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Town seeks more local control of affordable housing

By Quinn Suomala
Correspondent

AGAWAM -- The Agawam City Council unanimously approved a resolution asking for more local control of housing.

This resolution asks the state for more local control over housing. It was sent to the state as well as neighboring communities.

The council took this action following a visit from Executive Director of the Agawam Housing Authority Maureen Cayer.

During her time in front of the council, Cayer explained how difficult housing has become since Massachusetts implemented the 2014 change in regulation to the legislature that governed the housing authorities.

"In the first five years of my time we had local control and we didn't have difficulties," Cayer said. "I had a waiting list of about 115 people for my seniors."

Now with the change, Cayer has a waitlist of over 24,500 people for elderly housing alone.

This alteration was meant to simplify affordable housing applications by allowing people to apply online and to multiple units at once.

However, it has since had negative consequences on many housing authorities.

"It took away the ability for me to interact with the individuals who are in need of safe, affordable housing that do live here in town," Cayer had said.

People from throughout Massachusetts are able to apply en-masse for housing throughout the state. This resulted in people sometimes getting offered housing that is miles away from them and not viable.

HOUSING ❙ page 10

Town to set tax factor at upcoming public hearing

By Gregory A. Scibelli
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AGAWAM – The public is invited to come hear and be heard at the Agawam City Council meeting on Monday, Dec. 7 as the city council will be asked to set the tax factor for fiscal year 2027.

While property tax bills have gone out for the first two quarters of the year, the tax factor and tax rate that are set will determine what residents owe for the remainder of the fiscal year. The property tax rate is effective through June 30, 2027.

As of press time, Mayor Christopher Johnson has not made a recommendation to the city council for what the tax shift should be.

The tax shift/tax factor is the ratio in which residential property is taxed compared to commercial and industrial property. Agawam is one of a number of communities that has a split tax rate. Agawam, for the last couple of decades, has competed very closely with neighbor West Springfield for having the lowest residential tax rate in the Springfield area. Agawam had regularly been the lowest, but in recent years, Agawam and West Springfield have flip-flopped with having the lowest rate in the area.

Ironically, while tax rates have been dropping in recent years, tax bills are still going up for many residents and businesses due to rising property values. Last year, the council agreed to a 1.59 tax shift. It was the second straight year that shift was agreed to.

The 1.59 shift agreed to by the council came with a tax rate of $14.10, down 54 cents from the previous year. The shift makes the commercial and industrial tax rate $26.67. That is a decrease of $1.03 from FY2025's rate of $27.70. The first two bills for FY2027 were based off these rates.

Residential property taxpayers make up nearly 79% of the taxed popular. Commercial and industrial property make up the remaining 21%.

For FY2026, the town had to raise $77,769,105 million through the tax levy, which is more than $18 million below the levy limit.

For FY2025, Agawam maintained the lowest tax rate among similar sized communities, as well as surrounding communities. Agawam's rate of $14.64 per $1,000 valuation of property was 23 cents better than neighbor West Springfield. The neighboring towns have typically competed to have the lowest tax rate in the area for residents.

Coming up on Dec. 7, Johnson will make a recommendation for the tax shift and tax rates for the upcoming year. He will also share how much will be raised through the tax levy and give a presentation in conjunction with the Assessor's office about the why his proposed tax shift is the fairest to both residents and businesses in the community.

Last year, Johnson warned the council that bills could be on the increase in future years with various project debt, increases in health insurance, and other cost increases happen. The town will also be contending with the large debt-exclusion cost of the Agawam High School project when it is completed in a few years.

The public hearing on Dec. 7 will allow residents to be heard on the tax factor. The city council meeting begins at 7 p.m. There is no exact time for the start of the public hearing as it falls in the order of the agenda.



Alanna Rose, of Agawam, runs the booth for Pintu's of West Springfield at the Chamber's annual Food Fest.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

Chamber holds annual Food Fest event

AGAWAM – Last Thursday, Nov. 19, the West of the River Chamber of Commerce allowed the culinary talents of many local restaurants and entities to shine at its Food Fest event. Visitors to the event were able to get a few samples at some area restaurants, bakeries and even some unique food businesses. Businesses at the event were able to network and promote what they had to offer to various other businesspeople in the nearby communities. More than a dozen food and restaurant vendors took part in the event.

The Food Fest Event was available for residents

CHAMBER ❙ page 10

Agawam Public Library hosts annual 'Bizarre' Bazaar holiday exchange

By Christina Gioscia
Correspondent

AGAWAM - Agawam Public Library hosted its annual Bizarre Bazaar, a free holiday exchange. Donations for the event were collected earlier this month and the shopping days were held last weekend. The library accepted gently used decor for all holidays.

Adult Services Librarian Kristen Frost said the event has become very popular in the community.

"The Bizarre Bazaar gives community members a chance to be involved by both donating items for the 'shop' and choosing new holiday décor for free," Frost said. "With everything being so expensive in today's world, it is an excellent resource for folks to have where they can acquire holiday wares for no cost. Each year we have teachers and other professionals who work with young people select items that they can use to decorate or craft with their students. Some people like to come and select items they can give as gifts. Other folks look to refresh their holiday materials like finding a new wreath to hang or new lights to string. It is especially a great way for someone just starting out in their first home or apartment to get some holiday décor for free. Libraries are known for sharing materials for free, so we are happy to facilitate this event in keeping with the spirit of library sharing. The hope is always that when someone comes to the library for an event, they will see some other library materials that catch their eye and want to borrow them."



A section featuring fall decorations for sale. Fall decorations.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA GIOSCIA

The event is a lot of work to put together and Frost enjoys the work that goes into it.

"In putting this event together, it is amazing to see all the incredible things people donate to us," Frost said. "Anyone who attends the Bizarre Bazaar will be surprised with the number of items we have and the variety available. The best part of the event is opening the doors and seeing the joy on the faces of the visitors as they find special treasures among the displays."



Christmas decor donations including wreaths and stockings.

Frost credited Chad Pelley with helping with the preparation for the event.

"A special shout out goes to (Chad) Pelley who helped me sort all the items into categories," Frost said. "It is a huge job, but somehow we got it done. The promotions crew at the library also deserves a shout out for getting the word out about this event: Cher Collins, Charlie Pope and Erica LeFebvre. In reality, the entire library

BAZAAR ❙ page 10

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SPORTS

Brownies run ends in first round of state playoffs

AGAWAM – The Agawam High School boys soccer team had a strong run in the Western Mass. Class A Tournament that ended in a defeat in the finals. Agawam would move into the Division 2 State Tournament, and suffered its second straight 1-0 defeat, falling to Melrose High School 1-0 on Monday, Nov. 9. The Brownies defense played another tough, physical game, but the offense could not come up with a goal to equalize. Melrose scored the lone goal of the game in the second half. Agawam's season finished with an overall record of 8-9-4.







Jake Hamre tries to avoid the defender.
Right: John Carra looks to his right and makes play on the ball.
TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

Jack Chivers starts up the field after making a play on defense.





LEFT: Nathan Bassette tries to clear the ball away.
Above: Dylan Jorgensen charges after the ball.

Hodgdon launches new team to race modifieds

DANBURY, CT – Teddy Hodgdon is partnering with Jim's Welding Service to launch a new team to chase the Monaco Modified Tri-Track Series championship in 2027.

Announced Monday, Hodgdon will drive the Jim's Welding Service No. 56 in the popular Modified division for the new campaign. The paint scheme and colors of the car are from Jim's Welding Service owner Jim Beckman's NHRA Division One drag team.

The Monaco Modified Tri-Track Series schedule is yet to be announced. The team may also elect to run additional Tour-Type Modified events, but they will for sure commit to racing for the Monaco Modified championship.

"Jim has been a fantastic partner with our team over the years and we are proud to take the next step with him to chase trophies in 2027," Hodgdon said. "I can't thank everyone involved in putting this together enough. We are excited to go out there and try to pick right up where we left off at the end of the 2026 season, carrying our momentum. Even though it's a new team, we feel we are poised for a strong year."

Jim is no stranger to racing. Growing up at the Danbury Race Arena, Beckman has been involved in motorsports at some level for at least 50 years. He has competed behind the wheel in a Street Stock in Connecticut, along with other divisions, such as drag racing. His drag racing team has been very successful, winning a national event and more. Beckman has been involved in motorsports as a driver, car owner and partner with many in the industry.

He first became familiar with Teddy and the Hodgdon family when Teddy was competing in Wild Thing Karts at Stafford Motor Speedway. Since then, he's followed Teddy's progression through the ranks, and is ready to tackle this new venture with a new car to the team and trailer. He thanks his wife and family for their support.

"Teddy is just such a smooth, smart driver," Beckman said. "He's always showing that he is thinking ahead, preparing for his next move. He works really hard. Teddy and his family are awesome people. The opportunity to put this deal together came about and I could not be more excited. The sky is the limit for us."

Jim's Welding Service is located in Danbury, Connecticut. You can reach them at

203-744-2982. Quality fabrication since 1981, Jim's Welding Service is a job shop that has all different types of services. Jim's helps local municipalities with repairs on snowplows, sanders and more. They also offer additional services. Interested parties in need should reach out to them directly.

Thunderbirds grab win in Hartford

HARTFORD, CT – The Springfield Thunderbirds (5-7-2-3) snapped their five-game slide with a gritty 2-1 triumph over the Hartford Wolf Pack (11-9-1-0) on Sunday afternoon inside PeoplesBank Arena.

For a fourth straight meeting, the Wolf Pack jumped to a 1-0 lead, this time just 3:03 into the action as Justin Dowling one-timed a Liam Greentree feed behind Will Cranley on Hartford's first shot of the game.

Down but undeterred, Steve Ott's T-Birds had a quick rebuttal at 5:10, as Justin Carbonneau reeled in a loose puck at the bottom of the right circle and surprised Callum Tung with a precise short-side finish to even the slate, 1-1. Springfield registered nine of the game's first ten shots and outshot their I-91 rivals by a 13-7 margin through 20 minutes.

The stars of the second period were the T-Birds' penalty killers, who successfully dispatched two more Hartford man-up opportunities, with Cranley turning away each of the 12 shots that reached him in the second.

The T-Birds were inches from taking a lead late in the period as Carbonneau arrived in the low slot for a one-timer with Tung lying on his side, but the rookie's shot wouldn't go.

The tie carried into the third, with Springfield needing another kill to begin the final stanza.

The PK once again stood tall, and even after Springfield's own power play came up empty in their only try of the day, the momentum and confidence of the man-down unit helped spark the game-winning tally.

After weaving around a checker at center ice, Jakub Stancl carried the puck down the right wing, slipping a pass into the slot for Otto Stenberg. Stenberg's initial shot glanced off Tung, and after Oskar Sundqvist knocked the loose puck away from Tung's pads, Stenberg pounced on his own rebound and jammed it home with 6:21 remaining, giving Springfield the 2-1 edge.

The penalty-killing heroes were tasked with one final clutch stand. The unit completed its perfect day with just over two minutes remaining, and Hartford's last-ditch attempts to tie came up empty.

Cranley picked up his third win between the pipes, stopping 26 of 27, while Tung took the defeat despite 27 saves of his own.

The T-Birds and Wolf Pack renew acquaintances at PeoplesBank Arena on Black Friday, Nov. 27, for a 5:00 p.m. puck drop.