

The Journal Register

SERVING PALMER, MONSON, BRIMFIELD, HOLLAND & WALES

A TURLEY PUBLICATION | www.turley.com

April 3, 2025 | Vol. CLXXIV, No. 10 | \$1.00

www.journalregister.turley.com

PALMER

School Committee looks over preliminary budget for FY2026

By Marcelo Gusmão
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PALMER – At last week’s School Committee meeting, Superintendent Matthew Francis presented a preliminary budget for the district for fiscal year 2026.

“In December, we kicked off the budget season with a presentation,” Francis said. “This is the most up-to-date

information that we have.”

Francis added that there are still variables the budget is waiting on, and said that he didn’t foresee the committee needing to take action on the budget until later in the spring.

The presentation began with a discussion of impacts to the budget and outlining the priorities. He highlighted changes that have occurred since the previous meeting in

December.

“One of the budget impacts is increased enrollment,” Francis said. “These are students that are actually in our seats, as well as the foundation enrollment, which is based off of the chapter 70 funds that we get.”

Francis explained that Governor Maura Healey sent a preliminary budget to the legislative branches which showed an increase to the

town’s chapter 70 funds of approximately \$350,000. He then pointed out some priorities that he had to consider while crafting the budget, such as contract obligations and Collective Bargaining Agreements with paraprofessionals, custodians, food service, and nurses.

“I’ve talked about transportation,” Francis said. “Transportation, we are watching extremely close-

ly because of the increase of homeless and foster care transportation that we’ve had to account for since December.”

Committee Member Erica Nadeau compared the number for transportation to fiscal year 2025, and noted that it seemed low.

“There are some entitlement grants that we have to reserve,” Francis said. “When we do the final presentation,

waiting for your approval, you’ll see more of an understanding of where the grant money is going to be used, where the circuit breaker is going to be used, and how much we would have to pledge out of School Choice depending on what number we get from the town.”

Francis mentioned that the Operational Services

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MONSON

Select Board meets to discuss infrastructure plans and a drug-free Monson

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MONSON—The Monson Select Board met on March 25 to discuss several important issues, including infrastructure upgrades, community grant challenges, and various appointments. The meeting, which began promptly at 7 p.m., also featured a public comment period where residents raised concerns and shared initiatives benefiting the town.

Public Comment and Concerns

Roxanne Gunther of Mejell Road addressed the board with concerns over an alleged investigation into the town administrator’s access to emails. Gunther questioned the expenditure of taxpayer money for the investigation and requested clarity on who authorized it.

Town Administrator Jennifer Wolowicz clarified that there was no formal investigation, but rather a review initiated by town counsel to address potential conflicts of interest related to the town’s IT vendor. Wolowicz also

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BINGO NIGHT



Turley photos by Abigail McCoy

Winner Jen Deyo with her new Michael Kors Medium Duffel Satchel in Optic White.

Handbags & hand tools prizes for the night hosted by the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce

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PALMER — The Quaboag Chamber of Commerce hosted its inaugural Handbags & Hand Tools Bingo Night at the Amvets 74 in Palmer on Friday, March 21 drawing in a lively crowd for a fun and unique evening of bingo with a twist. This event was an exciting combination of fashion and practical tools, offering participants a chance to win stylish handbags or high-quality hand tools.



Winner Paulene Jacek with her new Ryobi Cordless Trimmer, Edger & Jet Fan Blower Combo Kit.

The evening began at 6 p.m. with doors opening for registration, and the games kicked off at 6:30 p.m. Participants purchased game boards for \$40, which covered entry for 10 rounds of bingo, access to a cash bar, and a snack table filled with fruits, vegetables, cheese, crackers, cookies, and brownies. For those seeking additional chances to win, extra game boards were available for purchase for \$1 each, and attendees could also enter raffles for smaller prizes.

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BRIMFIELD

A community hub for all at Hitchcock



Turley photos by Abigail McCoy

Cindy Skowrya standing on the front steps of the Hitchcock Free Academy, where everyone is welcome.

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BRIMFIELD—For the past five years, Cindy Skowrya has been at the helm of Hitchcock Free Academy, where she’s helped transform the historic institution into a vibrant community center. Skowrya, who was hired just two weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, has embraced the challenges that came with those early years

and continued to drive the Academy forward.

A Brimfield native, Skowrya has deep roots at the Academy. “I spent most of my childhood here,” she recalls. Her mother was the secretary of the Alumni Association, and many members of her family, including her parents, aunts, and uncles, graduated from Hitchcock when it still operated as a high school. Skowrya herself took tennis

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COMMUNITY

C4R prepares for 2025 waterway season

Work to begin on new section of Lower Quaboag Blue Trail

By Paula Ouimette
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PALMER – The Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council held its spring kickoff meeting this past Sunday, sharing details about water quality sampling, river restoration and cleanups, plans for a new section of Blue Trail and volunteer opportunities.

Coordinator of C4R Keith Davies welcomed people to the Palmer Historical



Cultural Center in Three Rivers on March 30 and shared the history of the watershed council, which started in 2014.

Davies said at that time, the existing Chicopee River Watershed Council was mostly defunct, and he saw an opportunity to revive it and also connect it with rivers upstream. By combining

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EDUCATION

Innovative EMT Pathway for students at PHS

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PALMER—Palmer High School is providing a unique opportunity for senior students aged 17 and older to join an innovative Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) pathway. This program, which runs outside of regular school hours, offers students the chance to gain practical skills in the medical field while earning valuable credentials.

Currently, eight seniors are taking part in this new program: Cassandra Perry, Aliyah O’Dean, Louis Alicea, twins Elijah and Keegan Jez, Rachel McNalloy, Gianna Perry, and Nayoka Williams. While students must provide their own transportation to and from the class, they can enroll as early as age 17, though they must wait until they turn 18 to take



Turley photos by Abigail McCoy

(left to right) Cassandra Perry, Aaliyah O’Dean, Louis Alicea, Elijah Jez, Keegan Jez, Rachel McNalloy, Gianna Perry, Nayoka Williams are participants in the EMT Pathways program.

the state exam to earn an official EMT license.

The program fully funded by Palmer High School. It is offered free of charge to students. The school covers

the costs for both the course and the final exam. For many of the students, the opportunity to take the class at no cost is one of the biggest draws.

“This is a great opportunity for me,” says Aliyah O’dean, one of the students in the program. “It looks great on a resume, and it

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SOFTBALL

Mustangs break out late, beat Chicopee Comp

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

MONSON — Matt Hull was an assistant coach for the Monson varsity softball team during the past four years. He has replaced Jill Carneglia as the Lady Mustangs head coach this spring.

It didn't take Hull very long to celebrate his first varsity win.

Monson held a 7-5 lead in their season opening game against Chicopee Comp before scoring six runs in the bottom of the fourth inning enroute to a 15-5 non-league home victory, last Friday afternoon.

Leading the way offensively for the home team were senior shortstop Natalie Hull, and sophomore second baseman Chelsea Hull.

The duo had five of the Lady Mustangs nine base hits and scored three runs.

Chelsea Hull is also an outstanding pitcher. The lefthander, who took over for senior righthander Molly Szado at the start of the fourth inning, did not allow any base hits and wound up as the winning pitcher.

Before playing the season opener, Chicopee Comp had only practiced outside two times.

"This was only the third time that we've been outside this spring," said Comp head coach Kelly Walsh. "Our scrimmages were also canceled due to the rain."

It was the second meeting ever on the softball diamond between the two schools.

Monson squeaked out a 7-5 win at Comp last April.

In last Friday's contest, the Lady Colts took a 2-0 lead

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Boys lacrosse defeated in season opener



Parker Libiszewski tries to overcome pressure.



Dominic Menard is pushed by an opposing player.



Ethan Mooney looks around for an open teammate.



Anthony Arventos tries to get around a defender.

Brennan Peterson surveys the field.

MONSON — Last Thursday afternoon, Monson High School boys lacrosse was defeated by Hoosac Valley in the season opener for both teams. The Mustangs, which have co-oped with Pathfinder Tech for the past few years, managed just a single goal in the 12-1 defeat. The Mustangs were scheduled to face Lenox and Mt. Greylock earlier this week, and are back in action on Tuesday, April 8 at home against Granby at 5 p.m.

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com

TENNIS



The Palmer tennis teams work out last week at practice.

Palmer tennis preps for regular season



PALMER — The Palmer High School boys and girls tennis teams practiced week at the high school courts. The boys tennis team won a league title and entered the state tournament last year. Both teams were scheduled to start the regular season on April 1, with the boys facing Greenfield and the girls going up against Renaissance. Next up, boys tennis faces SICS April 3 at 4 p.m. while girls tennis is at Hampden Charter on Friday, April 4 at 4 p.m.

The Panthers are preparing for their regular season opener.



Palmer boys tennis is looking to follow up on a 2024 season where it won the league title.



Girls tennis will be looking for an improve campaign.

BASEBALL

Pathfinder baseball gears up for regular season



Djauan O'Dean hits in the cage at practice.



Zander Auffrey makes a play during inside practice.



Sprints are a regular part of preseason.



The Pioneers are gearing up for the regular season this week.

PALMER — The Pathfinder baseball team worked out last week in order to get ready for the regular season. The Pioneers were scheduled

to get going on Monday. The Pioneers next game is at Smith Vocational on Thursday, April 3 at 4 p.m.



The Pioneers run through drills.