

**COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2023, at 6:04 p.m.
WOBURN CITY HALL
COMMITTEE ROOM**

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

Also present: Mayor Scott Galvin, Police Chief Robert Rufo, Fire Chief Donald Kenton, Supt. of Schools Dr. Matthew Crowley, Building Commissioner Thomas C. Quinn Jr., and City Nurse Alyson Roche

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Reading of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to waive the reading of and to approve the minutes of November 27, 2017; March 8, 2021; and January 9, 2023; approved, 8-0.

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1. **Pursuant to City Council Rule 36, receipt, and placement on file of the following items that have been in committee for more than 24 months:** Resolve to review the conditions and requirements of the Eversource project to install a 345kV transmission line (2/11/2020) Communication from Veterans Agent relative to Ferullo Field and the flagpole project (11/17/2020); Communication dated May 10, 2021, from Richard M. Haggerty, State Representative, 30th Middlesex District; A document entitled “WPS Updates – December 7, 2020;” A memorandum from the City Solicitor entitled “Re: NAI Inc. vs. Woburn City Council” (1/14/21); An email from State Rep. Richard Haggerty regarding Covid-19 emergency provisions (6/1/2021); Resumes for Ward 7 Councilor candidates (3/24/2021). President Concannon said the following matters have been in committee for more than two years and can be received and placed on file. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to receive the aforementioned matters and place them on file; approved, 8-0.

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2. **Resolve for Committee on Liaison to meet with the Mayor to discuss migrant families:** President Concannon said the mayor and a number of city employees are present to answer questions. Mayor Galvin said he published a press release regarding the migrant families last week and not much has changed. He said it is clear this issue is a major challenge for the city. He said there are 80 cities and towns that are shouldering the burden of sheltering the migrants. He said this issue in Woburn is falling primarily on the

School Dept. He said the school year is just starting. He said the Supt. of Schools is doing a great job. He said there are currently 155 migrant families in Woburn. He said they are located in four hotels. He said a management company is being used to house the migrants. He said there is a regional director. He said there are National Guard troops on the ground. He said there are two things causing this situation – the obsolescence of the Right to Shelter Law and the lack of immigration reform at the federal level. He said when the Right to Shelter Law was passed in the 1980s, it was well-intended. He said the law, however, was not intended to accommodate the number of homeless people in this instance. He said he is a proponent of the law being changed. He said it is not sustainable. He said there are 1,000 families coming to the state per month. He said they need housing. He said the city was chosen because it has 12 hotels. He said there is no local authority. He said lodging costs \$180 per night. He said the city does not get any money. He said the Fire Chief has seen an uptick in the demand for EMS services. He said there are a number of pregnant women staying at the hotels. He said it is a challenge. He said there are good volunteers raising money. He said this is not a sustainable model. He said he appreciates the efforts of the volunteers but they are going to get burned out.

Councilor DiMambro said some of the migrants are staying at the Sonesta in Woburn. He asked how long the migrants will be staying in Woburn. He asked what the end game is. Mayor Galvin said the end game is to get the migrants out and working in the community. Councilor DiMambro asked if there will be more migrants coming to Woburn. Mayor Galvin said there will be more migrants coming to Woburn until there are changes at the federal level. He said the goal is to get migrants their working papers. He said it takes time to get their status approved. He said they can't get working papers for 18 months. He said this is a big issue at the state level. He said he is not hearing much at the state or federal level. He said he thinks this situation is going to go on for a while.

Councilor Dillon asked if members of the City Council can attend the weekly meetings. He said they councilors want to be able to answer their constituents on a regular basis. Mayor Galvin said he has not heard a word from Councilor Dillon about this issue. He said Councilor Dillon can call him. He said he does not have a problem with any member of the council calling him. Councilor Dillon said he thought he did call the mayor. He said he would like to be included in the meetings. Mayor Galvin said members of the council are not involved with the day-to-day operations of the city. Councilor Dillon said members of the council have to answer to their constituents. Councilor DiMambro asked if there are 155 families how many individuals are there. Mayor Galvin said there about 600 individuals. Councilor Viola asked if the students are vaccinated. Mayor Galvin said not all of the students are vaccinated. Councilor Viola asked if community policing is involved. Chief Rufo said most of the migrants do not speak English. He said no one in his department speaks Creole. President Concannon asked how communication is being handled. Chief Rufo said communication is very limited. He said there are National Guardsmen who speak different languages. He said the city is getting no answers from the state. He said HIV is more common in Haiti than it is in the U.S. He said there are valid concerns about medical issues. He said the migrants can refuse to give their names to police. He said the police are being told the situation is not a law enforcement function. He said police are getting calls about panhandling. He said the lack of cooperation is very concerning. Mayor Galvin said Nurse Roche can give good detail about what the city has been doing with the Dept. of Public Health. Councilor DiMambro asked if the state has

sent any bi-lingual social workers. Mayor Galvin said the city has to hire those. Councilor Demers asked if there has been any discussion about budget relief. Mayor Galvin said most cities and towns are looking at expenditures. Councilor Demers said if the migrants are being placed in as many as 80 cities and towns, then that would involve about half the state legislature. He said his primary concern is the strain on police, fire, and the social workers at the schools. He said the schools are doing a lot more than they were 20 years ago. He said he would be interested to hear more from the city's state legislators and federal officials. Mayor Galvin said it is tough to get a grip on the situation. He said Winchester, Lexington and Reading are among the communities that are not participating. He said it is everyone's responsibility. Councilor Campbell said she is concerned about the lack of vaccinations. She asked if there are children entering school who have not had doctor's appointments. Nurse Roche said the DPH has dispatched rapid response nurses to screen for communicable diseases and review vaccine records. She said that while the DPH conducts immunizations and tests for tuberculosis and lead screening, all those programs are voluntary. She said families have the right to say no. Councilor Ferullo asked if the migrant students can be excluded from school if they are not immunized. Mayor Galvin said the students cannot be excluded. Nurse Roche said the city can refer the migrants to tuberculosis clinics. She said all the treatment is free. She said vaccinations have not started. She said the city is on the state's timeline. Councilor Campbell asked what percentage of migrants have tuberculosis. Nurse Roche said there are no cases of active tuberculosis, but there may be latent cases that would be referred for treatment. Councilor Campbell asked at which hotels the migrants are staying. Mayor Galvin said the migrants are staying at the Sonesta International, the Crowne Plaza, the Comfort Inn, the Red Roof Inn, and the Extended Stay. Motion made Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor DiMambro to send a communication to Rep. Ciccolo, Rep. Haggerty and Sen. Friedman in Woburn's legislative delegation inviting them to a meeting within the next two weeks or by the end of October to discuss the situation with migrants in Woburn; approved, 8-0. Councilor DiMambro asked what impact the migrant situation is having on the city budget. Mayor Galvin said the administration is working with the School Dept. to determine the costs on a quarterly basis. Councilor DiMambro asked what the impact is on the Woburn Fire Dept. budget. Chief Kenton said the fire department responds to the hotels weekly, not daily. Chief Rufo gave the same answer in regard to the police department. Mayor Galvin said Nurse Roche spends a significant amount of time working with the migrants. President Concannon asked if the fire department is having the same language issues as the police department. Chief Kenton said the situation is fairly new and hopefully the fire department will get some help. Mayor Galvin said calls for ambulance service is part of the uptick in demand for services. He said the majority of the costs are covered by Mass. Health and he expects the city will get reimbursed. Councilor Dillon asked Nurse Roche if vaccinations are required to attend Woburn Public Schools. Nurse Roche said that is correct. Councilor Dillon asked if the migrants are required to receive the same vaccinations as the children who live in the city. Nurse Roche said the migrant children are allowed to start school because of their homeless status. Councilor Ferullo asked if the migrant children move, will the city have to bus them back to Woburn schools. Supt. Crowley said that is a concern. He said 67 migrant children have enrolled in Woburn schools since the beginning of the school year. He said there are 39 students at the elementary level, 18 students at the

middle schools and 10 students at the high school. He said the students at the elementary level are enrolled at the White, Goodyear and Altavesta schools. He said the school administration did not want to divide families. He said two new buses were added to transport the students from the hotels to the schools. He said they may have to place students at a fourth elementary school if more migrant families arrive. He said under the McKinney-Vento Law, if a family moves to Boston or Billerica, it has the right to come back to Woburn Public Schools. He said Woburn would share the cost with the other community. Councilor Ferullo asked if the migrant students are mainstreamed. Supt. Crowley answered affirmatively. He said the School Dept. has hired an additional EL teacher who is working at the elementary level. He said they do not know at this time if there are any special education costs. Councilor Ferullo thanked Supt. Crowley for doing a great job. Councilor DiMambro asked what is happening with inspections at the hotels. Commissioner Quinn said weekly inspections started in August. He said last week there were some issues at the Sonesta that were addressed with management. He said hotel management has contact with the state. He said he is going to stay on top of it. He said hopefully the situation will get better over time. He said another concern has been waste management and rodent control. He said he communicates daily with the Fire Dept. and the Board of Health. He said the state is not giving the city much information. Councilor DiMambro said he is aware of someone propping open a back door at the Sonesta. He said this concerns him from a security issue. Commissioner Quinn said the building is open to the public and the city needs to make sure people can get out safely. He said he can look into the hotel's policy. Councilor Dillon asked who has the authority when officers get a call, police or the National Guard. Chief Rufo said ultimately police have the authority. He said the National Guard is there for safety purposes. President Concannon asked if there are any contractual issues with the Woburn Teachers Association. Supt. Crowley said that may be an issue. President Concannon said there may be a need for more teachers and more learning space. Supt. Crowley said expenses have increased. He said they have added EL teachers and two buses. He said they have hired a family and community engagement liaison. Mayor Galvin said special education costs can escalate quickly. He said 25 percent of the budget is devoted to special education. He said the city will be watching expenses on a quarterly basis. Councilor Demers asked if there are any migrant students who need out of district placement. Supt. Crowley said they are not seeing that yet. He said he does not know the level of trauma the migrant students have gone through. He said some of them have walked through 13 countries to get here and it is hard to know what kind of an effect that had on them. Mayor Galvin said there are a number of contingencies for which the state did not account. He said the migrants need car seats, baby formula, transportation, and diapers, among other things. He said it is not the city's responsibility to take over those services. He said he has reached out to David Crowley from Social Capital Inc. He said Mr. Crowley has a number of volunteers. He said the state is unrealistically relying on volunteers and he does not think that is sustainable. President Concannon thanked the city officials for attending this meeting. He said he appreciates their time. He said the council wants to offer its time and it wants to be a part of the solution. He said it sounds like the city is not getting what it needs from the state. He said this discussion was helpful tonight. Councilor Demers thanked the volunteers in the community.

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3. **Order authorizing Mayor to participate in Massachusetts Property Assessed Clean Energy Program (PACE Massachusetts):** President Concannon said Economic Development Manager Casey Hagerty is unable to attend tonight's meeting. Clerk said Ms. Hagerty has prepared a presentation but the person who was supposed to make the presentation is unavailable. President Concannon said the matter will be left in committee.

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Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Viola to adjourn; approved, 8-0. President Concannon adjourned the meeting at 6:53 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees