

JOINT MEETING OF THE WESTCOMM BOARD OF DIRECTORS, & FINANCE COMMITTEE

JANUARY 8, 10:00 A.M.

WESTCOMM

645 SHAWINIGAN DRIVE, CHICOPEE MA 01020

GOOGLE MEET:

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In Attendance:

Penny Ryan, Interim Executive Director, WESTCOMM

Tom Christensen, Town Manager, East Longmeadow

Lyn Simmons, Town Manager, Longmeadow

Jennifer Wolowicz, Town Manager, Monson

Stuart Beckley, Town Manager, Ware

JoAnn Kupiec, Admin Assistant, WESTCOMM

Mihaela, Miteva, Procurement Officer, WESTCOMM

Anthony Massoia, Dispatch Supervisor, WESTCOMM

Tyler Allen, Goosetown

John Beaulieu, Chicopee

Mike Meaney, IT Specialist WESTCOMM

Grant Herman, IT Director WESTCOMM

Lisa Ricardo, HR Director, WESTCOMM

Ian Coddington, Town Accountant, Longmeadow

Kim D'Amato, Town Accountant, Ware

Kim Collins, Town Accountant, East Longmeadow

Greg Wallace, Operations Manager, WESTCOMM

Stephanie O'Connor, Training Coordinator, WESTCOMM

Ellen

1. Meeting called to order 10:09 A.M. A roll call was done, and present at the meeting were Tom Christensen, Lyn Simmons, Jennifer Wolowicz, John Beaulieu and Stuart Beckley. 5 present.
2. **Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Approval of Meeting minutes from meetings held on 7/17/25, 8/18/25, 9/4/25 and 10/16/25. A motion was made by John Beaulie and 2nd by Stuart Beckley to approve the meeting minutes as written. A roll call was done, 5 yes.

- 3. Old Business: Building Update:** The building punch list items are down to four, and the next meeting is scheduled for January 12th. The outstanding items include replacing a gate sensor, an issue with the elevator card reader and access cameras that requires ECSC and Otis, difficulty with door 102, and a leak in the mechanical room that they plan to test with a hose. John Beaulieu stated their intention is for the punch list items to be completed by March 16th.

Radio System Progress: Tyler Allen reported significant progress on the radio system, including fixing roaming between sites one and two, and establishing data roaming across both sites. Several servers are now running and stable, including the data registration server, elite battery management server, Armada server, and OTAAP server. They emphasized that the server functionality allows for future remote over-the-air updates for users, which is a major time-saving achievement after six years of effort.

Radio Coverage and Licensing: Test runs of the radio system were successful, though Tyler Allen noted that Longmeadow is experiencing some drops in coverage, which staff are addressing this week through individual radio preventative maintenance and aligning. Reprogramming is complete for Longmeadow and Monson, and 50% done for East Longmeadow, with Chicopee next. The bid deadline for the upgraded FSA is next week, and they are also looking at FCC licenses and possible changes to known sites and locations, such as Grattan Street and Bliss Court in Longmeadow, to increase coverage.

FY27 Budget Discussion Introduction: Tom Christensen opened the discussion for the FY27 budget, starting with questions from the Finance Committee. Mihaela Miteva later presented a working draft of the budget, noting that input from the Board and Finance Committee would be implemented into the final presentation.

Salary and Union Contract Status: Ian Coddington asked about the status of the union contract in relation to the budgeted salary increases for dispatchers and supervisors (rows 25 through 34). Penny Ryan responded that the budgeted numbers align with the proposed negotiations, which are expected to be finalized soon, allowing for a final number in the budget before submission.

Budget Presentation Recommendations: Kimberly Collins suggested breaking down the presentation of salary changes to show a total increase for supervisors and dispatchers, noting that the spreadsheet showed an 11% increase for dispatchers and a 6% decrease for supervisors' budgets. Mihaela Miteva shared the screen to show the draft presentation, which included an overall budget increase of 10.19%, with personnel expenses up 8.22% and operating expenses up 9.58% compared to FY26 .

Assessment Formula and Call Volume Discrepancy: Mihaela Miteva explained that the majority of funding comes from the state 911 budget (75%), with the

remaining 25% from Westcom member communities, assessed based on call volume and the district agreement formula. Penny Ryan highlighted a large increase for Longmeadow's assessment, which they explained was due to past discrepancies in call volume calculations for Longmeadow, potentially off by up to 30% or about 10,000 calls per year. Penny Ryan emphasized that the new numbers are based on the district agreement and historical call volume checks.

Monson's Assessment: Ian Coddington questioned why Monson did not have an adjustment to their assessment, and Mihaela Miteva clarified that Monson is subject to a statutory minimum 10% assessment floor based on the district agreement, as they haven't met the minimum call volume. Penny Ryan confirmed that Monson's actual call volume number is 8.9% for their share, but they are charged 10% because they don't meet the minimum threshold.

Need for Call Volume Internal Audit and Definition: Penny Ryan discussed that past assessments total call volume was reported to be lower than the actual volume, suggesting some 40,000 calls were unaccounted for in previous reports. They suggested an internal audit to ensure proper recording and appointment of call volume. The discussion also brought up the need for a clear, documented definition of what is considered a 'call for service' for assessment calculations, as this definition has been debated by the Operations Committee in the past.

Budget Submission Timeline and Next Steps: Penny Ryan indicated that the budget needs to be submitted by the beginning of February, with a self-imposed internal deadline of January 20th. They requested a separate meeting early next week to go over the assessment numbers with the Chiefs and the Finance Committee.

Health Insurance Budgeting: Ian Coddington questioned the 20% placeholder increase for health insurance, as Longmeadow typically budgets between 8% and 10%. Penny Ryan noted that the 20% was an initial expectation based on the "rumor mill" for GIC. Kim D'Amato advised against going lower than 15% due to predictions of healthcare costs rising across the country. The group agreed to budget for a 15% increase for health insurance.

Retirement Budgeting: Kimberly Collins inquired if the 19% increase for retirement was due to under budgeting the previous year. Penny Ryan confirmed that the 19% is an actual, confirmed cost from the retirement board for Hampden County, not a discount cost, but for FY 27 they plan to try to pay the discounted cost.

Employee Insurance and Potential Membership Cap: Penny Ryan noted that the current employee share of health insurance is high, causing difficulties in staff recruitment and retention. They also raised a historical concern about an unwritten agreement with Scantic Valley, through Longmeadow, where Westcomm's employee numbers exceeding 49 might affect their employer status and insurance arrangement, which could necessitate the large 20% budget

increase if they had to be on their own. It emphasized the need to focus on this concern and include a clear explanation of how health insurance works through Longmeadow in the district agreement.

Staff Compensation and Operating Costs: Mihaela Miteva noted that the largest portion of Westcomm's expenses is personnel due to its public service nature. They reviewed proposed increases for dispatchers, supervisors, and administrative staff. The organization is experiencing increased operating costs after moving to a new, larger facility, which necessitates re-evaluation during the first operating cycle in the new building.

Capital Budget and Planning: Mihaela Miteva introduced a new need for a capital budget, proposing an initial \$100,000 for unexpected expenses and future planning for long-term replacements like the roof or septic system. Clarification was sought on the capital funds, emphasizing they should be used exclusively for capital purposes. Mihaela Miteva confirmed that a draft capital policy will be presented to the Board and Finance Committee for approval.

Stabilization Fund and Reserves: Tom Christensen raised concerns about the organization's existing reserves, including whether a stabilization fund or capital account already holds a significant balance. Kimberly Collins indicated that based on the audit, there is an undesignated fund balance of almost \$500,000, labeled as a restricted undesignated reserve balance in the financial statements. She suggested consulting the auditors to clarify the restrictions on these funds and determine if they can be used for capital projects.

Deferred Capital Funding Discussion: It was argued that if the existing reserves are substantial (potentially up to 10% of the budget), funding the \$100,000 capital item this year might be unnecessary to help keep the percentage increase down, as starting the line item makes it hard to remove later. Mihaela Miteva agreed that having 10% in reserves would put them in great shape according to DLS. The group, including Mihaela Miteva, found comfort in removing the capital funding for the current year to allow time to clean up the Capital Improvement Plan policy and locate existing reserves.

Financial Transparency and Accounting Review: Tom Christensen requested receiving a list of all bank accounts and balances under the Westcomm agency for next month's meeting, stressing the need for financial clarity, especially regarding reserve funds. The information about the existing funds is seen as a "game changer" for the organization's trajectory if they are allowed to use it for organizational needs. Penny Ryan also confirmed that the budget reserve number is 10% of the operating, not personnel, costs.

OPEB Study and Operating Expenses: Mihaela Miteva noted that a study for Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) is underway, which the board had previously voted to fund. Ian Coddington confirmed that an OPEB study is required every two years. Mihaela Miteva presented the operating expenses,

emphasizing that the new building presents a learning curve to determine accurate costs for items like HVAC and utilities.

IT Infrastructure and Fleet Needs: Penny Ryan explained that a slight decrease in IT costs resulted from removing redundant lines, but future costs will be driven by running additional fiber lines for new agencies. Mihaela Miteva discussed the fleet needs, including a new vehicle for the executive director (stipulated in the contract) and a second new vehicle. The budget includes financing for two new vehicles, and the organization is trying to determine if it is economical to keep an existing eight-year-old vehicle or trade it in

Prepared Enhanced Business Line Module: Ian Coddington inquired about a \$58,000 increase for "Prepared Enhanced" on row 132 of the budget. Anthony Massoia explained that this funds an AI-assisted business line module to handle non-emergency calls, which would free up staff from business line calls and improve service

Contract Clarifications: Ian Coddington asked about the radio system maintenance contract and if the 5% increase is expected annually, to which Penny Ryan responded, year-by-year, dependent on the number of sites, and not a multi-year contract. Ian Coddington also noted discrepancies in the description for tower rental increases (3% vs. 5%) and the Coffey Hill Tower expenses (inclusion/exclusion of electric costs), and Penny agreed to correct the descriptions. Penny confirmed that website development was recently finalized, and they are working on finalizing numbers for janitorial and septic services based on usage.

Budget Overtime and Telecommunication Systems: Kim D'Amato asked for clarification on the red line overtime, which Penny explained was previously for a radio technician, but the position is now salary-based, eliminating that specific overtime cost. Ian Coddington asked about TPX and Ring Squared, which Penny clarified are two separate companies providing fiber connection services between different locations, and consolidating them is being considered.

Discrepancy in FY26 Budget Total: Kimberly Collins noted a discrepancy in the FY26 budget total, citing one report showing \$6,681,847 and the current document showing \$6,772,321. Penny Ryan suggested the difference could be due to a restructuring of positions or an unforeseen contract expense that was higher than anticipated. Kimberly Collins emphasized that QuickBooks needs to be updated to reflect the approved budget number.

Next Steps and Meeting Schedule: The team decided to remove the capital funding and vehicle purchase line items from the budget for the current year. Penny Ryan confirmed that they plan to have a second meeting to finalize the budget this month, likely on the 21st at 10:00 AM, as a joint meeting with the finance committee. They need to acquire definitive information on health insurance and the reserve funds before the 21st to avoid further budget changes.

4. **New Business: IT Update:** None at this time.

Finance Update: Audit Status Update: Ian Coddington inquired about the audit status, and Penny Ryan reported that they had a call with CBiz representatives regarding the FY23 and FY24 audits, which are close to completion. The auditors requested additional information, including a year-end report from the state and a spreadsheet of grant expenditures.

FY23 and FY24 Grant Reporting Requirements: Penny Ryan reported that they are close to securing FY23 and FY24 funding but need a year-end report on expenditures, possibly from State 911. The requested report seems to be a combination of a year-end report from the state and expenditure details from the district's books, particularly total amounts on the ledger of each grant, which Grant Herman asked for clarification on. Kimberly Collins suggested running reports out of QuickBooks by project code to identify grant expenses by individual grant.

Intergovernmental Receivables Clarification: Penny Ryan was unsure about the meaning of "intergovernmental receivable". Ian Coddington suggested it might relate to an unpaid assessment. Lyn suggested to Penny that it could be a receivable related to the sheriff's department from FY23, which Penny acknowledged, though noting it doesn't happen often.

Follow-up on Audit Information: Penny Ryan confirmed that they would follow up on receiving the details in writing, as the other party was supposed to send a written follow-up detailing exactly what they were looking for regarding the audit. Penny stated they would include the committee members in the email and mentioned they have been saying they are "close" for a year.

Executive Directors Update: December Operational Highlights and Community Engagement: Penny Ryan provided an update on the operations, noting December was busy, including hosting a breakfast on the 22nd and 23rd that the staff enjoyed. They also highlighted working with the Salvation Army on an Angel Tree project, which provided for 25 families/kids and is something they plan to continue. Penny praised the training coordinator and community engagement lead, Steph, who spearheaded the Angel Tree and is actively engaged in community outreach, including starting a monthly health profile registration initiative at the senior center in Rivermills.

Operation Red Nose Radar and Training Courses Penny Ryan reported on the success of Operation Red Nose Radar, which took over 100 calls from across the country for the first time, noting that they were one of the most frequent callers. They also hosted a three-day Communication Training Officer (CTO) course, certifying nine staff members, with plans to host it again in April for another nine staff and subsequently pursue certification for supervisors.

Staffing and Educational Outreach: Penny Ryan announced that they interviewed two candidates for the Treasurer position and made an offer to the second candidate, awaiting their acceptance. They are hosting Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School students next Tuesday for a four-to-five-hour tour and program, with State 911 potentially attending. This visit is expected to lead to the first internship program, building off the existing partnership with Smith Voc.

Audit Concerns and Critical Incident Training: Penny, along with Tony and Tyler, met with the Sheriff to discuss their concerns about the radio audit. They also sent two staff members to a four-day ASAP (acute stress adaptive protocol) training, certifying them in peer support for critical incidents, which is part of setting up a regional team in Western Massachusetts.

Training Facility Utilization and Positive Feedback: Penny Ryan reported that they have hosted various training sessions, including basic SWAT training for a regional team and sessions on hostage negotiations and critical incidents, utilizing the training room downstairs. Feedback has been excellent, with the regional SWAT team, which included participants from Maine to Maryland, calling it the friendliest and best training location they have ever used. They are also set to host a regional fire inspector meeting and the Springfield team, as well as being the first in Massachusetts to host a four-hour training session with the Gabby Petito Foundation in the fall, which has been approved for State 911 reimbursement.

Promoting Success and Addressing Foundational Issues: Penny Ryan expressed excitement about the staff's motivation and the positive activities, suggesting the need for better promotion, such as using AI to create a year-end look-back report. They also noted that fixing foundational issues like the budget, financials, and radios takes up significant time, which limits their ability to focus on outward-facing activities. A suggestion was made to create a separate section on the website for the Executive Director's report to better showcase the work being done and to potentially turn the updates into press releases.

5. **New Business not reasonably anticipated within 24 hours:** None at this time
6. **Adjourn:** A motion was made by John Beaulieu and 2nd by Jennifer Wolowicz to adjourn the meeting. A roll call was done, 5 yes, meeting adjourned at 12:24 P.M.

Adjourn: A motion was made by Kim Collins and 2nd by Kim D'Amato to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting. A roll call was done 3 yes, meeting adjourned at 12:24 P.M.