

HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL, DECEMBER 14, 2015

Hearing opened at 6:45 P.M. with Councillor Cormier, Chair of the FINANCE COMMITTEE, presiding.

All members were present.

The following PETITION was the subject of the hearing:

C-30 Relative to determining the factor to be used in setting the Fiscal Year 2016 tax rate.

Present at the hearing was Chief Assessor Bill Mitchell, and Assistant Assessors Mary Carey and Richard Dondero.

Mr. Mitchell passed out the Classification Booklet which is on file in the City Clerk's Office.

Mr. Mitchell said we do this every year. The valuations were approved by the Department of Revenue. On the homepage of the Assessor's website there are two links so people can look at the new values. One is Assessed Value By Owner and one is Assessed Value By Address.

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Mr. Mitchell said we are here tonight to have the Council decide on how to shift the tax burden. It is not to set the tax rate tonight. There are four ways to split the tax burden; it's a single or a split tax rate. There are three other options that we will go over which are which are small commercial exemption, the residential exemption and an open space discount. The effective date of the assessment that you will be on your January 1st, 2016 bill is actually one year old and is as of January 1, 2015. Our assessments are always one year behind the market.

Mr. Mitchell said some of the highlights in the Classification booklet are total valuation of the City for the past ten years and how the tax rate has increased for the past ten years. He said there are five classes, anything beginning with a 1 is residential, anything beginning with a 2 is open space, anything beginning with a 3 is commercial and beginning with 4 is industrial and anything beginning with 5 is personal property. He said you can see how the property types have changed in value from last year to this year. The single family homes have increased nearly 5% over the past year which could be due from the market increase. There were 43 new homes built this year with an average assessment of \$352,000.00. Condominiums were relatively stable and overall it went down 1.13%. He said land values remained the same.

Councillor Nickel asked what the increase was for two-families and three-families.

Mr. Mitchell said two-families increased 4.9% and three-families were stable at .13% possibly due to owners occupying them.

Council President Marchand asked how In-Law apartments play into the valuation.

Mr. Mitchell said they are assessed for the use whether they are legal apartments or not.

The tax levy increase was shown over the past 15 years. This year it has increased \$2.8M over last year with that being said there is still \$5.2M of excess levy capacity that has not been raised.

Mr. Mitchell said that new growth is way up over last year and that is because of the new 43 residential homes built, the new self-storage building on Central Street, 108 Adams Street (Jim Whitney's project) and the solar facility on Industrial Road. One of the larger numbers you will see is the personal property. A lot of the business are doing well and adding new equipment like the Doubletree, Boston Gas, CAMCO Mfg., Comcast, Dixie, New England Power, the Solar Facility and Verizon.

Should the City Council decide to vote on a single rate the residential single family home will increase \$230.00 this year, the average tax bill is at \$4391.00 now, and the industrial will increase about \$259.00 which has an average tax bill of \$9,745.00. The commercial properties will increase about \$2,892.00 and the average tax bill is about \$14,000.00 per year.

Mr. Mitchell said the Board of Assessors that are sitting here recommend a single rate be adopted and to not take action on the other three exemptions.

Councillor Cormier said he noticed that there are 110 communities that have a split rate. Why would a community want to go from a single rate to a split rate?

Mr. Mitchell said in essence when you split the tax rate you are taking more of the burden off the residential class and put it on the commercial properties. The problem with that is to offset or make a difference in the residential class you are really putting a lot of burden on the commercial class in Leominster in order to save a dollar on the residential side you have to increase the commercial rate \$3.52. It is a much larger impact because our base of residential properties is so large it's our predominant base. He said it is a very difficult move to bring it back to a single rate.

Mr. Mitchell said they looked at the tax rate from the surrounding tax rates of Gardner, Fitchburg, Worcester, Leominster, and Westminster. Shirley, Lunenburg, Holden, Sterling, Princeton, Lancaster and Groton. Of all those communities Leominster has the fourth lowest average single family tax bill right now, even at a single rate. The only three that are lower than us is Gardner, Fitchburg and Worcester and Fitchburg and Worcester have a split tax rate to they are not comparable to us. The only one lower is Gardner and that is probably due to their average family home being worth about \$159,000. He said Leominster is in great shape that way and seems like a lot of money when we talk \$4,300.00 but when you start comparing it to other communities in our area, Leominster is doing pretty well.

Councillor Salvatelli said the top ten taxpayers only amount to 5.21%. If you look at the services that are provided there, particularly law enforcement, you would see a considerable amount of expenditure of manpower in these developments. He said 95% of this community is coming in from homes and small businesses.

Councillor Nickel asked if there were any municipal projects that we have started or going to start that would affect what our tax rate is going up.

Mr. Richard said yes, we have the high school that we went out for bond. Of course, all the settlements for the employee unions.

Councillor Nickel said you are going to have that and for a few years it's been 0% raises.

Mr. Richard said it is very hard to do that with binding arbitration being still in place for public safety officers. We have other school projects that are being planned. At the next City Council meeting there will be a submission for the Johnny Appleseed renovation. We have the Northwest renovation going on right now; we just recently completed and went out for bond on the high school project. We have a lot of school related debt. And of course, the issue hanging out there, what is going to happen with the police station.

Councillor Nickel asked if we had a couple of years to go on the Library.

Mr. Richard said yes, 2019 that principle and interest will be available. He said that is the beauty of having an aggressive debt plan paying off our debt within ten years. The new high school renovation, the Fallbrook project and the Southeast project are all scheduled for full funding in 2022. In 2023 there will be funding available for another project. The last principle payment on the Library will be 2018. In 2019 and 2023 there will be room and the existing levy to take on debt for another capital project.

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Councillor Nickel asked Mr. Mitchell what the tax rate difference from last year will be if we approve this tonight?

Mr. Mitchell said we are currently at \$19.44 per thousand and we will be going to \$19.58 per thousand. Not a large increase but because of the valuations they will realize about \$230.00 in the average tax bill.

Mr. Richard said if the values went up and your tax rate went down you would still be paying more. The average last year was \$4100.00 so in you add an average of \$4,000.00 a 2 ½% increase is \$100.00. So anything over the \$100.00 is because of changes in values and in the property type. Taxes did not go up 5%.

Councillor Nickel asked Mr. Richard where we stand on Free Cash being certified for last year.

Mr. Richard said they are still working on it and it's going to be a while.

Councillor Marchand said we had a problem with Vintage Capital a few years back and it was pretty significant.

Mr. Mitchell said he believed it was Merchant Hilltop, we had an Appellate Tax Board case with them and we settled. He said they went down and met with the owner and toured the property and physically adjusted appropriately to reflect the market value and it was reduced almost a million dollars in assessment for that property. He said we settled on the current years and did not go back prior years.

Councillor Marchand asked Mr. Mitchell if he anticipated abatements being an issue as we go into the next fiscal year.

Mr. Mitchell said no.

Mr. Richard said the new growth personal tax was pretty substantial for this year.

Councillor Bodanza said the single rate is made up of two prongs; functionally there just isn't a whole lot of commercial and industrial property to offset the residential property which makes up the bulk of the taxable property in the City. Secondly the concept is to encourage commercial and industrial growth through a single rate which ultimately would promote growth and ultimately come back to the residential tax payer and try to shift the balance a little bit, in terms of our taxable properties.

Mr. Mitchell said that is right.

Councillor Feckley asked Mr. Mitchell to explain exemptions and how they qualify for them.

Mr. Mitchell said the residential exemption is for communities like Cape Cod where you have a large influx of tourists into the town and you have a lot of services related into that influx of people and so to lessen the burden on those people they will split the actual tax rate and give owner occupied residents up to a 10% exemption on their residential property. By doing that it shifts the burden from the residence that people who own their domicile to the people who are just renters who just rent out their homes each year. You will typically see that in the Cape Cod area. They would get up to a 10% assessed value adjustment on the particular property and adjusts the tax rate for those individuals. Here in the City there's about 70%. So if we were to adopt something like that it shifts the burden within the classification. So, by the time you reach a certain value you will a larger increase in their tax bill. The small commercial exemption is similar. What it does is gives an exemption to commercial properties assessed under \$1M and less than ten employees in all locations. They would get a 10% reduction in their valuation. The issue with that you are talking about \$1M or so property, a lot of those are rented and not owner occupied. We might be giving the owner the exemption it's not flowed down to the people who actually operate in the City with their rents. Another exemption is the open space discount. Property is valued very low and has a very low tax bill. A lot of the open space can be within Chapter 61. It almost makes no sense to give that discount on top of the very low taxed property. That would be better for a larger farming community.

Councillor Freda said she doesn't know of any community that have gone into a split rate and thinks that all the split rates are trying to get to one. That is what the fight in Worcester has been about every year. Then it becomes a political football because one wants to look like the savior to the residential properties so they go on the other side and it becomes an unfair situation for everyone to be in.

Councillor Freda said she doesn't think people realize these assessed values also are the equalized valuations that the State uses on local aid and in school aid. All the changes in the foundation budget are also going to be impacted by our total assessed value. She asked Mr. Mitchell is he sees that continuing to rise and if he has looked at DOR and what the future may hold.

Mr. Mitchell said the last two years have been an increase so that is a good sign. The prior six years have been a decrease for a stabilization effect so it's still just a bit early to say I think we are on the move for a long trending increase at this point. It surely does look promising looking at some of the graphs and what the financial and economic people are saying but for him it's still a little bit early to say for sure.

Councillor Freda said she tends to agree but wanted him to say it. She said with the little growth that we had it is sustainable. That \$25.00 mark really scares her and she doesn't think people realize that the closer we get to that \$25.00 the closer we get to being a community in serious financial difficulty.

Mr. Mitchell said like the cities of Springfield and Everett.

Councillor Freda said Chelsea and Holyoke.

Mr. Mitchell said those municipalities rely on one thing to keep them going. With Springfield it was the casino. When you hit that level Proposition 2 ½ and \$25.00 per thousand all you can do is cut services.

Councillor Freda said we are not setting anybody's tax rate; we are only setting the classification. The tax rate is set when the budget is done.

HEARING BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL, DECEMBER 14, 2015, continued

Councillor Freda said the Governor's Municipal Modernization Bill, I get you would love it to go from three years to five years for certification but her fear is that you are going to get to the end of five years and you are going to get this huge spike on somebody's property taxes. Are you comfortable with going five years instead of the three if that were to come to pass?

Mr. Mitchell said sure. The rest of New England does a five year valuation, what that means is in Massachusetts we reassess property at 100% of fair market value every year. The difference is we do what's called an interim adjustment for the two years in between and the revaluation, like we went through last year, was where the Department of Local Services comes in and audit us to make sure that we're assessing at fair market value. It's like going through an IRS audit. The good thing that going to five years the City will save money in those types of revaluations expenses but in the interim we will see the process for those interim adjustments become a little stricter and require more reporting.

Councillor Lanciani said it is always a learning experience and it's good to see we have a capable team of Assessors that put together a program that you have to look at it before you can completely understand it. He complimented Mr. Mitchell and his staff for doing a good job.

Councillor Freda said she thinks it would be a good idea to have a breakdown, like Sterling. If you get a \$19.00 tax rate and you can see that \$2.00 pays for the Fire Department, \$1.50 pays for the Police Department out of your particular tax bill. She said she doesn't know why John Richard is afraid of it.

Mr. Richard said he is not afraid of it; it is just not accurate because you have things like indirect costs and are probably not taken into account in the local towns. He said it is pretty easy math if you just want to do that. If you want to put your name to something like that he encourages her to do it.

Councillor Freda said you could put a disclaimer.

Mr. Richard said you could but it isn't something professionally that we would advocate and the Department of Revenue has stopped doing that.

Councillor Nickel said we did a City wide revaluation on personal property instead of doing 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 and you also said the trend is trending up because of the values in the next few years. We didn't go up in property valuations on 1/3 of the City, next year we would have maybe done even better if we had waited and done the 2nd 1/3 and if things continue to improve by the time we get to the third year we could have then perhaps had a larger increase.

Mr. Richard said we are going to do a full revaluation of personal property every year. That was the policy change.

Mr. Mitchell said it is really about trying to get peoples values accurate.

Councillor Nickel asked what the additional cost will be to the City doing it every year.

Mr. Richard said we will be doing it every year so when a business gets rid of equipment it will be taken off. It was \$58,000.00.

Mr. Mitchell said we used to do \$25,000.00 so it's about \$58,000.00 a year to do that now.

Councillor Feckley said you brought us good news. We have new growth on the upswing, 43 new homes; tax values have gone up and hope that will continue. An additional \$.13 is too bad but not terrible.

No one in the audience spoke in favor or in opposition of this Communication.

Councillor Cormier said he echoes the sentiments of Councillor Lanciani that you are a very good team and work very hard. You answer people's questions, and he hears a lot of feedback from your office. You are very professional and knowledgeable on what you do and he appreciates what you do.

HEARING ADJOURNED AT 7:46 P.M.

Lynn A. Bouchard, City Clerk and
Clerk of the City Council

REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL, DECEMBER 14, 2015

Meeting was called to order at 7:30 P.M.

Attendance was taken by a roll call vote; all members were present.

The Committee on Records reported that the records through November 23, 2015 were examined and found to be in order. The records were accepted.

A recess was called at 7:32 P.M. to continue a public hearing and to hold the public forum.

Meeting reconvened at 7:46 P.M.

The following COMMUNICATION was received, referred to the LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, given REGULAR COURSE and referred to the Acting Police Chief, Acting Police Sargent, the Mayor, the City Solicitor, and the Human Resource Director.

REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL, DECEMBER 14, 2015, continued

- C-33 Dean J. Mazzearella, Mayor: Request that the City Council submit a request, pursuant to Article II, Section 8, Paragraph 1, Clause (1) of the Amendments of the Constitution, as amended by Article LXXXIX, that State Senator Jennifer L. Flanagan and State Representative Dennis A. Rosa file special legislation with the General Court, on behalf of the City, seeking to exempt the positions of Police Chief and Police Captain from the Civil Service Law, G. L. c 31, as follows:

AN ACT EXEMPTING THE POSITIONS OF POLICE CHIEF AND POLICE CAPTAIN IN THE CITY OF LEOMINSTER FROM THE CIVIL SERVICE LAW.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same as follows:

SECTION 1. The positions of police chief and police captain in the city of Leominster shall be exempt from chapter 31 of the General Laws.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon its passage.

The following COMMUNICATION was received with an EMERGENCY PREAMBLE, referred to the FINANCE COMMITTEE. Vt. 9 “yeas”. Upon recommendation of the FINANCE COMMITTEE the following COMMUNICATION was GRANTED and ORDERED. Vt. 9 “yeas”

- C-34 Relative to the appropriation of \$1,000.00 to the Police Department Overtime Account; same to be transferred from the Disability Fines Receipts Reserved for Appropriation Account.

ORDERED: that the sum of One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000.00) to the Police Department Overtime Account; same to be transferred from the Disability Fines Receipts Reserved for Appropriation Account.

RE: Holiday Season Parking Enforcement

The following COMMUNICATION was received, referred to the FINANCE COMMITTEE and given REGULAR COURSE.

- C-35 Relative to the appropriation of \$16,910.00 to the Recreation Capital Outlay Account; same to be transferred from the Stabilization Account.

The following COMMUNICATIONS were received, referred to the FINANCE COMMITTEE, given REGULAR COURSE and referred to the Mayor.

- C-36 Relative to the appropriation of \$130,000.00 to the Drake House Expense Account; same to be transferred from the Stabilization Fund.

- C-37 Relative to the appropriation of \$350,000.00 to the Drake House Expense Account; same to be transferred from the Stabilization Fund.

The following PETITION was received, referred to the LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, given REGULAR COURSE and referred to the Police Department-Traffic Division, the Fire Department and the Department of Public Works.

- 14-16 Richard M. Marchand: Amend Chapter 13, Section 13-26 “All night parking” to read “It shall be unlawful for the driver of any vehicle, other than one acting in an emergency, to park such vehicle on any street for a period of time longer than one hour between the hours of 12:00 A.M. and 6:00 A.M. of any day during the winter parking ban in effect seventy-two hours before a predicted Winter storm and twenty-four hours after the storm to provide municipal cleanup. The winter parking ban commences on December first, or the date of the first snow storm with an accumulation of at least three inches, whichever comes first, and terminates on April first.

The following PETITION was received, referred to the PUBLIC SAFETY AND TRAFFIC COMMITTEE, given REGULAR COURSE and referred to the Department of Public Works, the Police Department-Traffic Division.

- 15-16 David R. Cormier: Install a street light on pole #2 on Tory Circle.

The following APPOINTMENT was received, referred to the WAYS & MEANS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE and given REGULAR COURSE.

Fire Department- Permanent Firefighter- Adam Thibault

Upon request of the WAYS & MEANS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS, the following PETITION was given FURTHER TIME. Vt. 9/0

- 8-16 Raymond Racine: Modify Chapter 16, Section 16-32 of the General Ordinances of the City of Leominster by changing the classification of Engineer – Senior to an S-8, and the Public Works Assistant Director to an S-9.

REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL, DECEMBER 14, 2015, continued

Upon request of the LEGAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, the following PETITION was given FURTHER TIME. Vt. 9/0. A hearing is scheduled for December 28, 2015 at 7:00 P.M.

13-16 John J. Souza, Planning Board Chairman: Amend Section 22-17 Underlying Districts Table of Uses, Industrial Uses, Energy System, Renewable, to change in column RA from SPPB, SPA to "N".

Upon recommendation of the PUBLIC SERVICE COMMITTEE, the following PETITION was GRANTED. Vt. 9 "yeas"

30-14 James M. Donovan: Approve the layout of Samoset Drive and Spindletop Drive.

Councillor Cormier, Chairman of the Finance Committee, read the Financial Report for the City into the record. Account balances are as follows:

Stabilization Account	\$12,043,855.00
Emergency Reserve	\$ 100,000.00

Upon recommendation of the FINANCE COMMITTEE, the following COMMUNICATION was GRANTED a Factor of 1 was adopted. Vt. 9 "yeas"

C-30 Dean J. Mazzarella, Mayor: Relative to determining the factor to be used in setting the FY2016 tax rate.

Upon request of the FINANCE COMMITTEE, the following COMMUNICATION was given FURTHER TIME. Vt. 9/0

C-31 Relative to the appropriation of \$20,000.00 to the Cemetery Expense Account; same to be transferred from the Cemetery Perpetual Care Income Account.

Upon recommendation of the FINANCE COMMITTEE, the following COMMUNICATION was GRANTED and ORDERED. Vt. 9 "yeas"

C-32 Relative to the appropriation of \$250,000.00 to the Personnel-Collective Bargaining Expense Account; same to be raised by Fiscal Year 2016 Revenue.

ORDERED: - that the sum of Two Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000.00) be appropriated to the Personnel-Collective Bargaining Expense Account; same to be raised by Fiscal Year 2016 Revenue.

Upon recommendation of the WAYS & MEANS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS, the following APPOINTMENT was CONFIRMED. Vt. 9 "yeas"

Conservation Commission – Paul Colombo - term to expire 4/15/18

Under old Business, Councillor Marchand said they received a letter from the Mayor dated December 8, 2015 requesting an informal position from the Council as a whole as to whether the City should build a new police station or renovate the Lancaster Street property which is currently an annex to the police station.

Councillor Marchand said he raised a few questions to the Mayor, what type of a vote and what exactly is he looking for. The Mayor said he was looking for some feedback from the previous presentation that he gave in early October. Has the Board that was established to investigate the feasibility of a new police station/renovation project come to a conclusion as far as having a final formal vote to share with us to help us? The Mayor said it was an Advisory Council and they had done their job.

Councillor Bodanza said he is sort of struck by the problem that is going to be paralysis by analysis. This has been a problem in this community for a long time. He said he has heard the comment bandied around that putting all this money into an old building or a building that might not be the perfect building for a police state might not be the wisest choice. Siting anything today, whether it be a school or anything at all is difficult and a police station even more difficult. We have heard proposals for different sites around the community most of them were shot down for one reason or another. There have been a lot of creative ideas but none of them had risen to the top or developed consciences. At this point, it makes sense to use the site that we have. If we don't move forward and have to go out to look for a site without anything in mind we could all be talking about this years from now, still. He said we save a few dollars by renovating the former plastics museum. We all heard the architect's presentation and we had a chance to ask questions. What he took away from that presentation was that it was doable project. We all know that the plastic museum invested a lot of money in that building. A lot of the infrastructure has already been improved. Is it the greatest location of all? Maybe not but which location is? From a space point of view the current police station is obviously outdated. The contributors to the architects report involve the police themselves.

Councillor Bodanza said if started on this project today by the time we go out for permanent bonding the Library bond will be retired. The cost we are looking at does not reflect that. As Councillor Salvatelli pointed out at one of our meetings there isn't any grant money out on the horizon for a project like this. It's going to cost the taxpayer but we have gone a long time without a police station and do we have the will as a community to build one. That's what the Mayor wants to know do we have the will and what is it. He said his recommendation is to move forward with the renovation of that building and take the next step.

Councillor Marchand said the retiring debt of the Library will be July 1, 2018 so that \$900,000.00 will be available for FY19.

Councillor Freda said that if the Mayor is ready to move at this point she thinks we need to move. She said in the early 90's we sat here and listened to every judge and every attorney asking us to take the money that was put aside for a police station and

build a courthouse to save the courthouse and the schools. Everybody that agreed to that agreed with the attitude we will not forget the police. Fast forward to 2015, it has been over 20 years plus that we haven't done anything for the police department with that money we spent for the courthouse. Do we owe a movement, I think so. She said they went out for RFP's twice for anybody in the City that wanted to express an interest in selling their property for a police station site and had a number of sites were looked at and voted a site on Jungle Road. They looked at a possibility of downtown where the parking garage is 22 years ago. She suggested the architect look at the parking garage and use the existing station as Emergency Management and make a state of the art command center and tie in the fire department and have the whole public safety facility and I was told it was too expensive to go that route. If you look at the amount of money we put into Emergency Management between buying the building, amount of money we continually put in that building, maybe that wasn't so bad of an idea 22 years ago. We looked at a lot of option and came close but never finish the process of the discussion. If there is an end to this discussion and we can service the police station and give them something they deserve. Would I like to see a new police station? Absolutely. I am not confident in the fact that we went out a couple of times and had some really good sites that we could have used but it wasn't in the cards and there was no desire to buy a piece of land to put it on. If this is what is being looked at and is the most viable to do what we think we need to do then I am going to support it because I want to see a new station. I support the renovation.

Councillor Cormier said in 2010 it was his third meeting and a vote came before the Council to buy 210 Lancaster Street and he was the only person that voted no. Over the years that have gone by we've invested more money in 210 Lancaster Street he felt at that point since it was the will of the Council back then to move forward. He said they moved the detective bureau there and were told that a plan was going to come. Over the years it has taken time. He is very hesitant, especially after the numbers they received. We are talking \$27M vs. \$24.4M. What is the difference? We put a \$1M into this building so far and really went nowhere. For the difference in money he cannot see going forward with this building. He said we can do better as a community. We pride ourselves on having the best of everything. We have the best library, best activities for children and seniors and community events and festivals. We have a beautiful turf at Doyle Field, new schools. I don't understand what the problem is with building a new police station. Before any plan was put together, before we bought this building, we were told that there was going to be a huge difference in money between renovating a building and buying property and putting up a new building. If we had a real plan at that point, which he asked for, we probably wouldn't be here where we are today. If somebody put this plan together at the time there is no way we would have bought the building and considered it for a police station when you are talking about a small difference in money between building a new one and renovating this 110 year old building. He said he has given this a chance, he voted on spending more money after the initial purchase and he is done. He is good with 210 Lancaster Street. If this Council wants to move forward that's fine but he is not going to own any vote renovating a 110 year old building.

Councillor Lanciani said he has been contemplating a new police station for a number of years and no disrespect but we only had three meeting with regards to what can be done with that building. He thinks there are still some questions that need to be answered like are we going to have to dig below that building and put some room down there? Is there going to be enough room with what we have there? Extending the front somewhat? He said he is not comfortable with the fact that yes HKT came here, gave us a presentation but we have had no further meeting amongst the committee to see what the feeling is to go forward and what is it what we are going to be looking at doing exactly. He will vote no for the present building and will ask to go out and keep looking. Look how long it took to get the beam replaced over at the police station. We picked a site on Jungle Road. It could be done. There are about 5-7 cars traveling the City of Leominster each and every day and if one of those cars can't get off and go and look at something that needs to be taken care of or emergency then we have a problem. If you are asking me to vote tonight, I will not vote to go with 210 Lancaster Street.

Councillor Feckley said she came on the Police Department Building Committee late. She said she doesn't recall that their charge would be part decision making process but a recommendation process. So after the presentation we had he was waiting for the call that we were going to have another committee meeting. At the end of the presentation she was shocked to find out that the difference between new and renovation was so slight. She said she doesn't have a good feeling about the building on 210 Lancaster Street and she didn't have it from the moment she walked into it or during the discussions. The neighbors are not supportive of it. She said she was very new on the Council when the Chief came down and told the story about what was going on at the present police station and then she took a tour of it. She told the Chief it was a sad story and told him whatever she could do to support the men and women of our police department in the City of Leominster, whatever she can do to make it better. She said she has not changed her position on that and she will not support the renovation.

Councillor Dombrowski said he thinks we are operating in a vacuum. He said we ought to take this up in the new year aggressively. The Mayor has given us directive orders sought our position. Have this assigned to the appropriate committee and have some informational meetings and have a recommendation to the Mayor within six weeks. He thinks the building could work and we own it already. I would hate to see another building vacant. It might be very well a good presence in that neighborhood. The one caveat is the courthouse. It's a beautiful courthouse and I am all in favor of the courthouse because it provides revenue for the City. It's also rented to the Commonwealth and every time the Trial Court goes on one of their cost saving things they look to close courts that are rented vs. owned. There is a new sheriff in town, Governor Baker, and he is looking to save money. And if that is something that is possibly in the works we ought to investigate that as well. Look at that carefully. The holding cells are already there, the ramp to get inside is already there, and a lot of the communications system and wiring is already there. If the Commonwealth's plan or object is to close the courthouse and consolidate with another courthouse that is owned that might be a good site and cost effective. We should ask the question do we have an idea what's going on with the courthouse lease. Everybody here wants to help the police and everybody here is in favor of a new facility. He thinks that site will work. We should have a series of aggressive meetings and get the Mayor a reasoned recommendation by mid-February.

Councillor Salvatelli said did the Mayor reasonably think that he would get a unanimous vote on anything down here? What the Mayor is looking for, I think, he wants to know if you will get six votes for something because it needs to be bonded. Four people here say they would never bond Lancaster Street, so it's dead. If six people say they want a new police station it's like buying a house. Where are you going to buy? This reminds me of a maze going nowhere. At the end of the maze you can't get out of it. All he is asking for is there six votes to tax the people for the next fifteen years. They said the Miles Kedex property would work and the other property, Lincoln School, would be torn down which will be never used. If the Mayor came down and said I have Lancaster Street and spend \$24M or we can put it on X spot for \$27M. That is a reasonable question. Now you can say you want this or that. Saying you want a new building vs. the old building is not a reasonable question. It's an unfair question to ask anybody at this point. Six votes or it's not going to fly.

Councillor Nickel said when we bought that Lancaster Street School one of the comments was it could be a police station but it might not be a police station. At the time prices on property doubled every five years. Some of us on the Council said well there is a chance we can buy the property for this much and in five years the value might have gone up and that will help pay even more money into the police station. We have a beautiful library and spent the money, we did a very credible job at the high school and spent the money, and we are looking at roofs for school and spent the money. Don't these people deserve the same kind of respect, the same kind of thing? Spend the money.

Councillor Nickel said if I remember correctly, that additional \$3M was inclusive to buy the land so it's going to cost us the same amount of money to renovate a 110 year old building. He said he spoke with one of the police officers, someone that has been on the department for a number of years, said do you really want to have a police station with all the things that can happen sitting beside a church? Do you want to be sitting inside St. Anna Church and have some drunk screaming out in the parking lot every obscenity you can think of during someone's funeral mass? Easter? Christmas? Do you want to have a building with police traffic with people going in and out across the street from a school? Do you really want to do that? And one of the things was spend extra money for a parking garage below or have to go out and buy some land in the immediate facility for parking. As far as he is concerned, bite the bullet, do what needs to be done. Buy the land and give these people what they deserve.

Councillor Freda said Councillor Salvatelli is right. She doesn't think they are being asked to choose one or the other, she thinks they are being asked if they want to spend the money. She thinks the rest is yet to come. It isn't no, we are not going to support this building, yes we are, do we all agree that we want a police station. She thinks that is the key question. The high school was an additional \$1M because there were PCB's in the cement. She said you're going to find issues when you renovate.

Councillor Freda said to reassure everybody, when we first started talking about that building she went to the school and church. She said everyone knows that is her church and Councillor Bodanza's church. The school and the neighbors are in full support of that project being done. She said no in the beginning and she talked to all of them. Surprisingly to her, they were supportive. So, the question is do we support going out to bond for a police station, new or used. We need to have more discussion on which way we are going to go.

Councillor Bodanza said he doesn't disagree with what Councillor Freda is saying. At the end of the day is there support for the idea of spending \$27M. The discussion suggests there is. If he knew of a site out there that would work, in a heartbeat he would say let's go forward. His problem is doing what he does for a living, doing it as long as he has getting involved in land use, battles with neighborhoods. It is almost impossible to site anything. He is fearful that they are going to be talking about a site for a long time, years maybe longer. Eminent domain is an avenue and maybe the right avenue but it's not without controversy and expense. The \$3M is the difference between the two proposals is site acquisition cost and maybe \$3M is enough. He said he would rather see a brand new building. The structure is 110 years old and according to the architects it is structurally sound, is capable of being used and if structurally sound it's no different than building a brand new structure. The whole guts of that thing are coming out. The windows are going away, the heating plant is going away, and we all know that. That is why it's going to cost nearly the same as a brand new structure. Is it the ideal? No it's not and I am not married to it. The only reason I suggest it is that I am fearful that we are all going to be talking about this five years from now without a location. If we have something viable, at least let's give it a thought, or if something else comes along or someone comes up with an idea or we decide to take a section of a neighborhood by eminent domain. I don't think we want to put it out in left field. He said he doesn't see putting it out in the outskirts of the City is the way to go either. We need to be where people can access is, people that need the service and centrally located, and that is somewhat of an advantage on Lancaster Street. It's a difficult conundrum finding a site and maybe more difficult finding the site than paying for it. He said he respects all the opinions whether or not that site make sense or doesn't. We are all coming from the same place. We all want the best for the police department and want to break this log jam. It is not an easy situation.

Councillor Marchand said we are so overdue. Everyone made sense on how to do this. The urge to do it is before us and that is a good thing. How that happens is in question. His position is a brand new station. He had a discussion about a plan and is probably a pipe dream but we just purchased a great piece of property off of Merriam Avenue which is a parking location which abuts the housing authority and the post office. Wouldn't it be great if the post office and the housing authority could collaborate with the City and come up with the funds necessary to build a brand new parking garage there, take the parking garage down and build a brand new state of the art police station? When it can be occupied knock the old station down and connect to the fire station. Wouldn't it be nice if the fire department had a chance to buy a truck that would be a little bit bigger than the size of the building they are in? You could see taking care of not only the police station but also helping the fire department at the same time. Lancaster Street, we are dealing with a 110 year old building and from an architectural point of view and from a build out renovation it might be a beautiful building when it's all done. It is what it is and what happens when you build a new building, from an architectural design point, the police officers all the way up to the chief will be involved in the design. I like having it downtown. If I didn't have that option and there was a renovation project before me, without reservation, I'm in full support of it.

Councillor Salvatelli suggested that C-33, regarding civil service, should be held over to a meeting in January. He said something that has been going on for 50 years should be discussed in seven days. The new City Council should be sitting in on this.

Councillor Freda said the Clerk produced a 2001 discussion that they had. She said there was the Legal Affairs Chair back then and there was a lot of paperwork submitted.

Councillor Marchand said for consideration for the next Council in January there is a rules committee and his suggestion is to take a look at the committees he established that have 5 members and see if 5 is needed or suggest to go back to 3 the way it was. He asked each of the Chairs of the committees to meet with the Clerk or the Assistant City Clerk to see if there is anything in the folders that can be dealt with at the next meeting. Just a reminder, if something is going to come back up we have to notify the person who submitted the petition that was tabled and suggest an action to dispose of it.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 9:00 P.M.

Lynn A. Bouchard, City Clerk and
Clerk of the City Council