

Town of Chester Selectmen/Water Commissioners/Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting Minutes for March 25, 2019

Attending: Select Board members Barbara Huntoon & John Baldasaro, Town Administrator Kathe Warden and various members of the public

Barbara opened the meeting at 6:00pm, the Select Board and Country Journal recorded the meeting. Minutes of March 11 and March 18, 2019 were not approved and signatures. Warrants were signed.

New Business I Finance Committee to review FY2020 Budget

Andy Meyers said few changes within the budget were made as compared to the preliminary budget sent a few weeks ago. In the Selectmen's dept. the Assistant Administrator position was eliminated, to fund a fourth position for the DPW due to the new OSHA regulations and the need for extra help. Legal counsel was decreased by \$2000.00 to \$5500.00. The inspectors' certification costs was eliminated. Andy said that increases in departments were mostly due to salary increases. The Assessors department had expenses increased and the Consultant Services will be covered by the Principal Assessor's salary and benefits being eliminated. The Treasurers budget had the Assistant Treasurer's salary put back to the original request. Water Dept. Operations account was put back to \$40,000 from \$50,000. Kathe had reviewed the account for the last two years and it didn't seem necessary to have an increase. Town Hall Expenses was increased to \$17,500, the last two years is has fallen short and funds had to be transferred during the year. The Group Health insurance was reviewed and is set at \$72,000. The Town will be changing insurance companies that will help reduce costs. The Economic Development Director's budget may need to be increased due to Montgomery and Russell having withdrawn from supporting the program. Once Gateway has committed to the number of hours needed the budget will be reviewed and the final assessment will be available. Currently the Town is considering \$1,500.00 increase. The salary is staying the same, expenses would change and the programs could change. The program is going to become more focused on the participating towns instead of regionally focused. Andy and Jeanne LeClair will come to a future meeting to discuss goals for the Town. The Finance Committee has reduced the original budget by \$63,000.00 which has kept it under 2 ½ percent. That leaves about \$5,500.00 in excess currently, but there still are requests that could be funded. The Capital Projects include setting up a new Fire Truck fund, and an Ambulance Vehicle fund, and a voting machine for the Town Clerk fund, and the Historical Committee would like to replace the flag pole.

The Vocational budget can currently accommodate 9 students. Kathe made inquiries and currently there are 7 students' enrolled and 5 students that have applied. Andy said if all that applied were accepted it would cause a shortfall. Andy suggested that a policy be implemented to not allow students to apply to vocational schools after a certain date. Gateway currently has that policy. John and Barbara both agreed to this. Barbara asked Kathe to work on developing a policy.

There are salary requests above cost of living to bring the following offices to a more equal pay from the Accountant, Treasurer's Office, Town Clerk's Office, DPW Dept., Animal Inspector, and Building Inspector. There is also a 2% cost of living raise increase to all other depts. Andy said that with the increase of salaries, there has to be a measure of job performance. Andy said this would increase burden for both the Select Board and the Town Administrator to hold these positions accountable for the job performance. Bob Daley said he is total in agreement of this budget with the exception of the raises. He does feel every department deserves these increases, but now isn't the time to do them. He feels that it's too much burden for the Town and there isn't enough revenue to support them currently. He feels this isn't the time to do this but in the future with the 2 new businesses looking to open in town another year would be better. Barbara is also concerned about the raises and feels that 3% may be a better choice at this time. Barbara said she feels that when people applied and accepted these positions they knew what the pay rate was. She has an issue with the high increases in the department. John doesn't feel he should discuss them, but with the upcoming election this decision should be wait. He said that with both Gateway and the assessment up in the air this is too soon to make these decisions. He appreciates all the work that has been put in on the budget. Andy said that the other two members of the Finance Committee were in favor of the raises. All these positions are an investment for the Town. Barbara feels that the expectations need to be met first than raises should be second. Andy said with the elections that this could change the expectations of all departments.

Andy said if the regional school agreement goes to the stabilized amount \$30,000.00 and if the statutory amount \$28, 8008.00 than that can change the budget dramatically. Barbara thanks the finance committee for all of their work.

Departments and Committee - No updates at this time.

Old Business

Town Administrator update:

Highway update - John said they will be on Goss Hill Rd tomorrow putting down stone. Wednesday will be pothole patching. There are water leaks at the ball field and Prospect St. and they will be working to get those taken care of. John will be looking at Johnson Hill Rd and Middlefield Hill for Chapter 90 money. Barbara asks about Prospect St. John said Erica of PVPC is working on this project. The design phase started last year and this project will be for drainage and paving. It will be a 3 year project. There is a lot of ledge and can be an expensive project. John said that Hampden St project should be starting up in the next week or so, the asphalt companies will be opening up. John is meeting with Lane Construction tomorrow with Rene Senecal because he was very involved. John isn't happy how the road is holding up and will bring in a state engineer if necessary. All equipment is in good shape.

Citizens Comments –

Andy Myers talked about state owned land pilot payments. A meeting with the Hilltown Collaborative and the Mass Dept. of Revenue , Division of Local Services (DLS) a couple of weeks ago. The average PILOT payment per acre in the surrounding areas was \$10.00 per acre. Chester is being paid \$5.00 per acre due to the lower valuation of the land. John asked who put the values on the land and Andy said it was the local Assessors who did. Andy said that Chester's records show there was 3676 acres but the State's records showed there was 3151 acres. A difference of 525 acres. The eastern part of the state gets most of the money allocated for Pilot payments. This is due to the valuations are higher on the eastern part of the state. Jeanne LeClair had brought up at the DLS meeting, the decrease of a carbon footprint should be a credit to the formula for the payments. Barbara thought that should be considered because the town is protecting the land. John said the valuations are lower in Chester than Huntington and couldn't see a reason for it. Andy would like to see a new formula of for the allocation of payments. Half of the payment would be on the value of the land and the other half would be on the number of acres. This formula would be fairer for the western part of the state since that is where the most acres are protected. The Rural Alliance is working on this because there is such lower payments made to the western part of the state. Andy said that there is only 36% of the land in Chester has full taxes collected on it due to Chapters 61, 61a & 61b. John said it's going to be a struggle for the Town to continue in this direction. Barbara said that makes 63% of the land in Chester has tax status relief.

Annette LaMountain would like to see the potholes on Main St filled in especially by the bridge. John said on Emery St, Main St and Prospect St the crew would be filling in potholes on Wednesday. John will have the street sweeping done in the downtown before Chester on Track. Bob Daley said there was a COA Advisory Board meeting on Tuesday at 10:00am and he would update everyone next week.

James Hixby said a carbon credit for forested land would be a good idea.

Joan Skolkup (is this correct) asked if there had been a discussion about the Assessors and Barbara said that the Assessors had been invited to a meeting previously and the Assessors had respectfully declined.

Norma McDonald said she has had some complaints about the work performance of the Transfer Station employees. Barbara said an executive session could be set up for April 22 to discuss this.

John Foley said that previously Rene had mentioned a piece of equipment that could pound the pavement 3 inches into the ground, then the road would be repaved and wondered if that could be done to Johnson Hill. John says that would be expensive and instead a fill and overlay of 1.5 in center and out to the edges up to 4 inches on the sides. There are 2 culverts that need to be replaced. From Lyons Rd to the bridge is what he wants to replace. There is about \$265,000 in the Chapter 90 account and he needs to do Middlefield Rd going up the hill as well. Jason Forgue came in and John told him that when the work was being done at the ball field in the fall something must have happened because there was shooting water. John shut the water off and is having someone come and repair that as well as 2 other leaks on Prospect St. Jason said that on April 27 was the opening day for the baseball league, and he was looking for

recommendations for someone to throw out a first pitch. Holyoke Auxiliary color guard is coming to perform. Barbara asked for suggestions and the names of Joel Zakaski, and Tino Cardinelli came up. There will be a dunk tank, bounce house and food.

Barbara asked if John has had a chance to talk to Steve Salvini, John said it was on his radar.

Barbara asked Kathe to ask the Town Clerk to attend a meeting to talk about the dog licensing and the licensing software. John Foley asked about the COA report done by Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVCPC), Kathe was going to follow up with Erica Johnson tomorrow.

Kathe said that she found out the inter-municipal agreement for Vocational Transportation had expired. She had sent out notes to the Town to see if they wanted to continue to participate.

She wanted the Select Board aware of that. Kathe plans for the Vocational Transportation bids will be put out on the first week of May.

Barbara motioned to adjourn at 7:00pm, John seconded the motion, all vote aye.

Respectfully submitted

Katherine Warden

Barbara Huntoon Chair

John Baldasaro Vice Chair

Vacancy – Clerk

Meeting Minutes for March 25, 2019 contain 4 pages