

# REGULAR MEETING OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL

## **Minutes dated May 2, 2022**

Meeting was called to order by Council President Johnson at 7:00pm at the Agawam Junior High School.

### Item A. Roll Call

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

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

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

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

### Item C. Citizen's Speak Time

None.

### Item D. Minutes

#### **1. Regular Council Meeting – April 19, 2022**

Motion to approve moved by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilor Cavallo. The minutes were voice vote unanimously approved.

### Item E. Declaration of Council President

None.

### Item F. Presentation of Resolutions

- 1. TR-2022-24 - A Resolution to appropriate and authorize borrowing in the amount of Two Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$2,500,000.00) to pay costs for the Westfield River Intercept Sewer Relocation Project and the Reed Street Embankment Project (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli) (Referred to Finance Committee) (Tabled 4/19/22)**

Council President Johnson said the item will remain on the table.

- 2. TR-2022-25 - A Resolution asking the Mayor to reinstate the original hours of operation at the Agawam Senior Center (Sponsored by Councilors Bitzas and Rossi) (Referred to Community Relations Committee) (Tabled 4/19/22)**

Motion to remove the item from the table made by Councilor Bitzas and seconded by Council Vice President Calabrese. Voice vote approved. Councilor Bitzas explained why this item was tabled at the last meeting mainly to invite the Senior Citizen Director to attend the Council meeting to be available to answer any questions. He was disappointed that Mr. Squindo was not in attendance. However, Councilor Bitzas stated that his presence was not necessary to act on this item. Councilor Bitzas read the Resolution into record. Councilor Bitzas also stated that when he previously spoke to the Mayor the Mayor agreed to open the Senior Center however he waited and nothing happened. Councilor Bitzas said he did not understand what the big deal was – noting that after this was introduced on the Council Agenda, the Senior Center was opened for three extra evenings and for that he is happy. Councilor Bitzas

said this was a good start however the request in the Resolution is to open for five evenings and until 9:00pm as it was before Covid. Councilor Bitzas wondered why anyone would oppose this and hoped it would not be tabled again. Councilor Cavallo noted that we heard that the Senior Center Director was comfortable with reopening the Senior Center for three nights. He was concerned that there was never a Community Relations sub-committee meeting scheduled but was happy the Senior Center would be open for three evenings. Councilor Rossi agreed to co-sponsor this Resolution because he thought it was the right thing to do more towards a focus on senior activities. The Mayor took action on his own and came up with viable options that are quite fair with reopening three nights until 8pm. Councilor Rossi said he has no problem with reopening three days per week at this present time. Henry Kozloski told him that Conservation Commission meets on Tuesday evenings at the Senior Center and hoped they could open for these meetings. Councilor Rossi said he was disappointed that it became such an issue or interpreted as the City Council meddling in the Mayor's affairs or micro-managing as that was never his intent by signing on to this Resolution. Councilor Rossi thanked Mayor Sapelli for listening and hopes that this is just the beginning. Councilor Sandlin understands the value of the Senior Center and wanting it opened up to our seniors however her issue was that this should have gone to committee and Committee Chair chose not to hold a meeting. She does support the Mayor opening the Senior Center up for three evenings per week and believe the seniors are happy with this. Councilor Mercadante expressed wishing to see many residents in the audience when there is a community issue like this as it would be great to see their support and hear from them. He stated he is confident in the way the Mayor is handling this and that three nights a week is a good starting point. He questioned if we should vote against the Resolution since it asks for "five days" or if it is just a recommendation. Councilor Smith is in favor of the Senior Center being open until 8pm. He believes this Resolution put the Mayor in an uncomfortable position and he should have been approached privately. Councilor Russo stated he trusts the Mayor and three nights is a great compromise. Simply opening up completely puts seniors at risk. These three nights will be a good gauge to see if the seniors will come back. Council President Johnson asked for a Motion to approve on record. Councilor Bitzas asked for a Point of Order. Council President Johnson again asked for the Motion on the item and did not recognize the Point of Order. Motion made by Council Vice President Calabrese and seconded by Councilor Mercadante. He then asked for Councilor Bitzas' Point of Order. Councilor Bitzas wanted to clarify not having a sub-committee meeting. He stated he asked Barbara to send Councilor Rossi and email asking him if he thought we needed a sub-committee which she did. Councilor Rossi responded to her that it was the prerogative of Committee Chair to do what he thought was best. Councilor Bitzas stated he chose not to call the meeting as is his right according to our Rules and that it was not necessary. He also thought it would be better to have a discussion on the floor on air. He was approached by the Cultural Council to stay open until 9pm and Councilor Bitzas said he was one hundred percent sure the Mayor would do the right thing. Council President Johnson stated that this item is indeed non-binding and the Mayor does not have to do anything however he understands the sentiment on being open. Councilor Cavallo said since he has been on the Council in most cases or 99 percent of the time, items get referred to a sub-committee and there should have been a meeting scheduled. The bottom line is this item is being resolved, he said let's just move on and finish this. Council Vice President Calabrese noted there has been a lot of unnecessary posturing and we have a mayor that is very responsive to the needs of our town. Council Vice President Calabrese moved the question and Councilor Cavallo seconded it. Councilor Rossi made a Point of Information as his light was on before the Motion. He stated he was unaware of whether or not there was a sub-committee meeting but this isn't totally about the seniors, it's more about community activities at the Senior Center. The hours the Mayor has initiated make sense. Councilor Rossi made the Motion to amend to the hours that the Mayor has proposed. Council President Johnson said it is a non-binding Resolution and the Mayor doesn't have to do anything with this because it is completely within his purview as the Chief Executive Officer of this community. Council President Johnson understood the sentiment of wanting to make it match what the Mayor's done.

The vote was **6 YES** (Councilor Bitzas, Calabrese, Cavallo, Mercadante, Rossi, and Russo), **0 NO**, **1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier), **4 PRESENT** (Councilors Johnson, Sandlin, Smith and Suffriti) approving the item.

**3. TR-2022-27 - A Resolution confirming the reappointment of Vincenzo Ronghi, 55 Avalon Place, Feeding Hills, MA to the Community Preservation Act Committee to a term expiring April 30, 2025 (City Council) (Tabled 4/19/22)**

Council President Johnson stated we are waiting for confirmation from the Housing Authority that Mr. Ronghi is still there designated representative. This item will also remain on the table.

- 4. TR-2022-29 - A Resolution accepting a grant in the amount of Two Thousand and Five Hundred Dollars and Zero Cents (\$2,500.00) from the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Office of Grants and Research to the Town of Agawam Fire Department (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli)**

Motion to approve made by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilors Smith and Suffriti. Council President Johnson stated this grant is to purchase a defibrillator.

The vote was **10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the item.

**Item G. Elections**

None.

**Item H. Public Hearings**

- 1. TO-2022-8 (PH-2022-2) - An Order amending a LICENSE for gasoline/petroleum storage tanks, Gulf Express Mart, 18 Springfield Street, Agawam, MA (Clerk) (Referred to Administrative Committee)**

Motion to approve made by Councilors Smith and Calabrese and seconded by Councilor Sandlin. As Chair of the Administrative Committee, Councilor Rossi provided the report stating that there were no issues or concerns with this application although the Engineering Department had concerns that the tank should remain in the same location so as not to interfere with future construction in that area. Motion to send a positive recommendation to the Full Council by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilor Smith. The vote was 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilor Letellier)

Council President Johnson declared the Public Hearing open at 7:34pm. There were no speakers in support or in opposition, in person or in name only. Council President Johnson declared the Public Hearing closed at 7:35pm.

The vote was **10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the item.

- 2. TO-2022-9 (PH-2022-3) - An Order amending a LICENSE for gasoline/petroleum storage tanks, One Stop Mart, 373 Rowley Street, Agawam, MA (Clerk) (Referred to Administrative Committee)**

Motion to approve made by Councilor Rossi and seconded by Councilor Suffriti. As Chair of the Administrative Committee, Councilor Rossi provided the report stating that there were no issues or concerns with this application although the Engineering Department had concerns that the tank should remain in the same location so as not to interfere with future construction in that area. Motion to send a positive recommendation to the Full Council by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilor Smith. The vote was 4 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent (Councilor Letellier)

Council President Johnson declared the Public Hearing open at 7:36pm. There were no speakers in support or in opposition, in person or in name only. Council President Johnson declared the Public Hearing closed at 7:37pm.

The vote was **10 YES, 0 NO, 1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the item.

- 3. TR-2022-28 (PH-2022-4) - A Resolution adopting the Fiscal Year 2023- 2027 Capital Improvement Program (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli) – Public Hearing Date set for May 16, 2022**

Council President Johnson noted that the Public Hearing on this item will be conducted at the next meeting on May 16th.

- 4. TOR-2022-8 (PH-2022-5) - An Ordinance to amend Section 124 of Chapter 180 of the Code of the Town of Agawam (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli) (Two Readings Required) (Referred to Legislative Committee) – Public Hearing Date set for June 6, 2022**

Council President Johnson noted that the Public Hearing on this item will be conducted at our June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Item I. Old Business**

**1. TOR-2022-7 - An Ordinance to amend Sections 7(A)(1) and 7(A)(2) of Chapter 49 of the Code of the Town of Agawam (2 of 2 Readings) (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli) (Referred to Legislative Committee)**

Motion to approve the second and final reading made by Councilor Mercadante and seconded by Councilor Suffriti. Councilor Bitzas spoke against this item at the last meeting. He wanted to remind the Council that a teacher with a four year degree makes \$48,000; a Police Officer and Firefighter makes \$59,000; a Principle Clerk makes about \$40,000. He asked how we could approve a position making \$86,000 and said this salary is way too high. Councilor Bitzas didn't understand why the town would do this when a clerical person could do the job and the current assistant has done a fantastic job over the last six months. He also stated the Senior Center Director is a great grant writer so why would we need to hire another.

**Amendment #1**

Councilor Bitzas believes it is too much money and made the Motion to amend the Ordinance to add in the Now Therefore clause the words "with a starting salary of \$60,000" as long as it was legal to do that. Council President Johnson asked if there was a second. Council Vice President Calabrese seconded the Motion to Amendment #1.

The vote was **2 YES** (Councilors Bitzas and Calabrese), **8 NO** (Councilors Cavallo, Johnson, Mercadante, Rossi, Russo, Sandlin, Smith, and Suffriti), **1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) defeating Amendment #1.

Discussion continued with Councilor Mercadante stating that the Mayor's Office needs the help noting it never hurts to have another grant writer within the town and not overloading the current staff. He said this position adds no extra cost to the tax payers of Agawam. This position was already there and included in the budget – the Mayor is just switching the job title and scope of responsibilities. Councilor Mercadante stressed that we need to give the current staff in the Mayor's Office some much needed relief. Council Vice President Calabrese thanked Solicitor Buoniconti for his help in seeking what she wished to accomplish with her proposed amendment. Her proposed amendment would cost about \$500 if approved.

**Amendment #2**

Council Vice President Calabrese made the Motion to amend by adding the following Now Therefore clauses:

Now Therefore, the position of "Chief of Staff to the Mayor" shall be posted for thirty (30) days as an available position open to the general public; and

Now Therefore, such posting of this available position shall be published in the newspapers in general circulation with the Town of Agawam.

Council President Johnson asked for a second. Councilor Bitzas seconded the Motion to Amendment #2. Council President Johnson asked for discussion to be limited only to the amendment. Councilor Russo asked for clarification of the \$500 and if it was for the full thirty days, one day or one week. Council Vice President Calabrese did not know but was going by the Solicitor's numbers. Council President Johnson agreed with the sentiment but didn't think it was proper to be placed within the Ordinance and noted they already do properly advertise. Councilor Sandlin also didn't believe this should be placed within the Code noting past practice of advertising for two weeks and not thirty days. Councilor Rossi why it would be necessary to make any amendments for a procedure that was already in place. Council President Johnson explained the advertising process and agreed it should not be part of the Code. He believed the Mayor will place the required ad in the paper and post it accordingly. Councilor Rossi made another comment asking if this particular procedure would be any different.

The vote was **2 YES** (Councilors Bitzas and Calabrese), **8 NO** (Councilors Cavallo, Johnson, Mercadante, Rossi, Russo, Sandlin, Smith, and Suffriti), **1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) defeating Amendment #2.

Discussion on the Main Motion continued with Councilor Smith simply stating the Mayor is eliminating the Executive Assistant and replacing the position with a Chief of Staff. This position encompasses additional responsibilities with no additional cost to the Town – simply a name change. The Mayor needs someone to represent him. He’s asked for our help and we should respect that and that is all we are voting on. Councilor Russo respects protecting the taxpayer’s money however this does not affect taxes nor the budget. The Senior Center Director is indeed a great grant writer however this would be a more efficient way to run the Mayor’s Office. Councilor Bitzas understood replacing an eliminated position for the same money. We could save more money by making the starting salary lower – this wastes the taxpayer’s money believing this job could be done by a clerical position. He wanted everyone to remember this position will be there for years and years. Councilor Sandlin made a Point of Information to Councilor Bitzas saying this new position deserves more money. The previous person had no education and was paid a great deal of money. This new position is a great idea for the town. Councilor Cavallo agreed that we have a very hard working mayor and this should not be a problem believing it is warranted as well as saying other communities have the same thing. Council President Johnson made a Point of Information to clarify any misinformation. This Ordinance is currently the Executive Assistant to the Mayor. They are proposing the exact same salary. The Mayor is simply eliminating the Executive Assistant position and replacing it with the Chief of Staff position as well as removing the stipend that the Executive Assistant received so it actually saves the town money. Simply put, he is taking the existing position, renaming it and broadening the scope of responsibilities.

The vote was **8 YES** (Councilors Cavallo, Johnson, Mercadante, Rossi, Russo, Sandlin, Smith, and Suffriti), **2 NO** (Councilors Bitzas and Calabrese, **1 ABSENT** (Councilor Letellier) approving the second and final reading.

**Item J. New Business**

- 1. TR-2022-30 - A Resolution to appropriate and authorize borrowing in the amount of Eleven Million Six Hundred Twenty Nine Thousand Dollars (\$11,629,000) for the purchase of 1070 Suffield Street and the construction/reconstruction of the building and site for a police station (Sponsored by Mayor Sapelli)**

Council President Johnson did not refer this item and stated there would be a workshop on May 9th at the Senior Center on this item. The workshop will be televised.

- 2. TR-2022-31 - A Resolution preventing and opposing the closing of the Northampton VA Medical Center located in Leeds, Massachusetts (Sponsored by Councilors Bitzas and Rossi)**

Next Agenda.

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

Council President Johnson informed the Council that we would be receiving the budget on May 12<sup>th</sup>. Therefore we will be holding the budget workshops on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. The plan is to have the Public Hearing on the Operating Budget on June 6<sup>th</sup> and the vote at our second June meeting. There will likely be another workshop in May on some other important items and that will likely be at the Senior Center as this venue doesn’t work well for a workshop however all will be televised. All of the councilors expressed prayers for Councilor Letellier, her son Matthew, and her family. Councilor Bitzas also gave appreciation to all the teachers for Teacher Appreciation week. Council President Johnson shared the same sentiments and for the general public, Councilor Letellier is currently in the hospital and we are hoping and praying she finds her way out of this current struggle. Our prayers are with her and especially her son Matthew. He wanted her to know how much we all care for her.

**Item M. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn was moved by Council Vice President Calabrese and seconded by Councilor Suffriti. Meeting was adjourned at 8:08pm.

**\*Please note that this meeting was live-streamed on Channel 15 as well as being able to view on the town’s website\* [www.agawam.ma.us](http://www.agawam.ma.us)**

approved

TR-2022-29

**A RESOLUTION ACCEPTING A GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF TWO THOUSAND AND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS AND ZERO CENTS (\$2,500.00) FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY OFFICE OF GRANTS AND RESEARCH TO THE TOWN OF AGAWAM FIRE DEPARTMENT**

(Sponsored by Mayor William P. Sapelli)

**WHEREAS**, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security's Office of Grants and Research (OGR) has awarded a grant to the Town of Agawam Fire Department; and

**WHEREAS**, the grant is in the amount of two thousand and five hundred dollars and zero cents (\$2,500.00); and

**WHEREAS**, the grant monies will allow the Fire Department to purchase an automated external defibrillator for the Fire Inspector's vehicle; and

**WHEREAS**, it is in the best interest of the Town of Agawam to accept said grant; and

**WHEREAS**, the Town desires to accept said grant.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Agawam City Council pursuant to M.G.L. c. 44 §53A accepts a grant up to the amount of two thousand and five hundred dollars and zero cents (\$2,500.00) from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security's Office of Grants and Research.

DATED THIS 2nd DAY OF May, 2022.

PER ORDER OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL

*Christopher C. Johnson*  
Christopher C. Johnson, President

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY

*Stephen J. Buoniconti*  
Stephen J. Buoniconti, Solicitor

Orig. Town Clerk  
cc: Auditor  
cc: Council  
cc: Com  
cc: Law  
cc: Mayor

Orig. Town Clerk  
cc: Council  
cc: Auditor  
cc: Fire  
cc: Law  
cc: Mayor  
cc: Treasurer

TR-2022-25

Tabled 4/19/22  
approved

**A RESOLUTION ASKING THE MAYOR TO REINSTATE THE ORIGINAL HOURS OF OPERATION AT THE AGAWAM SENIOR CENTER**

(Sponsored by Agawam City Councilors George Bitzas and Robert Rossi)

**WHEREAS**, approximately ten years ago the Town of Agawam built one of the best Senior Centers in the Commonwealth; and

**WHEREAS**, our senior citizens should have the opportunity to utilize the Senior Center for activities after 5:00pm as originally done; and

**WHEREAS**, the Senior Center is currently allowed to be open after 8:00pm for certain special events and/or public meetings; and

**WHEREAS**, many senior citizens are asking to keep the Senior Center open until 8:00pm as was done in the past to allow them to have the opportunity to exercise in the gym after dinner, play pool and participate in other extracurricular activities; and

**WHEREAS**, the extra cost to the Town is minimal and is certainly worth it to serve our elderly population who have worked hard all of their lives, paid taxes and given so much to our community.

**NOW, THEREFORE, THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL** hereby resolves to respectfully ask the Mayor to reinstate the original hours of operation at the Agawam Senior Center as soon as possible.

Dated this 2nd day of May, 2022

PER ORDER OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL

*Christopher C. Johnson*  
Christopher C. Johnson, City Council President

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY

*Stephen Buoniconti*  
Stephen Buoniconti, City Solicitor

TOR-2022-7

First Reading 4/19/22  
Second Reading 5/2/22

**AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTIONS 7(A)(1) AND 7(A)(2) OF CHAPTER 49 OF THE CODE OF THE TOWN OF AGAWAM**

(Sponsored by Mayor William P. Sapelli)

Approved

**WHEREAS**, Section 7 of Chapter 49 (Personnel) of the Code of the Town of Agawam lists the full-time administrative positions not within a collective bargaining unit; and

**WHEREAS**, one of the positions listed in Section 7(A)(1) and 7(A)(2) is the Executive Assistant to the Mayor;

**WHEREAS**, the Mayor plans to restructure the staff and assignments in the Office of the Mayor by eliminating the Executive Assistant position and adding a Chief of Staff position; and

**WHEREAS**, the Chief of Staff position will be fundamentally different in scope with greater outreach to the community, attendance at functions on weeknights and weekends, grant writing oversight, and engagement on economic development projects; and

**WHEREAS**, the Chief of Staff's salary will be a non-union, full-time position which necessitates amending the listed positions under Chapter 49 of the Town Code; and

**WHEREAS**, a Chief of Staff position will expand the services of the Office of the Mayor and enhance economic development within the Town.

**WHEREAS**, it is in the best interest of the Town to amend Chapter 49 of the Code of the Town of Agawam.

**NOW THEREFORE**, the Agawam City Council hereby amends Section 7A(1) and 7A(2) of Chapter 49 of the Code of the Town of Agawam (Classification of nonbargaining unit employees) by deleting "Executive Assistant to the Mayor" in its entirety and inserting in its place "Chief of Staff to the Mayor".

Dated this 2nd day of May, 2022.

PER ORDER OF THE AGAWAM CITY COUNCIL

*Christopher Johnson*  
Christopher Johnson, President

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY

*Stephen Buoniconti*  
Stephen Buoniconti, City Solicitor

Orig. Town Clerk  
cc: Auditor  
cc: Council  
cc: Law  
cc: Mayor  
cc: Personnel

TO-2022-8 and TO-2022-9 amendments to gasoline storage licenses were also approved