timothy Donovan. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said there have not been a lot of significant changes in the department, after a lot of change the previous year, when there was some shifting of titles and responsibilities. He said everyone in the department is now comfortable in their role. He said it has been a stable year. He said tax collections have gone pretty well and he expects them to be right in line by the end of the fiscal year. He said the same is true for water/sewer fees and excise tax collections. He said tax title from FY '22 and FY '23 have been added and they are in the range of \$2.5 million. He said some of the tax title property is on contaminated land. He said that involves a very slow process. He said the collectors are trying to get that cleared up before it hits land court. He said interest revenue is up over \$2.5 million. He said the rates are great and have resulted in a significant increase. He said his payroll fees are increasing \$2,000 because the city changed banks. He said the bank the city was using was acquired by Eastern Bank and the fees were adjusted slightly. He said his postage line item is also increasing from \$84,000 to \$93,000 due to increases in postal fees on July 1. He said the department should be okay. He said his office has taken into consideration the increase of 5 cents per stamp. Councilor Demers said the Treasurer/Collector's office is one of the more forward-facing departments at City Hall. He said the staff does very well. He referenced the increase in postage fees and asked if residents can opt out of paper billing or if there is a requirement to mail paper bills. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said residents can opt out of paper billing. He said they can also sign up to receive electronic bills. He said his office sends out reminders. He said his office has seen an increase in paperless billing. Councilor Demers asked if Treasurer/Collector Donovan knows the ratio of people who

have opted for paper vs. paperless billing. Treasurer/Collector Donovan said he does not know the exact percentage. He said it is on the rise and continues to increase. He said most real estate taxes are paid by escrow, which is not on-line. He said the office has options. He said they have seen a decrease in walk-ins. Councilor Demers thanked Treasurer/Collector Donovan and his staff. He said if there is anything he and his staff need, they can reach out to the council. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said no one over the age of 30 does anything by mail anymore. She said she is pretty sure that age bracket won't be impacted by the postage fees. Chair Viola thanked Treasurer/Collector Donovan and his staff. He said the Treasurer/Collector's office is one of the most forward-facing departments at City Hall. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by President Dillon to take the Purchasing Dept. budget out of order from the posted agenda; approved, 9-0. **Purchasing** - Representing the Purchasing Dept. was Purchasing Agent Orazio DeLuca. Agent DeLuca said his departmental budget is level-funded, which is fine by him. He said the Purchasing Dept. runs a pretty tight ship. He said his department doesn't do much outside the lines to get the job done. He said there are only two of them in the room. He said he loves his job. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said the council's Liaison Committee was talking this week about electricity aggregation, with which agent DeLuca is going to be involved. She thanked Agent DeLuca for everything he and his staff do. Agent DeLuca said he is looking at different programs for energy. He said there are a couple of different options and he hopes to find the best deal for the city. Councilor DiMambro said Purchasing Agent DeLuca does a great job. He said the council appreciates him always trying to get the best price. President Dillon said he is very impressed with the way Agent DeLuca crunches the numbers and thinks outside the box. He said Agent DeLuca always works to get the best cost for the city. Chair Viola thanked Agent DeLuca. He said the Purchasing Dept. is very important to the city. He said he is looking forward to hearing about electricity aggregation options. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by President Dillon to return to the regular order of business; approved, 9-0.

Recreation – Representing the Recreation Dept. was Recreation Director Rory Lindstrom. Director Lindstrom said there are a couple of increases in the Recreation Dept. budget. She said the summer clinic instructors line item has increased by about 10 percent in an effort to upgrade the summer staff. She said the maintenance supplies line item has increased by about 10 percent due to rising costs. She said the utilities and bus rental line items have increased to reflect rising costs. She said the increase in the bus trips line item is due to the addition of some field trips, which she said have gone over well. She said the special education account has increased due to an increasing number of people with special needs who participate in the programs, particularly autistic children. She said she put in for a program coordinator but the position wasn't funded. She said she had a conversation with the mayor. She said this is a position the department will need in the future due to the increase in recreation programs. She said she and Wellness Coordinator Brian Nagle have all they can handle. She said the department needs a full-time programming coordinator. She said she and Mr. Nagle work seven days until 7 p.m. in the summer. She said adding one more person would be helpful. Councilor Demers thanked Director Lindstrom for everything she does. He said he worked for the Recreation Dept. as a seasonal summer aide and he knows how far the department has come. He said the department has gone light years ahead of where it was since then. He said programs have been added and expanded. He said Recreation Dept. programs have reached hundreds of residents. He said the special needs programs are exemplary. He said he appreciates Director Lindstrom's candor about staffing. Councilor Toro thanked Director Lindstrom for everything she and her staff do. He said he knows how important it is to have a thriving Recreation Dept. in a community. He said he wishes

the council could have considered the new position that Director Lindstrom wants to add. He told Director Lindstrom to keep up the good work. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said it seems like just yesterday the council was appointing Director Lindstrom. She thanked Director Lindstrom for what she and Mr. Nagle do. She said the Recreation Dept. is a value add to the council's constituents. She said it is measurable. She said she is disappointed the coordinator position is not funded. She said maybe it will be next year. She said she knows there is money in the 2024 capital budget for Leland Park and she knows the department is moving forward with bids. Director Lindstrom said she is waiting to hear back about the playground equipment. She said she does have some designs that she hopes she will be able to share with the council by this fall. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she has her fingers crossed for the fall. Councilor DiMambro said the Recreation Dept. is doing an amazing job. He said limiting the increase to 1 percent for the department's overall budget needs to be acknowledged. He said what the Recreation Dept. does for the city is amazing. President Dillon asked if adult volunteers can be used until the Recreation Coordinator position is funded. Director Lindstrom said that is something she can look into. She said it has been hard getting part-time help. She said the department used to have a lot of staff. President Dillon said he drives by the old Spence Farm stand on a regular basis. He said when that was turned over to the Recreation Dept. there was controversy. He said when he sees the farm stand lit up, it makes him happy. He said it is a great use. He said the Recreation Dept. brought heart and soul to it. Director Lindstrom said the farm stand is used seven days a week. She said it's nice the farm stand is not just sitting there. She said she really enjoys having the space. Councilor Campbell said there is a line item for a part time clerk for \$7,072 that is offset by a revolving account. She asked Director Lindstrom to elaborate. Director Lindstrom said there is a part-time clerk's position that is funded by fees from programs. She said that position has been there for three years. She said the department needed help with billing and advertising. Councilor Campbell said she hopes there is more conversation next year about the new position. Councilor Ferullo thanked Director Lindstrom and Mr. Nagle for their prompt response to an issue with the splash pad. He said they took a bad situation and turned it into a good one. Councilor Pappalardo said it is going to be difficult to add to the budget this year but he has seen what the Recreation Dept. does. He said this is an exceptional situation and the city should fund that new position. Chair Viola thanked Director Lindstrom and Mr. Nagle for all they do for the community. **Mayor** – Mayor Concannon said his office will have the same level of staffing in FY '25 as it does now. He said he appreciates the support of the City Council for the positions that were added this fiscal year. He said the Community Outreach position is having a great impact. He said there are already countless stories of Woburn residents who Ms. Stone has assisted. He thanked the council for adding the Chief of Staff position. He said the Substance Misue Coordinator has already hit the ground running. He said this was a part-time position under the previous administration. He said the position was very active at first but then it waned. He said fortunately there is a funding mechanism. He said Substance Misue Coordinator Mackenzie Dezieck has begun to assist members of the community. He said there is also a place holder line item for salary adjustments once contractual agreements are made with employee unions and other personnel. He said he believes the figure is realistic. He said the maintenance line items are mostly the same. He said there is one reduction in professional development. He said the budget is the same as the one the City Council supported in 2024. Councilor Demers asked about the dynamic in the office with the new staff. Mayor Concannon said the staff is working very well. He said there is a great team. He said there are roles that are still being defined. He said Administrative Assistant Dianne Mearls is very busy. He said

Samantha Stone is dealing with calls for assistance that may have gone underserved. He said the Chief of Staff is dealing with the daily comings and goings. He said that person was helpful during the budget process. He said Ms. Dezieck jumped right in. He said it is a team effort with which so far he is pleased. Councilor Demers said he wants to echo the importance of the Substance Misuse Coordinator. He said he thinks a full-time approach will help residents. He said he thinks the city stepping up will go a long way. Mayor Concannon said Ms. Dezieck has a network out there. Councilor Demers said he will look forward to her first presentation. Councilor Demers said this is his fourth budget. He said when he first joined the council he noticed there were \$32,000 in expenditures for community services. He said he does not doubt the worthiness of the organization, but he does have concerns there are taxpayer funds being used. Mayor Concannon said he asked the same questions when he was on the City Council. He said these organizations offer direct services to Woburn residents. He said former City Solicitor Ellen Callahan Doucette walked him through case law and provided him with guidance that this is an appropriate use of funds. Councilor Demers said when he sees these organizations receive other large grants. He said the city is looking at departments with staffing increases. He said these organizations do benefit Woburn. He said he is trying to take a holistic approach to the budget. Councilor Ferullo said he wants to compliment Mayor Concannon on hiring Ms. Dezieck. He said is looking forward to working with her in the future. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Councilor Demers for bringing up the importance of the Substance Misuse Coordinator. She said there are so many people out there struggling with addiction. She said she is happy there is a resource in the city for people. Councilor Pappalardo asked Mayor Concannon to elaborate about the line item for salary adjustments. Mayor Concannon said there is an expectation of contract settlements. He said this is a place holder with a number that he feels will cover the cost of contractually negotiated raises. He said the actual number will be determined when the contracts are settled. President Dillon said he is in the mayor's office three or four times a week. He said the staff the mayor has added has been beneficial. He said Ms. Mearls does a great job. He said the mayor's staff serves the public. He said he calls Ms. Stone two or three times a week. He said he thinks the Chief of Staff position works with him directly to the benefit of the city. He said the city is getting more things done. He said he thinks the public needs to know that. He said as far as the Substance Misuse Coordinator position is concerned there are people in the city who are struggling. He said Ms. Dezieck is clearly making a difference. He said there was a need for that position. Councilor DiMambro said he appreciates the effort of the extra staff. He said the need for a Substance Abuse Coordinator is so great they may have to add another similar type of position. Chair Viola thanked the mayor for adding the Substance Misuse Coordinator. He said he sees what happens when people don't get the help they need. He thanked the mayor for adding Ms. Stone. He said she has been helpful. **City Clerk** – City Clerk Lindsay Higgins said there were three city-wide elections during the last fiscal year, for which supplemental appropriations were required to cover staffing and operations costs. She said there is some reimbursement from the state for early voting and vote by mail costs. She said this year's budget contains requests for increases in election staffing to comply with new requirements under the Votes Act of 2022. She said the city's voting precincts were redistricted and a split precinct was added in Ward 1. She said there is an increase in the postage line item due to significant increases in postal rates. She said printing costs have increased. She said there are currently 29,686 registered voters. She said an increase in voters results in an increase in the costs of printing ballots and annual census mailings. She said the department incurs some administrative support costs from the License Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals. She said those

two boards do not have funding besides salary. She said there is a capital budget request will be for election poll pads, which she said are currently used by 219 communities in the state. She said Woburn is a little behind the curve when it comes to using poll pads. She thanked her staff by name and said they continue to get more and more responsibility every year and they have stepped up. Councilor DiMambro said the City Clerk's office is one of the most visible offices in the city and he hopes City Clerk Higgins has enough money in her budget. City Clerk Higgins replied that will depend upon election costs. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she misses City Clerk Higgins as a member of the council but she feels City Clerk Higgins is thriving in her role. She said the City Clerk's office is one of the most forward-facing offices in City Hall and it is an important office. President Dillon said he sees City Clerk Higgins as often as he sees Mayor Concannon. He thanked her for the guidance she has given him. He said the clerk's staff is outstanding. He said he sees how the staff deals with the general public. He said the staff works hard. He said he was thrilled to vote for her when she was appointed City Clerk. Councilor Demers asked if there are no more than 29,000 voters in Woburn. City Clerk Higgins there are as of today 29,686 registered voters. Councilor Demers asked if there were 9,784 people who voted in the mayoral election last fall. City Clerk Higgins said that is correct. Councilor Demers said the city has to print ballots for every registered voter in the city. He said that has an impact on the budget. He said the clerk's office does a fantastic job. He said he appreciates the patience and guidance City Clerk Higgins puts forth to make the City Council look good. Chair Viola thanked the City Clerk and her staff for doing a tremendous job. **Council on Aging** – Representing the Council on Aging was COA Director Marie Lingblom. Director Lingblom said there is a modest increase in the line item for MCOA dues. She said the Outreach Coordinator position is funded by a grant. She said they are without an Outreach Coordinator at this time. She said they looked to fill the position in the fall with dismal results. She said the need is there. She said people are suffering. She said the proposed salary for the position is \$52,000. She said the COA gets \$142,000 a year in grant funding. She said half of that goes to salaries. She said she knows every department is pressed for cash. She said the staff at the Senior Center works hard for not a ton of money. She said there are 6,000 COA members. She said pickleball has been an activity that is gaining popularity. She said Paul Medeiros has been great in the custodian's role. She said Mr. Medeiros can fix anything. She said the Senior Center needs to offer more competitive salaries. She said they do not get qualified people. She said the COA needs to be able to attract qualified people and they cannot do at offering the salaries they are offering. She said the other big request is for a van. She said the vans are starting to fall apart. She said the vans make 5,500 trips a year. She said there are five part-time van drivers. She said they are all great. She said it is a very busy center. She said they transport about 25 people a day, there and back. She said there are trips all day long. She said the alternative to coming to the Senior Center would be seniors who are left home alone. She said the Senior Center is a lifeline. She said in addition state Reps. Haggerty and Ciccolo have proposed \$75,000 in the state budget. She said hopefully the legislature will approve that. She said they really need two vans. She said the Senior Center serves 150-200 seniors every day. She said they serve 120 meals. She said the center is in a great location. She said there is parking. She said there are 250 pickleball players. She said pickleball seems to be going really well. She said they are hoping to have a fundraiser pickleball tournament. She said the Woburn Fire Dept. has been really great. She said they did carbon monoxide and safety programs. She said she can't say enough about the people who work and volunteer there. She said she loves her job. She said she appreciates the support of the City Council. Councilor DiMambro said the Senior Center does a phenomenal job. He said he sees the vans go by his

house a number of times during the day. He said the parking lot is always full. He said there was a full house for the Memorial Day program. He said the pickleball courts are always full. He said the grounds are immaculate. He said he appreciates everything Director Lingblom and her staff do. Councilor Campbell thanked Director Lingblom for all she does. She said it is not an easy position. She said everything she has done is tremendous. She said pickleball and the other activities for seniors are great. She said she thinks the Outreach Coordinator position is a need. She said these seniors are lonely. She said they need that support. She said she hopes the city can fund that position next year. Director Lingblom said the mayor has been supportive. Councilor Campbell said he believes it's time. She said this is a lifeline for seniors. She thanked Director Lingblom for what she is doing. She said she will support an Outreach Coordinator position. Councilor Pappalardo said he may be the only member of the council who is also a member of the Senior Center. He said he hadn't spent a lot of time there until the last year or two. He said it is growing and it's vibrant. He said you get a good vibe from the people in the building. He said it is a really neat place. President Dillon said the staff at the Senior Center does a really great job. He said the seniors are the ones who built this city and handed it down to the present generations in great shape. He said they worked hard. He said now is the time to give them a little relief and pay them back. He said Paul Medeiros is amazing. He said he has seen Mr. Medeiros in action. Councilor Toro said he has attended multiple events at the Senior Center. He said Ms. Lingblom and her staff have created a welcoming environment. He said close to 30 percent of the city's population is eligible for the Senior Center. He said the COA plays a very important role. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she remembers when Director Lingblom was appointed to this position. She said seniors are the city's most vulnerable population. She said 38 percent of the city's residents are seniors. She said tending to senior citizens is one of the most important things the city can do. She said the COA positions are very important. She said it is part of a community's responsibility to provide relief to its most vulnerable population. Councilor DiMambro said he wants the public to know the Senior Center is a good place to hang out. He said there are resources there. He said Director Lingblom runs a boatload of programs there. Councilor Demers thanked Director Lingblom for everything she does. He said he wishes he had more time to get over there. He said he plans to come in to visit and say hello. He said when he was a legislative aide for former State Rep. James Dwyer he was there a lot. Councilor Ferullo thanked Director Lingblom for all she does. He said he is trying to get his father to go to the Senior Center, thus far to no avail, even though he lives nearby. Chair Viola thanked Director Lingblom for everything she and her staff do to help the city's aging population. He asked Director Lingblom to reach out to the council if she needs anything. **Fire** – Representing the Woburn Fire Dept. was Fire Chief Donald Kenton. Chair Viola thanked Chief Kenton and the WFD for their help on Memorial Day. He said there was an issue at the cemetery and the fire department responded professionally. Chief Kenton said there are currently five new firefighters who will graduate from the academy in a couple of weeks and will join the fire department. He said the new personnel will reduce overtime. He said he is asking for a modest 7 percent increase to his budget. Councilor DiMambro said the fire department does a hell of a job. He said for what the fire department does, a 7 percent increase is reasonable. He told the chief to let the council know if there is anything it can do for the fire department. Councilor Demers said he wants to commend the department for everything it does for the city. He said the response to the fire on Richmond Park was phenomenal. Chief Kenton said two children were rescued from that fire. Councilor Demers said he sees the line item for overtime is at \$1.4 million. He asked the chief to explain to the public how the overtime dynamic works. Chief Kenton said overtime is up

about \$100,000 from last year. He said he went over this year due to some staffing challenges. He said the additional five firefighters will keep that close to what is budgeted. He said the department is still looking to find the sweet spot for overtime. He said the department is on it. He said they do have a statistical meeting monthly. President Dillon said the men and women in the fire department are heroes. He said they save lives. He said it is a calling that is admirable. He said there are other things the department does that are impressive. He said he called the fire department to assist in a situation involving a business and a resident and the cooperation the fire department displayed was impressive. He said the public should know about the number of safety inspections the department performs. He said that is a full-time job in itself. He said the fire department does it with a smile. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Chief Kenton and his department for fighting a recent fire on Richard Circle. She said no one was hurt because the fire department arrived quickly and took care of it. She said the council's responsibility is to keep the public safe. She said she worries about the fire department staff working so much overtime. She said it is not good for them or their families. She said having the overtime number come down is a good thing for everyone in the long run. Councilor Pappalardo said he caught up with Chief Kenton about a month ago and he educated him. He said one of the things they discussed was the need for additional technology and asked if that was baked into this budget. Chief Kenton said it is. Councilor Campbell said she hopes the five new firefighters work out for the city. She thanked Chief Kenton and his department for their response to the fire on Richmond Park, and what the men and women of the department did to save two children who easily could have perished in that fire. Chief Kenton said one of the new firefighters will be the first female firefighter on the department. Councilor Ferullo said the quality of service the fire department provides is extremely commendable. He said the execution at Richmond Park should be recognized and congratulated. Chair Viola thanked Chief Kenton and his staff for what they do. He praised the fire department for its quick response to a fire at Woburn Animal Hospital. He said they did a tremendous job. He asked if there are two dispatchers operating right now. Chief Kenton said there are two dispatchers during the day. **Health** – Representing the Health Dept. was Board of Health Agent Jack Fralick. Agent Fralick said his departmental budget has remained essentially unchanged except for salaries and the trash contract. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she thinks a lot of people take for granted what a great trash collection program the city has. Agent Fralick said the prevailing wage has been crippling the city as far as costs are concerned. He said he has been trying to increase the recycling rate by negotiating with Waste Management. He said Waste Management is coming up with a way to introduce rolling automated pickup. He said Waste Management is a great company to work with. He said the city is looking for a way to save money and still provide excellent services. Councilor Demers asked if residents can come to the Health Dept. office for a recycling sticker they can put on a barrel. Agent Fralick said they give out those stickers every day. Councilor Demers asked if Waste Management will take recycling in a barrel with a sticker. Agent Fralick said the Health Dept. office has stopped giving out small bins. Councilor Demers asked Agent Fralick to elaborate about automated trash pickup. Agent Fralick said the prevailing wage for trash pickup is \$47 per hour, which is driving the collection agencies toward automation. He said the barrels would be provided by Waste Management. He said the city would be renting the barrels more or less. He said it is time. He said there are not many contractors who pick up trash the way it is picked up in Woburn. He said the savings could be 13-14 percent. Councilor Demers asked if there might be issues with automated pickup on the city's narrower streets. Agent Fralick said that would be something the contractor would have to deal with on a daily basis. He said he expects residents

will adapt to the automated system. He said people are pretty smart. President Dillon said Agent Fralick has a good staff. He said Administrative Assistant Patricia Bergeron-George is the first person people see and she greets everyone with a smile. He said she always has information. He said Health Inspector Meghan Doherty took care of an issue when a business needed an inspection on a Friday afternoon, after City Hall had closed. He said Insp. Doherty jumped into action after hours. He said Insp. Doherty went above and beyond. Councilor DiMambro asked how the automated trash collection will work with a family with 4-6 people who may produce more than one barrel of trash per week. Agent Fralick said there will be a provision for a bag buy or purchase of another tote. He said he expects the cost of another tote to be about \$125 per year, but that hasn't been worked out yet. **Conservation** – Representing the Conservation Dept. was Conservation Administrator Theresa Murphy. Administrator Murphy said for the first time in a long time her departmental budget is not level funded. She said there is funding this year for an administrative support position. She said the Conservation Dept. has been woefully underfunded for decades. She said a full-time clerk will be able to allow the department head to attend to professional duties and site inspections without leaving the office unoccupied. She said Conservation Day was May 4. She said the Conservation Commission was supported by several groups including the Friends of Horn Pond, the Boy Scouts, the Woburn Golf & Ski Authority, and the Woburn Memorial High School Green Team. She said the Conservation Commission is grateful to all of them. She said Samantha Langone is doing great work as the Community Gardens Coordinator. She said the tree program had another successful year. She said there is an increase to the line item for property maintenance, which she said has been level funded for seven years. She said the miscellaneous travel/meetings line item has increased to \$700 and the trail development line item has been restored to \$1,000, which is what it was 10 years ago. She said money in the trail development line item is used to replace trail markers. She said the Conservation Dept.'s budget is a fraction of the overall city budget. She asked the council to approve the budget as is. Councilor Campbell said she will absolutely support the new position. She said every year for the nine years she has been on the City Council the Conservation Dept. has been asking for more help. She said this office does a tremendous amount of work. She said she is thrilled. President Dillon said he has seen what the Conservation Dept. does at Hurld Park. He said he can't come close to the knowledge Administrator Murphy and the Conservation Commission members have. He said many members of the Conservation Commission are personal friends. He said the effort they put out is amazing. He said he certainly will support the Conservation Dept.'s budget. He said it is important for the Conservation Dept. to be pro-active. Administrator Murphy said it is much better to fix a problem before the fact. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she will support the Conservation Dept.'s budget 100 percent. She said she is not sure how Administrator Murphy managed to do it all these years. She said the City Council generates about 40 percent of the work in the Conservation Dept. She said she applauds Administrator Murphy for being so persistent. She said the Conservation Commission is a great board. Administrator Murphy said they are very dedicated. Councilor DiMambro said Administrator Murphy does a great job. He said there are so many people involved in the Community Gardens. He said people love it. He said he will support the addition to the staff. Chair Viola thanked Administrator Murphy and the Conservation Commission for what they do. Administrator Murphy said she did make a request for another position, an Assistant Conservation Administrator. She said she hopes the position will be funded next year. She thanked the council for its support. **Assessors** – Representing the Assessors Dept. was Chief Appraiser John Connolly. Chief Appraiser Connolly said Board of Assessors Chair Robert Maguire and member

Lori Medeiros are in the audience, along with Senior Residential Appraiser Jane Ventresca. He said Ms. Ventresca does an outstanding job. Chief Appraiser Connolly said he would like to take a moment to recognize Rita McBride, a staff member of the Assessors Dept. who passed away in April. He said Ms. McBride's absence has left a void and he would like to thank her for all she did for the department. He said his departmental budget is pretty much level funded. He said there is a \$2,000 increase in the professional development line item which he said will go toward training. He said a systems manager position is partially funded at \$45,000. He said the mobile assessors line item funds a system that allows the department to take photos and make live entries. He said the personal property audit line item has increased to \$20,000. He said personal property valuations are outsourced. He said there is a 5-year contract. He said everything else is level funded. President Dillon asked about trends in commercial rates. He said the commercial rates in Boston seem to be leveling off. Chief Appraiser Connolly said Boston is going to be struggling a lot with commercial rates. He said commercial rates are really still in recovery after Covid. He said Woburn benefited a little bit but the commercial market is feeling the pain. He said interest rates are impacting development. He said the good thing is Woburn has a lot of projects that are shovel ready, but they have to come to fruition. He said the commercial market is stagnant. He said there is still some incredible movement with the residential market. He said the city saw its first \$2 million residential sale. President Dillon said he appreciates the explanation. He said the office runs very efficiently. Chief Appraiser Connolly said Ms. Ventresca and Analyst Rita Nye have stepped up. Councilor Demers asked Chief Appraiser Connolly about any changes to the revenue base since the last tax classification hearing. Chief Appraiser Connolly said the Eversource gravy train is coming to an end. He said the end of the project is near. He said that project was a great benefit for new growth. He said the city is seeing the benefit of that with the funding of Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB). Councilor Demers asked if the Assessors Dept. makes projections based on plans. Chief Appraiser Connolly said the data used for FY '25 is as of Jan. 1, 2024. He said the department works off factual data. He said there will be residential growth at the Vale, but the commercial growth there is stagnant. Councilor DiMambro said the city's commercial base helps out the residents immensely. He said if the commercial sector is stagnant, what is Chief Appraiser Connolly's take about the future of technologies and if that is something that could be profitable. Chair Appraiser Connolly said tech uses have been kind of consistent. He said the good thing with the tech projects is they are ready to go. Councilor DiMambro asked if the commercial stagnation is ending. Chief Appraiser Connolly said he thought there might be some positive movement by now but it hasn't happened. He said they go where the data takes them. Chair Viola thanked Chief Appraiser Connolly and his staff for everything they do. **DPW/Cemetery** – Representing the Dept. of Public Works and the Cemetery Dept. were Supt. John Duran and Cemetery Commission Chair John Sawyer. Supt. Duran said the DPW budget is basically level-funded. He said there are 6-8 items that have been increased due to increases in operating costs. He said it is otherwise pretty much the same budget that he has submitted in the past. He said the DPW is in good shape. He said there are some issues with hiring and he is working with Human Resources on getting more people. He said he wants to make sure he hires good people who will stay. Councilor Demers said there is a line item for a facilities manager funded at \$83,000. Supt. Duran said he is looking at that. He said he is not sure they are going to get someone at that rate. He said they are going to go back and revisit that. Councilor DiMambro said for what the DPW does, this is a very modest budgetary increase. He said the DPW also tends to 32 acres in the Cemetery Dept. He said the DPW does a good job at the cemetery. President Dillon said the

DPW is a great asset to the city. He said he knows the DPW's efforts are appreciated by the residents. He asked for an update on the new Deputy Supt. Remy Carroll and his transition. Supt. Duran said Mr. Carroll was the best person for the position. He said Mr. Carroll is even better than Supt. Duran thought he would be. He said he is acclimating well. He said Mr. Carroll is a welcome addition. He said there is a lot of work. He said Mr. Carroll is learning about different projects. He said Mr. Carroll came from Groveland. He said this job involves a much larger scale. He said he thinks the city made the right pick. President Dillon said the cemetery looked great on Memorial Day. Supt. Duran said Chair Sawyer ought to be recognized for the Memorial Day programming. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Supt. Duran. She said much is happening in Ward 5. She said she appreciates the time Supt. Duran puts in to reviewing plans. She thanked Supt. Duran and his team. Councilor Campbell said she is happy to hear the new Deputy Superintendent is doing well. She said he seems extremely qualified. She thanked Supt. Duran for getting to the end of the Eversource project. She thanked him for keeping her posted. She said if she calls Supt. Duran, he either gets right back to her or picks up the phone. She said she would also like to thank Supt. Duran's team. She said there is a lot of talent there. Councilor Toro thanked Supt. Duran for being responsive when he calls. He said Supt. Duran is one of the easier department heads with which to work. Regarding the cemetery, Supt. Duran said there were complaints at the beginning of the year. He said one of the only storms occurred at the end of March. He said the guys are doing their best. He said there was an outside contractor for landscaping. He said that worked for three years but the contract expired. He said the price to renew the contract doubled. He said there is an item in the budget. He said there are going to be additional costs that will be split between the city and the cemetery. He said he met with a new contractor. He said Gatsby Landscaping will be starting on July 1. He said he is confident there will be a good relationship. He said the city got a good deal for the next three years. Chair Sawyer said the contract is double the previous price. He said he likes the fact the contractor is a local company. He said he wants someone who will answer their calls. Supt. Duran said the DPW has been working as a team. He said it is tough to get tree guys. He said they are doing their best to make it work. He said he wants the cemetery grounds to look good. Chair Sawyer said the trees and landscaping are what make the cemetery attractive. He said removing trees incurs a big expense. Councilor Mercer-Bruen thanked Supt. Duran and Chair Sawyer for their efforts. She said Chair Sawyer has been on the Cemetery Commission for a long time. She said she has gotten a few calls about people walking their dogs and not being mindful of the cemetery rules. She said she is not sure how that gets policed. Chair Sawyer said there are signs that indicate no dogs are allowed at the cemetery. He said he is not surprised to hear there have been calls about dogs, however. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if Animal Control Officer Jay Donovan can help with that. Chair Sawyer said it has always been an issue. Supt. Duran said there is adequate signage. He said people need to police their dogs. Chair Sawyer said the staff will tell people dogs are not allowed. He said it is difficult to have the police involved. Councilor Demers said simply put the cemetery is not a park. He said it's a final resting place. He said that should be enough. Supt. Duran said enforcement is difficult. He said they have to pick battles. He said they do the best they can. Councilor DiMambro said the cemetery looks beautiful. He said he had an opportunity to speak to employees. He said some people drop off their trash at the cemetery. He said the cemetery is not a dump. He said it is not a place for a dog to do its duty. He said he wishes people would recognize that. Councilor Toro said chair Sawyer is his neighbor. He said Chair Sawyer is very passionate. He said he appreciates all Chair Sawyer and the Cemetery Commission do. He said he has gotten complaints about people going into the

cemetery after hours. He said he asked if the gate could be closed at night. Chair Sawyer said gate closure is on the agenda for the Cemetery Commission's next meeting. He said closing the gate would certainly prevent people from dropping off trash. He said he would be sure to let Councilor Toro know about any developments. Councilor Toro asked who makes the decision to close the gate and who will fund the position that is tasked with closing the gate. Chair Sawyer said the Cemetery Commission may end up funding that position. He said the gate is supposed to be closed at dusk. He said he is going to speak to the police chief. He said he feels like it's a problem when the gate is wide open all night. Councilor Demers asked if there has been any thought to establishing seasonal hours. Chair Sawyer said the cemetery has always closed at dusk. Councilor Demers said that is vague. He said if there is a dedicated time, that may be helpful. President Dillon said the cemetery looked great on Memorial Day. He said it was a great look for the community. He thanked the Cemetery Commission for kicking in with the new landscaping contract. He said the budget is tight this year and anything the commission can do is helpful. Chair Sawyer said they did have to find a solution to the landscaping issue. President Dillon said he likes it's a Woburn company. Councilor Campbell said Woodbrook Cemetery looked fabulous on Memorial Day. She said she noticed an extremely large tree with a pink ribbon on it and asked if it is going to be taken down. Chair Sawyer said that tree has been targeted. Chair Campbell asked if the trees that have been targeted are sick. Supt. Duran said those trees are dead. Chair Viola thanked Chair Sawyer and Supt. Duran for everything. Chair Sawyer said the guys at the cemetery try really hard. He said they are a good crew.

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MOTION made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to adjourn; all in favor, 9-0. Chair Viola adjourned the meeting at 8:38 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees