

TOWN OF CHESTER
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
JUNE 10, 2017

Moderator Richard Holzman called the Annual Town Meeting to order at 1:01PM. A quorum was present with 78 voters signing in.

The Moderator asked all to stand and recite the pledge of allegiance.

Article 1:

The Moderator read the article, which is to elect three or more Field Drivers and three or more Fence Viewers. Selectman John Baldasaro made a motion to pass over this article. Selectman Barbara Huntoon seconded.

Discussion: Mr. Baldasaro stated that this motion relates to positions that are outdated and no longer needed, and the Selectboard will be working to discontinue these positions.

With no further discussion the Moderator called for a voice vote. The motion to pass over this article was passed with a unanimous vote.

Article 2

The Moderator read the article. Selectman Barbara Huntoon made a motion to authorize the Selectmen to appoint such other Town Officials as are not required to be chosen by ballot. Selectman Rene Senecal seconded.

The Moderator called for discussion. Hearing none, he called for a voice vote. The motion was passed with a unanimous vote.

Article 3:

The Moderator read the article. Rene Senecal made a motion to fix the salaries of all elected officials for the period of July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 as indicated on the warrant. This was seconded by John Baldasaro.

The Moderator called for discussion. Hearing none, he called for a voice vote. The motion was passed with a unanimous voice vote.

Article 4

The Moderator read the article. John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the Town will vote to authorize the Board of Selectmen, or other town departments with the knowledge of the Board of Selectmen, to apply for and accept grants from the Federal Government, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or any other source, to execute any documents in connection with said applications and to expend said grant funds for purposes received without further appropriation. Barbara Huntoon seconded the motion.

The Moderator opened the floor for discussion

Bob Daley asked for a clarification regarding grants. John Baldasaro explained that once a grant is received, expenses made against that grant are then applied to the line item in that grant. The process is routinely audited.

Mr. Daley asked a follow up question: is the grant given to the particular department that requested the grant? Mr. Baldasaro responded that by law grant monies get deposited into the general fund. If a grant can only be expended by that department, it will only be used by that department.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.

The article was carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Article 5

The Moderator read the article

Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the town will vote to authorize the Treasurer, with the approval of the Selectmen, to sell at public auction, or at private auction to Government agencies, all of any of its property acquired by virtue of sale for non-payment of taxes, which sales have been confirmed by the Land Court or the Tax Commissioner, and to give deeds therefore. The motion was seconded by Rene Senecal.

The Moderator invited discussion.

Tom Huntoon stated he does not agree with the section that addresses that the auction can include government agencies.

John Baldasaro responded that this language is required by law; the town has no intent of changing any procedures regarding town auctions.

Barbara Huntoon added that the town is not giving any favor to government entities. It still has to go to public auction.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called the vote.

The motion was carried by a unanimous voice vote.

Article 6

The Moderator read the article. Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the Town will vote to authorize the Treasurer, with the approval of the Selectmen, to borrow money from time to time in anticipation of the revenue of the financial year beginning July 1, 2017, and in accordance with the provisions of Mass. General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 4, and to issue notes as may be given for a period of less than one year in accordance with the provisions of Mass General Laws, Chapter 44, Section 17. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator opened the floor for discussion. Hearing none, he called for a voice vote. The motion was carried unanimously.

Article 7

The Moderator read the article. John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$816,002 for the Town of Chester's minimum contribution to the budget for the Gateway Regional School District for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. (Last year's figure was \$834,112). Barbara Huntoon seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion.

John Baldasaro asked that Andy Myers, chairman of the Finance Committee give a presentation on the school budget. Mr. Myers stated that the Finance Committee is recommending approval of this motion, as this is the minimum contribution that the state recommends.

Michele Kennedy voiced her concern that the wording "or any other amount" sounds like we are giving the school district a blank check.

Mr. Baldasaro clarified that this wording allows the town to spend less, but not more than what is authorized, without having to have another meeting to authorize spending.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.

The motion passed with a majority of aye votes; there was one no vote.

Article 8

The Moderator read the article. Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$276,070 for the Town of Chester's share of the transportation and debt service (non-discretionary contribution, including the school build project) for the Gateway Regional School District for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. (Last year's figure was \$309,188.) Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator then open the motion for discussion.

Norm Robitaille stated that the other district towns have voted, but the budget does not reflect that. How much is being saved?

Dr. Hobson (regional school superintendent) stated that there is "a savings of a bit less than \$100,00", but that costs for special education have increased in the budget in other areas (outside of transportation).

Hearing no further discussion the moderator called for a vote.

Article 8 was carried with a majority vote; four opposed.

Article 9

The Moderator read the article. A motion was made by Barbara Huntoon to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$413,788, or any other amount, for the Town of Chester's share of the above minimum contribution to the budget for the GRSD for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. The motion was seconded by John Baldasaro.

The Moderator invited discussion.

Andy Meyers told those gathered that the finance committee is recommending a figure of \$372,886, and made a motion to amend the motion.

Barbara Huntoon commented that per the finance committee, this figure would level fund Gateway for this coming year, and stated that all of the Selectmen are in agreement. The decreased amount is due to the decrease in student enrollment.

Andy Myers noted that the \$413,788 figure is "over 50%" of town budget and needs careful consideration. He stated that Chester is last town to vote on the school budget and that two other towns have rejected it. To reject this figure would make a statement to the GRSD that it needs to consider more fully the economic trends of the region. He referenced charts prepared by state that show the population decrease in next several years, particularly in the birth to 19 year olds, and the 20-64 year old age groups. He noted that as the population is aging, more folks are on a fixed income. In 2016, the six towns have spent \$6 million; by 2035, this figure will be doubled, and this continued level of spending will "break the bank". He continued that, since 1993, Gateway student enrollment is down by half the students, with trend continuing to go down. Last year we lost another 37 students. There comes a point where the budget becomes unsustainable for the towns. We are in different economic environment need to come up with better solutions.

Assessments to the towns are up 2.7% (\$ 245,000), but this is not equally spread across participating towns. Russell and Huntington have gotten hit hard. The towns that voted for the budget have had decreases in their assessments. The question before us is do we support Huntington and Russell? He reminded the participants that we can't afford to have another town leave district.

Mr. Myers noted that Gateway processed this budget without any input from towns or any meetings with the selectmen of the towns. We want a seat at the table.

A yes vote, votes the budget down and gives us a seat at the table - towns need to support each other, with town inputs get a better budget. Both towns and schools are suffering from same economic climate

Dr. Hobson, Superintendent of the GRSD, was recognized. He stated that they have met with the Gateway Town's Advisory Committee (GTAC) during the budget process. He stated that if this motion is voted down, Gateway has 30 days to come up with a new budget. He stated that this may not allow the proper amount of time to meet with those concerned. He stated that the budget has been cut over \$1 million in less than 7 yrs. Special needs students' costs have risen \$200,000. He stated that we cannot cut a lot more. He noted the Chester's assessment is up only \$14,000 over last year but less than 2010. He noted that he has cut staff by 50%, and administrative staff by 60%.

John Baldasaro stated that in supporting other towns, we must look at the consequences to us as well. When Worthington pulled out, we got attention from the state. The state has made a recommendation that the Gateway towns find ways to share costs and administration. The Hilltown Collaborative was formed from that recommendation. The process is broken.

Mr. Baldasaro recommends turning down this version of the budget, stating it will make a big difference if fixing a process that is broken.

Shirley Winer asked, "is it true that only 50% of Chester Elementary being used"?

Dr. Hobson stated that only one room is not being used. All other classrooms are being used. Chester is a single-track school, and can't combine more than one grade in a classroom. The School Committee has asked for input/facilitated discussion from the towns.

John Baldasaro stated that the School Committee is a very structured meeting and that you only get only 1-2 minutes to talk. He stated that school superintendent Administrator has never come to Selectmen to ask for input in the budgetary process.

Shirley Winer, School Committee member, agreed with John Baldasaro that the school committee meetings are very structured. She noted that even school committee members weren't up on all of the budget process.

Dr. Hobson stated that the budget was previously available; it is the town's fault that citizens don't know about the budget until today. He did say, however, that the district will take equal blame.

Ann Daley asked, "how many students was school built for?".

Dr. Hobson stated 300 students - 30 students to a classroom. He stated that there are presently 170 students in the school. This figure was later corrected to 150.

Pam Zebrowski disagreed with this figure. She stated that the Chester Municipal Light Department (CMELD) prepares gift bags for the students for educational events that the electric company provides schoolchildren. This year, when they asked for a head count, the school said 112 students, not 170. She also stated that the salary increases in the school system are beyond reality. Where is this money going to come from? We have to work together. WE can't keep spending at this level.

Diane Dunn, School Committee member, stated that if we underfund our schools, won't be able to attract new people. Those we do attract will be more needy.

Other citizens who work at or have graduated from Gateway added the following:

- There are more opportunities then than now. It's a double-edged sword, but we need to keep schools attractive.
- The Town wants to send a message for more cooperation, but we can be penny wise and pound foolish.
- The Town should be part of the budgetary process, and we need to have better educated children. Without this budget, we won't be able to.
- Every time we vote down the budget we send negative publicity.
- What happens when next year, or in the future, we need help from other towns? What about the GRSD salaries
- The last time the budget was voted down the state asked for a MARS report. The result of that report was that we need continuity in the district.

John Baldasaro agreed that stability and continuity are needed. He noted however that the report also says that the current process is not working now - "60%of our budget is pre-determined without our input". The Town is a business, and a business cannot function well when 60% of its costs are determined by someone outside the business. He asked citizens to turn this down.

Barbara Huntoon asked the following questions

- "didn't the MARS report talk about expanding vocational education?". "Isn't that one of the reasons why we're losing students"?

- "are the top-heavy administrative costs mandated or is that a district decision?"
- "Why are you losing students to charter schools?"

Dr. Hobson responded that MARS report looked at creating more opportunities, but it was not specific to vocational education costs. He stated that this would be \$150,000 to each town. He noted that GSRD has introduced a robotics program and a STEM program .

Stacy Stewart asked, "does \$14,000 increase have any effect on tax rate?"

Mr. Baldasaro stated it would be about 10 cents on per thousand on the tax rate.

Michele Kenney noted that the average assessment for Hilltown taxes is \$2500, while the projection is that by 2035 the average assessment will be \$7500. This is not about \$0.10 on the dollar in the big picture.

Ann Daley reminded all that there's only a single pool of money. She noted that there is not a single town that has not asked their departments to cut their budgets. It all comes down to the fact that that all of us share only one pool of money. She stated that we haven't paid for our own employees to get pay raises, and to provide more needed services in our towns, while the school gets raises every year. She encouraged all to look at big picture. "If we don't look at the big picture, we are all going down the toilet."

Andy Myers stated that the Selectmen are working hard to make Chester competitive as a town. "We as town are sharpening our pencils, we want Gateway to as well."

JohnBaldasaro stated that there is more of a symbiotic relationship here that is actually happening now, and there is a need for more partnering.

Barbara Huntoon made an amendment to the article and motioned to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$372,886 for the Town of Chester's share of the above the minimum contribution to the budget for the Gateway Regional School District for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. (Last year's figure \$348,154). This motion was seconded by John Baldasaro.

John Baldasaro noted that if voters approve the amendment they will vote down budget.

Bob Daley stated that in view of the all valid points that were made, the school committee can't keep writing checks that we cannot cover.

The discussion was called by moderator. He summarized the discussion by saying we want minimum sacrifice with maximum rewards, that the population changes are an issue. These will not be easy solutions. Sometimes you will have some of your favorite things go by the way. He encouraged voters to keep an open mind.

There was a request to clarify what all were being asked to vote on - the motion or the amended motion.

John Baldasaro stated that there are two votes. The first is on the amended article for 373,866 for the above the minimum contribution. The second vote will be on the amended article to

change that amount to \$372,886. He stated that, in effect, if you vote for the amendment, you are voting down the article as well.

The moderator called for a standing vote on the main motion as amended (\$372,866). The amendment to the motion passed with 48 in favor, and 26 opposed.

The moderator then called for a standing vote on the main motion as amended; this main motion amended carried with 48 in favor and 26 opposed.

Article 10

The Moderator read the article.

John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$159,309 for the Town of Chester's share of the above minimum contribution to the budget for the Gateway Regional School District for the period July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. The motion was seconded by Rene Senecal.

The Moderator invited discussion.

John Baldasaro stated that both the Selectmen and the finance committee recommend passing this article.

There was no further discussion. The Moderator called for a voice vote on the motion. It was so voted unanimously.

Article 11

The Moderator read the article.

Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the Town will vote to accept funds being provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under the provisions of Mass. General Laws Chapter 90, to pay for such costs as allowed by appropriate legislation in connection with the maintenance, repair, and construction of Town ways and bridges, in the amount of \$234,161, with such funds to carry over from year to year until expended by the Town. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion, and hearing none, called for a voice vote.

The article was voted unanimously in favor.

Article 12

The Moderator read the article.

Rene Senecal made a motion to see if the Town will vote to appropriate the income from the sale of electricity to private consumers, municipal building and jobbing for the Municipal Electric Light Department for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2017 and to authorize that the whole be expended under the direction and control of the Board of Electric Light Commissioners and Manager. John Baldasaro seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion.

Michele Kennedy requested an explanation of the article.

John Baldasaro stated that it authorizes the operations of CMELD.

The Moderator called for a voice vote, The article passed unanimously.

Article 13

The Moderator read the article.

Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the following sums of money (Moderator through Selectmen Miscellaneous) to defray charges and expenses of the Town, including debt service (principal and interest) and to provide a Reserve Fund, for the period July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 and further, to hear the report of the Finance Committee and act thereon.

The Moderator recognized Andy Myers. He gave the finance committee's report and thanked the members who served in the past year.

John Baldasaro thanked the finance committee for their service. He proposed going through budget by section (see warrant):

Section A - Total General Government - request for \$236,116

Section B - Public works - request for \$507,750

Section C - Health/Welfare/Culture/Recreation - request for \$152,955

Section D - Public Safety request for \$147,583

Section E - Debt & interest request for \$123,441.47

Section F - Unclassified Expenses request for \$359,476.47

Total budget the town is voting on is \$1,403,880.47

Andy Myers stated that the finance committee recommends approval.

Ann Daley asked why the highway secretary is under the Selectmen's line item and what are the breakouts of highway department's salaries.

John Baldasaro offered clarification that the secretary is a regular line item on the budget.

John Murray provide information regarding the salaries: the Highway Superintendent is paid 24.23 / hr.; the staff is paid at \$20.20 per hour.

With no further discussion, the moderator called for a voice vote. The article was passed unanimously.

Article 14

The Moderator read the article.

John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the Town will vote to accept a payment in lieu of taxes in the amount of \$7,500.00 from the CMELD to cover the cost of street lighting. The motion was seconded by Barbara Huntoon.

The Moderator invited discussion.

Tom Huntoon asked if that is a fair amount to pay in lieu of taxes? "How much do they have in their account? What monies are held in their account?"

John Baldasaro stated that payment in lieu of taxes is determined by the CMELD manager and the commissioners. It is not required by law that CMELD make a payment in lieu of taxes..

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote. The motion carried; there was one opposing vote.

Article 15

The Moderator read the article.

Rene Senecal made a motion to see if the town will vote to transfer from Water Department funds in the Treasurer, the amount of \$665 to cover the cost of a bill from Elm Electric, for FY 2016, that was unintentionally never paid. John Baldasaro seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion. Hearing none, he called for a voice vote. (Needs 9/10 ths of to pass).

Article passed with unanimous vote.

Article 16

The Moderator read the article. John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the town will vote to transfer from available funds in the treasury (free cash) the amount of \$7,500.00 or any other amount for maintenance and upgrade of the town website and IT services for town hall as needed. Barbara Huntoon seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion.

John Baldasaro stated that this project is long overdue, and that the town has been using a bandaid approach for a long time. We need to update and upgrade the town website to make it more user friendly. In response to questions, he said that there are three vendors in consideration for this project, and the appropriation is for "up to" this dollar amount.

The Moderator then called for a voice vote.

The article passed unanimously.

Article 17

The Moderator read the article.

Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the town will vote to transfer from available funds in the Treasury (free cash) the amount of \$103,655.03, or any other amount, to cover the snow and ice deficit for Fiscal year 2017. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

Ann Daley stated that this is the only fund we can deficit spend and asked why is this coming out of free cash and not put on next years' tax rate? Rene Senecal stated that the rate would be increased by \$0.90/thousand and that towns don't fully fund it because we can deficit spend.

Towns can use free cash or take it from the stabilization fund.

John Baldasaro stated that the stabilization fund contains about \$450,000

John Foley asked if this amount of \$103,665.03 is for overtime?

Mr. Baldasaro stated no, it is for salt, sand, and equipment maintenance.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.

It was so voted unanimously.

Article 18

The Moderator read the article.

Barbara Huntoon motion to see if the town will vote to transfer from available funds in the Treasury (free cash), the amount of \$2,000.00 or any other amount, to begin a Records Preservation project proposed by the Town Clerk. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator recognized Susan Kucharski, the Town Clerk to speak to the need for these funds. Ms. Kucharski noted that there are a number of vital records from the period of 1880 - 1910 that are in a very fragile state, and records from the 1960's and 1970's that are in danger of deterioration. A records archivist has evaluated these records and recommended a preservation plan that would span several years and be affordable to the town. Some of the records in question were available for review at the town meeting.

Tom Huntoon had several comments and questions regarding the project. The Moderator called for a voice vote hearing no other discussion.

The motion was passed, with only one nay vote.

Article 19

The Moderator read the article and John Baldasaro made the initial motion. It was seconded by Rene Senecal. John Baldasaro then made a second motion to amend the main article to read "To see if the town will vote to transfer from available funds in the Treasury (free cash) \$100,000 to reduce the tax rate." The motion was seconded by Rene Senecal.

The Moderator invited discussion. There was only one comment stating that the present tax rate is \$20.32; passing this amended article will drop the tax rate. The Moderator called for a vote on the main motion.

The main motion was carried with one nay vote.
The Moderator then called a vote on the main motion as amended.
The main motion as amended carried with a unanimous vote.

Article 20

The Moderator read the article. John Baldasaro made a motion to pass over this article. Barbara Huntoon seconded the motion. Since there was no discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.

The motion to pass over this article was accepted with a unanimous vote.

Article 21

The Moderator read the article. John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the town will vote to rescind \$12,335.00 of the borrowing made under Article #19 of the June 13, 2015 Annual Town Meeting. Barbara Huntoon seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion. Shirley Winer requested clarification of this article. John Baldasaro stated that this was a "bookkeeping article to zero balance the books", that the town didn't need as much money as was authorized at the time.

Article 22

The Moderator read the article. Barbara Huntoon motion to see if the town will vote transfer from available funds in the treasury (free cash), the amount of \$2,500, for the purpose of a survey and engineering drawings to establish costs for construction of the William Street turn-around. John Baldasaro seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion.

In response to questions from the voters, Andy Myers stated that the survey work was done. John Baldasaro stated that this for the engineering costs.

The Moderator called for a voice vote.
The article was approved unanimously.

Article 23

The Moderator read the article. Rene Senecal made a motion to see if the town will vote to amend the Chester General Bylaws by enacting a bylaw entitled "Stretch Energy Code" for the purpose of regulating the design and construction of buildings for the effective use of energy, pursuant to Appendix 115.AA of the Massachusetts Building Code, 780 CMR, the Stretch Energy Code, including future editions, amendments or modifications thereto, with an effective date of January 1, 2018. The motion was seconded by John Baldasaro.

The Moderator invited discussion.
Voters requested an explanation of the stretch energy code.

The Moderator recognized Jim Barry, non-resident guest, from the MA DOER, to speak to the issue. He explained that the state's Green Energies Act sets aside money to carry out energy efficiency projects in town that would reduce energy consumption. One of the first criteria a town has to meet in order to qualify for this money is that a town must be designated a "green community". This designation happens when a town adopts the Stretch Energy Code. This code is an optional part of the state's building code that requires that new construction must be more energy efficient than normal building code. He explained that in 2010 it was a stretch, in 2012 the building code was changed and almost caught up with stretch code. Now, in Jan 2017 the Stretch Energy Code is almost no stretch at all. It does not impact additions, renovations, historical buildings.

John Baldasaro told voters that one major reason of interest the Selectmen have in passing this code is that the state promising at least \$135,000 in grant money now; adopting this code will also make the town eligible for future rounds of funding. He noted that the parameters of the program meet with the goals of what the selectman are trying to do. He stated that the HERS (Home Energy Rating Services expert) rating required under the code costs \$ 750-1000.

Duane Pease, speaking from his experience as the town administrator in Middlefield, stated that Middlefield has used their grants for passive solar, insulated garage doors, etc.; the grant has saved quite a bit of money in energy costs with these improvements.

Michele Kenney asked how many new home constructions Chester has had in last year. John Baldasaro answered that there was only one new home built last year.

Andy Myers noted that the municipal grant can also be applied to schools, so that if GSRD needed to make improvements at Chester Elementary School, the grant could be applied to Chester's portion of the improvement.

Ray Labreque stated he thought that with materials, the cost increase was closer to \$3,000. John Baldasaro clarified that since Jan. 2017, the building code requires the materials upgrade so in the past that was true, but now it ranges from \$750-\$1000.

Moderator offered a point of clarification - the grant money comes to town regardless of how many houses are built.

Mr. Berry recommended a start date of Jan 1 2018 for new construction. He stated however, that the grant money would be available to the town for projects on Oct. 1, 2017.

Ann Daley asked where does this grant money come from. Mr. Berry responded that these grants are taxpayer funded; everyone in Chester is contributing, as there is a tax on all electric bills in the state that fund this program.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.

The motion was carried, with only one opposing vote.

John Baldasaro thanked Mr. Barry for coming out on Saturday to help the town understand this issue.

Article 24

John Baldasaro made a motion to see if the town will vote to accept the Dog Control By-Law, as printed in the warrant. Rene Senecal seconded this motion.

The Moderator recognized Terry Donovan, Animal Control Officer, who then summarized the proposed by-law.

Michele Kenney asked, "does the proposed by-law take into consideration that this is a rural area?". Another citizen commented: "it's state law that dog's be leashed.

Pam Zebrowski stated that while we live in a rural area, not all areas of the town are rural; some houses are close to one another with dogs running loose.

Hearing no further discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote.
The motion was carried; there was one nay vote.

Article 25

Rene Senecal made a motion to see if the Town will vote to rescind the annual town caucus.
John Baldasaro seconded the motion.

The Moderator recognized Susan Kucharski, Town Clerk, to speak to this article. She explained how the current system works, and stated that there are several reasons to rescind the caucus.

1. Most importantly, those citizens who are familiar with the two different ways to get on the town ballot can bypass the caucus election, take out nomination papers, and have their names entered on the town's annual election ballot. Those who aren't familiar may think that they have to win in the caucus to get on the ballot. There is an inherent unfairness with this two-way system to get on the ballot
2. A caucus costs the town money in election costs (e.g. flash card for the AutoMark voting machine, ballot printing, police presence, paying election workers, postage for absentee ballots, etc.). Historically, less than 10% of registered voters in Chester turn out for the caucus, though this low voter turnout does not decrease the cost of the election.
3. The caucus is now an outdated method to choose candidates, and now is not well understood by many voters. About half the towns and cities in the Commonwealth have done away with their caucuses.

She explained that passing this article would level the playing field for all candidates seeking town office and save the town money. No rights are taken away by rescinding the caucus. All candidates seeking a town elective office would have to take out nomination papers as the only way to get on the ballot for election, and there would be only the annual town election.

There were no questions or further discussion. The Moderator called for a voice vote.

The motion to rescind the annual town caucus was carried unanimously.

Article 26

The Moderator read the article. Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the town will vote to accept MGL 41:110A. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator recognized Sue Kucharski to speak to this article. She explained that the town's election calendar is set backwards from the date of the Annual Town Meeting, and the annual town election. It is based in various state laws that are used to calculate the events leading up to an election, such as when nomination papers are due, the last day for voter registration, and so on. Unless the town accepts this MGL, Saturdays are counted in the general calculation of the dates for these events. The laws also regulate the time of day some events must happen. For example, voter registration for towns with a population under 1500 must take place between 2-4 pm and 7-8 pm on the last day to register to vote. Without a vote to accept this MGL, this could have to happen on a Saturday, as was the case this year. Acceptance of this MGL would

not affect things such as elections, Town Meeting, or other events that the town chooses to schedule on a Saturday or holiday. It just does not mandate that the town hold events on a Saturday or holiday.

There was no other discussion and the Moderator called for a voice vote.
This motion passed unanimously.

Article 27

The Moderator read the article. Barbara Huntoon made a motion to see if the town will authorize the Board of Selectmen to conduct a market feasibility study to determine if selling the CMELD benefits the town and its' residents. Rene Senecal seconded the motion.

The Moderator invited discussion.

John Baldasaro clarified that this article is on the warrant by citizen petition.

Jonathan Gliano asked several questions (how much will it cost? what is scope of the study? what is the best way to go forward? would this help with modernization?)

John Baldasaro acknowledged that these are good questions and stated that there was no provision in the petition for this.

Maryann Pease asked if the person who presented this petition is present to speak to this?

John Baldasaro said no.

Paul Young spoke in favor of CMELD, stating that it has given good service to the town and that another entity would likely take care of other, larger towns first. He said we can depend on our electric company. The audience applauded his remarks.

John Baldasaro stated that the Selectboard has contacted companies such as Eversource before, and they are not interested. He said there doesn't appear to be a ready buyer. In addition to the cost of the study, the town would have to do inventory of poles, assets, and other equipment, and this could be costly.

Elaine Gilmore expressed appreciation she is able to get information on what's happening in town through the Watts News that comes with the electric bill.

Terry Murphy, a member of the electric light commission stated that the commission has approached companies before, and that right now Chester's rates are cheaper than National Utilities and Eversource. He noted that the average response time in Chester is 2 hrs. 30 min. In Becket, which is supplied by Eversource, it is over 4 hrs. He stated that if CMELD were sold, is in process of upgrading its infrastructure Chester would not be at top of the list for response as a small town. He added that CMELD is in the process of upgrading its infrastructure.

Richie Small, Fire Chief, corroborated that CMELD's response time is second to none. He explained that if there's a fire, the fire department can't fight it until the electricity is turned off to the structure. He noted that if he had to wait for a response from an electric company that is out of the area, it could mean more extensive losses because of the delays.

Ray Labreque asked specifically who is behind this petition? After some discussion about whether or not the person behind the petition could be named, it was noted that the information is a public record. John Baldasaro stated that the petition was submitted by Mike Hickson.

The Moderator commented as a citizen and said that the town needs to protect CMELD, but look at producing our own power, getting a grant to help us move to next level. We need to look at making it stronger, richer. It is not a question of how it is being run.

Terry Murphy noted that the Electric Light Commission has access to services that help them keep up with times. He said that Chester use less electricity than a decent size factory. He noted that every 8 minutes the price changes in National grid. CMELD's contract is locked in for the next 3 years. Responding to the Moderator's comments, he said that Chester is a bedroom community, and most use is in the early morning and at night. Right now we can't buy solar when its' most available (during the day), because most of the town's population isn't here to use it.

Bob Daley noted that autonomy, cost, and efficiency are the hallmark of public utility, and CMELD has this.

Michele Kenney stated that maybe with the new green community designation, we could look at more solar power.

With no further comments or discussion, the Moderator called for a voice vote. The motion was defeated unanimously.

With no further business, the Annual Town Meeting was dissolved at 3:41PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Kucharski
Town Clerk