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MONSON

FinComm examines budget

By Abigail McCoy
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MONSON – Public safety funding and Monson’s broader fiscal challenges were at the center of discussion during the March 9 meeting of the Finance Committee, where officials reviewed preliminary budget proposals for the Fire and Police departments as they prepare for the upcoming fiscal year.

The meeting, held at Town Hall and chaired by Finance Committee Chair Peter Fimognari, focused largely on the Fire Department’s budget presentation by Fire Chief Brian Harris, followed by an overview of the Police Department budget by newly appointed Police Chief Nick Gasparini. The conversation highlighted growing operational costs, staffing needs and the difficulty of maintaining services as the town confronts significant budget limitations.

Fire Department outlines operational pressures

Harris began the discussion by distributing a detailed budget narrative and worksheet to committee members, explaining that the document was designed to proactively address common questions and provide a clearer overview of departmental needs.

According to Harris, the department has already made numerous reductions over several budget cycles and has reached a point where additional cuts could compromise operations.

“The fire department, like many others, has made significant cuts to our budget over the last several budget cycles,” Harris said. “It’s my findings that we can no longer sustain any additional cuts to our line items.”

One of the department’s most pressing needs involves equipment testing and replacement. National Fire Protection Association guidelines require annual testing of fire hoses and ladders to ensure safety and reliability. Harris said the department has been unable to conduct those tests for the past two years because of limited funding.

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MONSON

Markey visits Monson to award federal grant

By Abigail McCoy
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MONSON – Town officials, firefighters and community members gathered on March 6 to welcome Senator Ed Markey, who visited the town to formally recognize a \$1 million federal grant that will help fund renovations and an expansion of the Monson Fire Department station.

The funding comes through congressionally directed spending, often referred to as an earmark, and will support ongoing improvements to the town’s fire station. The grant represents a significant federal investment in public safety infrastructure and will reduce the amount Monson taxpayers must contribute toward the project.

According to town officials, the fire station project carries an estimated total cost of approximately \$6.6 million. With the federal funding now secured, the portion



Monson Town officials gather with Senator Ed Markey and other representatives of the various counties of Massachusetts.

expected to be covered by local taxpayers will decrease to roughly \$5.6 million.

“It’s a significant amount of money for sure,” said Monson Fire Chief Brian Harris. “Being able to bring

back \$1 million to Monson is a huge success for the fire department, the town and the citizens of the town.”

Town officials explained that the grant did not come easily. The Monson Fire De-

partment applied for the congressionally directed funding two years in a row.

The department was initially notified during the first application cycle that it had been successful. However,

federal budget cuts prevented the earmark from moving forward at that time. Officials reapplied the following year and were later notified that

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PALMER

Plans underway to celebrate country’s 250th anniversary

By Abigail McCoy
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PALMER – Community groups and town organizations are already laying the groundwork for a year-long celebration of the United States’ 250th anniversary in 2026, known as the country’s “semi-quincentennial,” with a wide range of historical programs, exhibits and community events designed to highlight the town’s past while encouraging residents to participate in preserving its stories.

During a recent planning discussion hosted through the Palmer Public Library, organizers outlined an ambitious calendar of events leading up to and throughout the anniversary year. The effort aims not only to commemorate the town’s history but also to build public awareness and encourage participation

from residents of all ages.

One of the first challenges organizers identified is simply getting people familiar with the anniversary itself.

“Part of our activities need publicity,” organizer Helene O’Connor said during the meeting. “A lot of people don’t even realize that 2026 is the 250th anniversary.”

To help generate interest, organizers are considering a playful promotional video featuring recognizable community figures attempting to pronounce the word “semi-quincentennial,” culminating with a child delivering the correct pronunciation.

Several events are planned throughout the spring and early summer to build momentum for the anniversary year.

One of the first major programs will take place



during Patriots’ Day weekend in April, when the Palmer Public Library plans to host an exhibit highlighting a historic quilt created during the nation’s Bicentennial celebration in 1976.

The quilt was originally organized by late-Palmer resident Doris Nahabedian, who invited schools along the historic Henry Knox Trail to contribute squares designed by students; the

route used by General Henry Knox to transport cannons from Fort Ticonderoga during the Revolutionary War.

Although three quilts were originally planned, only two were completed. One remains preserved in Palmer’s archives, while the second was presented to the Massachusetts State House.

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TOWN COUNCIL

BESS moratorium approved

By Abigail McCoy
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PALMER – The Palmer Town Council addressed a wide range of municipal issues during its March 9 meeting, including a temporary moratorium on battery energy storage systems, new tools for addressing neglected properties, budget challenges driven by rising health insurance costs and a potential referendum on merging the town’s four fire districts.

The meeting also included recognition of a longtime volunteer, public comments from residents regarding infrastructure and taxes, and updates on town projects and the upcoming fiscal year budget.

Battery Energy Storage Moratorium approved

Early in the meeting, councilors voted unanimously to approve Zoning Amendment and Ordinance 2026-02, establishing a temporary moratorium on battery energy storage systems in Palmer.

The measure had been discussed at two previous meetings and is intended to give town officials time to review potential zoning regulations and impacts related to large-scale energy storage facilities before allowing development.

Volunteer honored in Community Spotlight

The council also recognized longtime volunteer Dave Cotter as the second recipient of the town’s Community Spotlight award. Cotter was recently named Massachusetts Conservation Commissioner of the Year and has contributed more than four decades of volunteer service in Palmer.

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PALMER

Historic school photos preserve memories at Schoolhouse Commons



Yelenik holds up an example of a photo that was placed in the racks. Turley photo by Abigail McCoy

By Abigail McCoy
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PALMER – For generations of Palmer residents, the building now known as Schoolhouse Commons was once simply Park Street School at 1085 Park St., a place where thousands of local children spent their earliest years in the classroom. Today, a growing collection of historic class photographs is helping to keep those memories alive.

According to Paula Yelenik, who owns the Frame store within the Schoolhouse Commons, she has been involved with organizing the photographs inside the building. Park Street School served the community for more than nine de-

cadec, operating from 1900 until its closure in 1991.

“That’s 91 years,” Yelenik said. “A lot of people went through this school.”

The building later found new life as Schoolhouse Commons, but remnants of its long educational history remained behind. When landlord Nelson Peace purchased the property in the mid-1990s, just a few years after the school closed, he discovered a number of class photographs still inside the building.

Peace’s daughter, a photographer, enlarged many of the images so they could be displayed prominently throughout the

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SPORTS

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BASKETBALL

Palmer wins playoff opener

PALMER – Last Sunday, Mar. 1 at Pathfinder Tech, Palmer 5/6 Suburban Basketball won its playoff opening game against Mohawk Pioneer, scoring the victory 46-28. Palmer would move on to face Belchertown in the next round. Palmer would go 7-9 during the regular season.



Julian Bayanilla gets plenty of air on this shot.



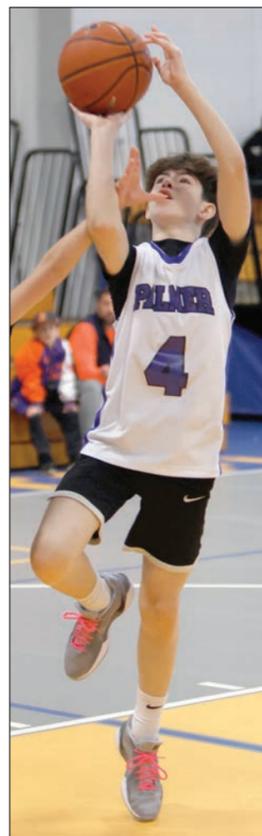
Landon Chevalier eyes the hoop.

Connor Baer is focused as he shoots.



AJ Braden goes for the opening tip.

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com



Nathan Drewnowski overcomes a block and shoots.



Alexander Cartier shoots ahead of pressure.

BASKETBALL

Panthers season ends in first round

ORANGE – On Thursday, Feb. 26, the Palmer High School girls basketball team was defeated by host Mahar Regional High School in the opening round of the Division 5 state tournament 64-35.

Palmer reached the state tournament by finishing in the top 32 in Division 5 with a 9-11 total record.

In the first round matchup with Mahar Regional, the Senators were able to get out to a first start to pace the game with a 14-4 run. Palmer would come back with a better second quarter, but could not stop Mahar's offense, heading to halftime training 30-16. The Panthers would not be able to mount any kind of comeback from there.

Addyson Petraszewicz had Palmer's best performance, scoring 15 points to lead the Panthers in the defeat. Palmer finished at 9-12.

ALL-STAR GAMES

Seniors headed to All-Star Games

SPRINGFIELD – The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame announced the team rosters for the 2026 Western Massachusetts Senior High School All-Star Games. On Friday, Mar. 20, the Hall of Fame will host the 2026 All-Star event on the Jerry Colangelo Court of Dreams at the Hall of Fame. Sixty of the region's top seniors were selected from different divisions to participate in the final high school contests of their prep career.

"We are honored to welcome Western Massachusetts' top high school basketball players to the 15th annual All-Star celebration at the Basketball Hall of Fame," said John L. Doleva, President and CEO of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. "This event is a special opportunity to recognize the hard work and achievements of these outstanding seniors, and we invite the community to join us as they take the court one final time in their high school careers."

A committee of local coaches and media members, representing each division on both the boys' and girls' sides, selected the teams. Using the designated classes for the PVIAC Tournament, the players will be divided into six teams: two girls' teams, two boys' teams of Class A and B players, and two boys' teams of Class C and D players. Only graduating seniors are eligible for the All-Star Games. Rosters are on the next page.

For the 15th year, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame will recognize one boy and one girl as the Western Massachusetts Players of the Year. A special presentation

ROAD RACE

St. Patrick's Day Road Race set to kick off big weekend

By Gregory A. Scibelli gscibelli@turley.com

weather for the Holyoke St. Patrick's Road Race.

HOLYOKE – Last March, for the first several years, it was gorgeous

More than 6,000 people participated in this year's event, with nearly 5,000 participants finishing the 10K,

or 6.2-mile course.

It was Samuel Whittaker of Salem, CT, who finished the race in 31:24. Alex Corbett, who placed second in last year's race, came in 23

seconds later at 31:47.

The top female finisher was Angelia Rafter at 34:13 and she placed 12th overall. Rafter is from Glastonbury, CT.

Among local finishers, Matt Provost of Monson was 19th overall at 35:09. Ryan Davis of South Hadley was a close 20th at 35:10. Lindsay Smith of South Hadley finished 22nd at 35:12.

While the race course, commonly known as a "hilly" course throughout downtown Holyoke ending with a turn off Beech St. and up the hill on Hampden St. toward the finish line remained largely the same, there was one noticeable change in this year's event.

Presidential Timing took over the official timing



The participants are off in the 48th running of the Holyoke St. Patrick's Road Race last March.

Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli