

Town of Chester
Board of Selectmen/Water Commissioner/Zoning Board of Appeals
Meeting Minutes June 5, 2017

Present: Selectmen - John Baldasaro and Barbara Huntoon (Clerk Senecal absent) Town Administrator Patricia Carlino, Administrative Assistant Rosanne McClafin

Attendees – Mary Ann Pease, Duane Pease, Greg Harrison, Beth Lansing, Betty Erdman, Gustave Erdman, Norman Robitaille, Heather Robitaille, Pam Zebrowski, Jerry Zebrowski, Andy Myers, Craig Boyer, Terry Donovan, Cheryl Provost, Robert Daley, Gene Watters, Wilma Foley, Anne Daley, John Foley, Mike Hickson, Art Lindburg, Annette LaMountain, Terry Murphy, Mike Donovan (Country Journal), Tom Geryk (Veterans Service Agent), Steve Connor (Veterans Service Agent)

Guest – Jim Barry-Green Communities

- 1) Chairman Baldasaro called meeting to order 6:04 p.m.
- 2) Minutes of May 22, 2017 BOS meeting approved and signed.
- 3) Warrants approved and signed.
- 4) First right of refusal Ingel Road – Piece of property coming out of Chapter 61B Recreational Land -BOS has never exercised right of refusal in the past. Chairman Baldasaro motion we do not exercise right, Vice-Chairman Huntoon seconded, unanimous vote.
- 5) Water department Rte. 20 property, broken water pipe resident requesting reduction in water bill due. The house was vacant, water pipe frozen leaked approximately 166,000 gallons of water into basement, passerby noticed water coming from basement window. Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted property owner's responsibility to secure residence if property is uninhabited, Chairman Baldasaro agreed "it is not our responsibility", board denied request for reduction of water bill.
- 6) Water commitment- BOS approval for Assistant Water Dept. Collector Jill Moritz to make billing for period 1/4/2016 – 4/1/2017. BOS approved and signed.
- 7) Jim Barry-moved to later in meeting.
- 8) Scholarship moved to 6-12 meeting. Funds not yet available.
- 9) Cemetery Commissioner Jeff Dixon plans to resign, Town Administrator to post position.
- 10) Veterans agent appointment-BOS noted agent appointment made at meeting May 22, 2017 made in haste without due diligence and irregular procedure (item was not on the agenda for May 22 meeting). The Board recognized their fault and apologized to the residents. Chairman Baldasaro provided the following historical information for reference, previous resident Chester Veterans agents have been unable to effectively complete duties and were unable to recover funds for the Town. The most recent resident agent resigned. Chairman Baldasaro stated that the Board would open the floor for comments, residents to raise hand to be acknowledged:
Robert Daly expressed "deep concern" for veteran's service and care and it was obvious many people have questions regarding the decision to terminate the Northampton VA representative contract and to appoint a representative without posting the position. Mr. Daly presented 4 (four) questions to the BOS. 1.) Do they (BOS) have documented evidence of issues with current representative? 2.) Is there a regular review of agent performance? 3.) How is the search for a new representative done? 4.) Have the requirements been posted?
Chairman Baldasaro responded, no actual complaints, concern was expressed over number of hours agent is available, (some people were not aware agents are available Mon-Fri 8-4 in Northampton), the BOS do not perform evaluations for appointed positions. Vice-Chairman Huntoon, the BOS did not do a search, (thus there were no requirements posted) the applicant (Michael Hickson) submitted a letter requesting the appointment and again noted the BOS acted hastily based on the compelling argument that applicant made. Chairman Baldasaro noted the BOS does not do "performance evaluations" on appointed positions, the Board annually makes a determination of the appointee performance, takes into consideration any persons who submitted their names for the appointment and makes appointment accordingly and again noted the topic should have been tabled until it had been on the agenda.
Duane Pease asked what qualifications/certifications are required for agent? Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted the BOS knew there would be training required.

Mary Ann Pease-we are participating in the VA collaborative, sharing expenses, this is a working situation why change it, especially when we are working toward more collaborative functionality. We also receive additional services through the Northampton VA. The BOS should be looking more closely at expenses. Where will classes be held? Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted that these were valid points and that is the reason the BOS is re-evaluating the decision.

Steve Connors- Veteran Agent- Per contract agreement, the Town must give 30-day notice to withdraw from contract. Yes, even though the agent has limited hours here in town for appointments, they are available Mon-Fri 8-4 in Northampton and accommodate requests for appointments, also veterans can meet with agents in other town locations as well. Mr. Connors noted that there are other state and federal benefits that agents must be aware of as well as veteran's benefits. To demonstrate the agent's willingness to work with veterans, Mr. Connors noted that he had an appointment to meet at the Town Hall with the veteran applicant, who did not show up, he then went to the applicant's house in an attempt to meet with him, to no avail, he returned to the Town Hall and ultimately Mr. Connors was not successful in his attempt to meet as arranged.

Chairman Baldasaro motioned to rescind Veteran Agent appointment made May 22, 2017, Vice-Chairman Huntoon seconded, motion passed.

Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted there was a lot of valuable information presented. Chairman Baldasaro stated if there are additional points residents would like to present, please email or contact the board.

John Foley - "would it be too much to ask for the BOS to do due diligence before they screwed up?"

Jerry Zebrowski – will the BOS appoint representative prior to training? Wouldn't it be better to appoint someone who is already qualified?

Treasurer Cheryl Provost noted the agent must be appointed to be eligible for training.

Veteran Agent Connors noted the agent has 6 (six) months to complete training, and that he had financial information available. Susan Kucharski asked how does the town get reimbursed? Mr. Connors explained, once Chester pays out benefits, they (Chester) must get VA approval to be reimbursed up to 75% of the expenses. Between 2013 and 2014, the town lost more than \$21,000.00 due to improper or untimely documentation. Benefits are very complicated and agent must know "what to fight for". Northampton VA representatives can also process Social Security claims. Vice-Chairman Huntoon commented "we have gotten a real education".

11. Common areas of Town- Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted the Main Street/Route 20 intersection look "sad", who is responsible for weeding, cleaning etc. Admin Asst McClafin stated community service crew to be scheduled – weather permitting- to weed and clean. Vice-Chairman Huntoon would like Admin to confirm cemetery department to otherwise maintain areas.

Item 7. Jim Barry – Stretch Code/Green Community. In order to be eligible for "Green Community" status and be eligible for funds the Town must vote to participate and fulfill the following 5 (five) criteria (there are free services available to assist the Town in compliance)

- a) Encourage renewable energy in business- The Town already meets this requirement by virtue of the Solar By-Law.
- b) Expedited process for permitting- permitting process cannot exceed 12 months.
- c) Commit to create a plan to reduce energy expenses by 20% over a 2 (two) year period. PVPC is currently preparing an energy audit which will provide an "Energy Baseline" to work from.
- d) Town must commit to purchasing "Energy efficient" vehicles for future vehicle purchase. Any vehicle with a GVW 8500 lbs. or more are exempt.
- e) Town must adopt building "Stretch Code". Applies ONLY to NEW residential construction. Once the Town has all 5 points completed or in process, the Town is eligible for \$135,000.00 for weatherization improvements, new boiler, windows, insulation etc. in all municipal owned buildings. A portion of the funds may be set aside for residents to apply for as well. Once initial funding is spent the Town becomes eligible to apply for additional funds up to \$250,000.00

Jerry Zebrowski-where does the money come from and with global warming, why do we need it.

Jim Barry- funds come from State grant, all utility companies make alternative compliance payments to the state which funds this program.

Andy Myers-how would a regional school building be handled? Jim Barry- the Town can have a "Shared Portfolio" to accommodate needs or add regional school after initial round of funds are used.

Ann Daly volunteered for Green Community Committee.

Chairman Baldasaro encouraged residents to vote at Annual Town Meeting for this important and beneficial program. Jim Barry agreed to attend ATM June 10 to answer questions.

Chairman Baldasaro encouraged attendees to attend meeting June 7, 2017 5:00 p.m. at Stanton Hall in Huntington with Lt. Governor Karen Polito, and reminded residents the BOS will be meeting at 12:30 on June 10, 2017 just prior to the Annual Town Meeting.

Citizen Comments:

Ann Daly: re: water department issue, suggested it be noted in "Watts News" or on website, that it is the property owner's responsibility to secure uninhabited residences.

John Foley: looked for minutes on website, stated last posted minutes dated 1/9/2017. Vice-Chairman Huntoon stated the minutes are on the website, look under "Selectmen's" page. Website will be addressed by future IT services. Chairman Baldasaro noted there will be an item on the ATM warrant for funds to implement IT services. Town Administrator stated the IT review done by PVPC has not yet been received, waiting for full report. IT needs include "back-up", website improvements, support, security etc.

Susan Kucharski: does the BOS have 1,3, and 5-year plan for The Town? Chairman Baldasaro responded that The Town annually reviews the Community Development Plan with PVPC. Additionally, the BOS refers to the plan all year long- i.e. Hampden Street project. These items are not usually on the agenda as they are under review by PVPC. Vice-Chairman Huntoon noted general plan for the future is to reduce the tax rate, promote growth and continue to work with the PVPC and Hilltown Collaborative. Chairman Baldasaro reiterated the BOS are actively trying to find ways to be more efficient. Andy Myers has taken the lead with The Hilltown Collaborative, many on-going discussions coming to fruition, experiencing real momentum.

Susan Kucharski: what is plan for day-to-day workings of Town Hall. Chairman Baldasaro noted the structure of the Town Administrator and Assistant is in place to address day-to-day operations of the Town Hall, the BOS is to oversee long term goals, talk to Administrator as needed regarding daily operations etc. Vice-Chairman Huntoon also noted the BOS cannot "micro-manage" and follow up and discussions outside of BOS meetings must not violate open meeting guidelines. Ms. Kucharski expressed concern for the BOS "thought process" "problem solving", "ability to serve the common good" and "take the best course of action".

Additional discussion of veterans agent appointment and subsequent vote to rescind.

Additional discussion of allowance by Board for citizen comments during meetings.

Annette LaMountain-inquiry made regarding license requirement to hold raffle for Historical Society, and items missing for Town Hall from April Penny Social. Chairman Baldasaro instructed Annette to file a report with the police. Discussion followed regarding number of keys to Town Hall and related recordkeeping. Town Administrator Carlino to research cost to change locks.

There being no further business Chairman Baldasaro motioned to adjourn 8:00 p.m., Vice-Chairman Huntoon seconded, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosanne McClaflin Recording Secretary

John Baldasaro – Chairman

Barbara Huntoon – Vice-Chairman

Rene Senecal – Clerk