

Town of Chester

Board of Selectmen/Water Commissioners/Board of Appeals

Minutes of 7/30/18

In attendance: Chairman Barbara Huntoon, Vice Chair John Baldasaro, and Clerk Rene Senecal
Chairman Huntoon opened the meeting at 6:00.

Minutes of 7/9/18 and 7/23/18 were reviewed. 7/23/16 were signed but Clerk Senecal stated the minutes of 7/9/18 still need correction.

1. Ron Ouimette:

Ron appeared before the board to discuss the elected vs. appointed positions in town. Ron stated while the Selectmen have indicated they do not tell other officials how to do their jobs, in his opinion, it seems they “micromanage consistently”. His explanation of this was that it seemed like the Board would ask for one thing from a department, then change their mind at the next meeting. He then read a statement he had written regarding how towns should run their business and how municipal officials should “always have integrity and tell the truth”. (Copy of statement on file) Barbara suggested Ron read Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 41, which spells out some of the laws that towns must live by. Each member of the Board made a statement explaining municipal rules and how they are different than those of the “business world”. Barbara explained for example, the process of conducting interviews and discussing those interviews in front of the public as well as discussing any other issues (e.g. job performance) and the awkwardness of the process. Rene explained that this town has done this (posted appointed positions) repeatedly. John agreed that towns are not run like a business and that can sometimes create uncomfortable situations. Ron stated he had worked with seven Highway Superintendents since he’s lived here, some of whom were very good. Barbara suggested that the Highway Superintendent position may have the potential to become a shared position (related to the Hilltown Collaborative’s initiative toward looking at shared services). The Board thanked Ron for his input.

John Foley was recognized and stated he feels “Chester is in worse shape statewide than it is locally.” He asked if there is a job description for Selectmen? Response was no.

More discussion held regarding the law of appointments. Discussion was also held regarding elected officials and accountability. The Board stated the only recourse to dissatisfaction with elected officials is recall vote.

Bob Daley was recognized and wondered if the Highway Dept. could be reconfigured by hiring a retired or part timer as a “Clerk of the Works” to oversee the department, and then hire another fulltime person to work. It was taken under advisement.

2. Jason Costa: Cannabis Discussion

Jason presented possible plans of cultivating cannabis in the property at the former Carm’s Restaurant/Charlie’s Garage on Route 20 that has recently been purchased. His plan is to operate a small-scale cannabis cultivation and manufacturing (extracting oils, etc.) business. He would start small, and then maybe expand to purchasing from other places. He wants to move forward quickly and hopes to have Community Outreach in August, Selectmen approval, and then application to the State as soon as possible. The board asked him to expand on his plans. He briefly explained the cannabis processing he would do involves taking the raw flower, pressing it, and creating oils, etc. It’s an alternative to a product that would be burned. John asked if he would stay in Chester or go to Middlefield if that town were to allow cannabis business (currently they do not). Jason indicated while he lives in Middlefield, he wants the business in Chester, in part due to Chester’s receptiveness to cannabis related businesses. Barbara asked the following questions: Are they looking at any other property?

Jason responded, "No". How many investors do they have? He stated three for the time being, including himself. How much space do they need to start? Jason said about 1800-2000 sq ft to start, then possibly somewhere else for outdoor cultivation as they would want to expand. The question was asked regarding his financing situation. Jason said for now he and his partners are doing the financing but might want to look for additional financing in the future. The Board also asked mentioned discussing benefits to the town and Jason stated he is prepared to work with the town to that end. At this time the Board instructed Pat to send Jason the Host Agreement that was negotiated with the last applicant for his review and comments. John asked how many people Jason's business would employ and Jason stated three to start, with the addition of at least one more full time and some temporary help as time goes on. He said in the long term he would like to hire more and would concentrate on local hires. At this time, he and his partners are backing off on the "retail" side until the State presents a more concise direction. Rene asked if he would be "leasing" the property and Jason stated he has secured a 7-10 year lease with the new owners of the property. Jason was asked what his background is and responded he is an entrepreneur who attended business school and has experience in the corporate world and with consulting. He wants to be sustainable, stay local, feels that Aaron and Erin (the property owners) are committed to the project, and has some background in growing cannabis. If the Board is in favor of this he would like to come back with a written proposal. The Board indicated they are in favor of further discussion and Jason agreed to come back next week, August 6th, 2018 at 6:45 p.m. Pat will check with Erin Patrick about theatre schedule to ensure Town Hall availability for public outreach hearing.

3. Town Administrator:

Pat relayed a request from the Highway Department for an additional \$1.00 per hr. to be paid to the summer help person, Chris Bellanger. As Steve Cooper was in attendance, he was recognized, and stated both he and Doug feel Chris is doing a great job including taking initiative in many situations. Currently he is paid \$12.50 per hr. After discussion Rene moved to pay Chris \$1.50 more per hour, for a total of \$14.00 per hr. John seconded. Unanimous. As the Highway Department had budgeted for two summer helpers, and are halfway through the summer, there are adequate funds in the budget.

The Board asked Steve Cooper how everything was going in the Highway Dept. Steve brought the Board up to speed on what the Department has been doing and that he has been "handling" situations.

Pat stated she had a call from a citizen looking for info on Littleville Fair. Barbara pulled up contact info for Pat to respond with/have.

4. 7:00 p.m.

At this time, the Board opened a Zoning Board of Appeals hearing for Darcie Gasperini who is requesting a variance of the required frontage on Lyon Hill Rd., from 200' to approximately 152', to allow her daughter to build a house. Ms. Gasperini provided a plot plan. Art Lindberg asked to be recognized and said he is an abutter who attended to look at the plan. Discussion held as to size of house, perc tests, side setbacks. Art didn't really have any problems with the plan, but said he is afraid of "picking and choosing who got approval going forward". Art stated some time ago there was a problem having to do with the whole subdivision in that area, including his lot. Barbara didn't see where "picking and choosing" should be an issue as each case is individual and while she is sorry there was a problem in that area in the past, it is not relevant to now. Art then stated as an abutter, he didn't have a problem with this variance. Two other abutters, Joe and MaryAnn Sullivan were in attendance and asked how far back the house would be. It was determined it would be back about 200' and would be a small ranch. Upon learning this information, the Sullivan had no objections.

While the Board looked favorably upon the request, due to a publishing error, the meeting will have to be continued to Monday, August 6th, 2018 at 7:00 p.m. for final decision. Motion made and moved. Unanimous. The Gasperinis will come back on August 6th.

5. 7:15 p.m.

The Board opened a Zoning Board of Appeals hearing for Lewis Magni, of East River Road regarding an accessory building (porch) that he built. Due to the confusion surrounding this application, the Board would like the Building Inspector to be part of the discussion to provide guidance. (This application was also a part of the publishing error.) The meeting was continued until Monday, August 13th, at 7:00 p.m. Motion made, seconded, and passed unanimously. Pat to contact Building Inspector and request he attend.

6. 7:30 p.m.

The Board returned to its regularly scheduled meeting.

- A. Pat explained she had had a conversation with a possible candidate for the Asst. Admin/Asst. HW Admin. position. The candidate wanted to know if there might be some flexibility in hours in order for her to work another job. Barbara stated that no, the hours of the job are based upon what the town needs, not what applicants need.
- B. Barbara asked if the Asst. Building Inspector's job had been advertised yet. No. Discussion of payment. Agreed that this person will be paid by inspection, like the Plumbing and Electrical Inspectors.
- C. Mowing at Emery Field. There has been some confusion/difficulty in maintaining the field the way that the Recreation Committee is looking to have it done (once a week). Steve will speak with Donald Gauthier to see if we can get it straightened out. The Board does not feel they would want to turn over the responsibilities to the Rec Committee, as had been suggested, due to the machinery involved.
- D. Barbara announced the Rec. Committee is holding a benefit on 8/11 (rain date 8/12) for the Paduano family from Russell who lost a child. The Committee is trying to get softball teams for a competition and asked if Chester officials could put together a team. None of the Board can play due to previous commitments/etc., but all agreed to pass the word.
- E. Rene stated the town website needs some corrections, including updating phone numbers. Pat stated she had made a list over the weekend and will take care of it as soon as she can.

7. Citizens Comments:

- A. Andy Myers: Encourages everyone to attend the theatre and reminded all ticket price for Chester residents is \$10. The season has three weeks to go.
- B. Ron Ouimette asked the Board if they had thought any more about the handrail idea on Old State Rd. Rene said he checked the codes with the State and did not think it would be allowed.
- C. John Foley stated that the COA Board of Directors voted to form a sub-committee to help with the search for the COA director position. Pat to advertise. She is working with Current COA Director Susan Kucharski, who has given her notice but will help out in the interim.
- D. Bob Daley
 - a. apologized for leaving abruptly last week.
 - b. Asked about the Auditor's Report: Pat reported that Tom Scanlon, Auditor, stated the draft is coming soon. John B. asked for his phone number. Barbara asked for his email. Both will reach out.
 - c. Asked the Board about new Accountant and the Board related it was notified that Paula Beck would meet with them quarterly to keep them updated and will send department heads monthly reports.
 - d. Questioned start date of Hampden Street project (administered by PVPC). Pat responded it should be sometime in August.
 - e. Brought up the transcription service he had talked about for the Meeting Minutes. He is still investigating.
- E. Gene Watters asked who was running the Highway Department now. Barbara stated that the Board of Selectmen were acting as the Highway Superintendent.
- F. Cedar Millet:

- a. Asked when East River Road project was starting. Rene stated he was meeting with Ludlow Construction regarding culverts tomorrow and the project should be starting soon. Cedar asked about approvals from Conservation Committee and Wild and Scenic. She was informed all permits were all applied for and approved. Barbara asked that the neighbors NOT talk to the contractors while they are working. Call this office if there are questions
- b. Made a comment that the Magni Zoning Advertisement was incorrect. John B. said they would take care of it at the 7/13 meeting.

G. Steve Cooper:

- a. Asked what was expected of him RE: Highway Department. Board told him they trust his judgement but asked him to stay in touch with Pat with any concerns, questions, etc. He agreed and said he will field phone calls that come into Highway.
- b. There will be a burial at Pine Hill Cemetery and Tino Cardarelli offered to help with placement in lieu of current lack of Cemetery Commissioner.
- c. Sent Chris Bellanger to help Donald Gauthier with weed-whacking.
- d. Barbara asked Steve about washout on Crane Road. He said Doug put cones out and they will try to repair the road tomorrow.
- e. Barbara asked about road mowing in general. Steve responded CMELD has been doing some, but Highway not yet. Will need to focus on East River Road before work begins.
- f. Working with Rene on a list of culverts on East River Road.
- g. Will be on vacation next week.

8. Further Business:

A. Cheryl Provost:

- a. Explained she is changing the way she pays the group health insurance.
- b. Has worked with Paula Beck a couple of days and that is going well.
- c. Kathy Borden will be back soon to teach Paula how to open the new fiscal year and enter receipts.
- d. Barbara asked Cheryl how the drop-box is working. Cheryl responded so far so good.

B. John B. asked how the meeting between CMELD and Rene and Barbara went and both answered that it went well and was very cordial. There was productive discussion on "misinformation" regarding the security cameras and what is required to connect power at the ballfield. (Will pass the information on to the Recreation Committee.) All in attendance agreed to keep lines of communication open.

C. Barbara read two anonymous letters that were sent to the Board.

There being no more business, Barbara entertained a motion to adjourn, John B moved, and Rene 2nd, unanimous.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Barbara Huntoon, Chairman

John Baldasaro, Vice Chairman

Rene Senecal, Clerk