

**Town of Chester Board of Selectmen
Water Commissioners & Zoning Board
15 Middlefield Road
Chester, MA 01011**

Monday February 24, 2020 at 6:00PM

Selectboard Members Present: John Baldasaro, Barbara Huntoon

Selectmen recorded this meeting.

Opened meeting in Selectboard office. Signed minute meetings and warrants

John opened meeting at 6PM

New Business

#1 Town Accountant Paula Beck and Town Treasurer Jon Lumbra - update

Paula: Audit is going very well; Jon is working hard to get everything up to date for auditors. Auditors think it will be done by end of February, but Paula is not sure if that is still true as she thinks they are waiting for a couple items from Jon.

Free cash: Paula and Mary Ann have filled and signed off on everything on the Gateway Portal. And Jon as Treasurer has to sign off on it, thought it was all Cheryl's stuff, but Paula is sure he is going to sign off on it.

Paula and Kathe W worked on and got grant for the software which will make reporting a lot easier in the future. Our reports will automatically upload seamlessly.

Paula spoke to the Lanesboro treasurer who used to work for Softright (the new accounting software company) and she was able to convert our accounts without changing numbers. No department will be affected by the change and Paula has sent it to Softright to have it uploaded and checked. She anticipates starting to use it in 2021.

Expenditures: there are two Paula is concerned about. First is the transfer station, who went over budget last year, were level funded, and it looks like they are going to be over by \$8500 this year. 80% is Wickles Trucking. Paula believes the transfer station is bringing in more money now. In addition, the decision was made to no longer use the services of HMRC which is a savings of \$7000. Those two factors should offset any shortage this year.

Highway supplies and repairs are exactly on percentage wise of funds left, but based on last year's figures, they spent a lot more so if that trend continues, there will have a deficit again. Kathe W. is working closely with Corey and can probably mitigate most of it. Kathe is going to review the accounts with Corey to be sure accounts are in order. Paula will provide a report and John agrees that Kathe and Paula will sit down with Corey and be sure that he understands the

projections. Paula gave Corey a report showing what he has spent to date. Highway is over-budget on snow removal by \$40,000, which is not uncommon. John pointed out that the Highway salary account is right on and the deficit will be solved.

Paula has told all department heads that she cannot over-spend their accounts.

Once the town's audit is completed, the auditors will be looking at CMELD records unlike last time, when they just used our numbers and never looked at CMELD's books. The auditors are going to make necessary adjustments to CMELD books or towns books so that both sets will be in sync.

Back to highway supply repair, John B took over on October 2018 and didn't start doing anything until November so nothing got spent the first three or four months of that physical year. This makes tracking and projecting more difficult. Highway had to catch up on some projects in the spring so hopefully there will be a more even trend and stay within budget. As past trends show Barbara pointed out.

Jon: Jon is now eleven weeks into the Treasure's position. His primary focus is on data clean up. Reconciliation with cash accounts, using software as system was only used till December 14th. Recons were done outside system on paper and excel sheets but the problem with that it doesn't pick up on entries that were made within the system that shouldn't have been there are ghost entries which weren't caught. Jon has completed the town side of this as of June 30, 2019 and it has resulted in nearly \$3 million (is this million or hundred thousand?) in transfer entries - no physical cash just eliminating ghost entries that have accumulated over 4 years. In a nutshell, he had to correct transfers between accounts when funds actually belonged to other accounts, a cumulative difference of about \$270,000 as of June 30, 2019 of unknown differences. The good news is he now knows what those differences are - best described as deposit in transit. Funds that came in before June 30, 2019 were not put into the system and when they were some were done as late as October 2019. Because the books had closed, they were deemed deposits in transit and with the paper trail, Jon can show the auditors and assure them this will not happen going forward. He is now half way through doing the same process for the CMELD accounts.

Jon pointed out the town has 23 bank accounts. It is easier to open an account than to close an account. He said is not unusual but can be an issue. For example, if an account is missing three cents in interest a month, that is fine but if you pick the wrong bank account now you are taking funds out of wrong account and there isn't enough in there. Jon is going to reduce number of accounts and will choose dependent on the yield the Town will get. Jon thinks Westfield Bank would be a good choice and being local it provides easier access to cash if the Town needs it. Remote capture can be used for checks. The Treasurer and CMELD do remote capture with Easthampton Savings Bank, and the Tax Collector uses United. Tax Collector, Mary Ann Pease and Jon are meeting with Westfield Bank tomorrow and Jon said his standard conversation is

“Here is what the banks are giving us, can you beat it”. Barbara feels they will. Then we can close out accounts like old payroll accounts thru UNIPAY and whittle them down.

Turnovers are flowing like clockwork from other departments. All turnovers are being processed timely and are never more than a week behind from when deposits hit the Treasurer’s office to when they are booked and passed over to Paula.

As reported last time, so that was general funds, and then I have the stabling of the non general funds, main focus on stabilization and cemetery perpetual funds. Did not move all available funds but did take \$200,000 from stabilization and moved it to LPL and took \$40,000 from cemetery to LPL in separate accounts, same parent account, one statement with the segregations broken out and those are being vested in 85% bonds, 15% legal list as allowed (I don’t know what this means.) We are slowly starting to invest now; first money was invested on February 10, 2020 and as of today made \$200 which is 7% of what was invested. Jon recommended that play through, that list has a rolling 12-month history after closing January 31, of just over 13% when we were getting 1%. Identifies an issue for him. Right now, the money is recognized as general fund interest. Jon and Paula will work collectively to break that out and how we post it. Stabilization interest will stay with stabilization. The Town could consider is a “spin policy” where 50% of the interest earned goes to next year’s budget or tax relief. Little early for that but a great plan. John B commented that is 12% free money we weren’t touching before. Selectboard complimented both Paula and Jon for doing a great job.

Modified payroll. Still a couple of hiccups but as of the middle of December going in is now broken down by the timesheets, so there is a record if an employee is taking personal days, sick days, or vacation days; it is all tracked. The payroll company is now reporting that as well so when an employee gets paid, the breakdown shows on their paystub. Was never tracked or shown before.

Kate Phelon, Executive Director of Westfield Chamber of Commerce

Brought Chamber directories.

The Westfield Chamber covers 10 communities including Chester and she didn't think it was clear that the Town had a chamber. She is doing outreach to be sure we know there are resources out there.

Kate said one of the things the Chamber will do is ribbon cuttings for new businesses, which was just done for Carm’s grand opening; a great event! The question was asked if Jeanne Leclaire is in contact with Kate. Kate said she and Jeanne have been in contact and that they both go to economic development meetings and therefore we have a voice.

Kate is very connected to state government. She is watching the rail situation and is available to help or write a letter of support; just let her know. John B said yes. Town is to write the letter for Kate to bring to her Board of Directors and she will get it signed. Anything she can do she is willing to help.

Transportation bond bill is being followed. Invited all to legislature luncheon, a good event that provides direct access to our legislators. Kate listed some of the possible attendees and encouraged the Selectboard to the lunch on April 24th. Barbara will be going.

2020 census. Pushing to have everyone counted. If we need help call.

MassDot I 90 new interchange study group: The two options being looked at are in Blandford. If it comes to a vote or need help with anything pertaining to the issue let her know.

Asked if there was any manufacturing in Chester? Reply was no. There is a manufacturing collaborative thru Governor and there will be a web site. Kate said if we ever get any back let her know.

Selectboard stated the most important issue is the Rail. It is so important for us. Town is not for the I90 plan. I90 is what ruined the Hilltowns. Anything she can do to help us out is welcome. Discussion followed about some new things coming to Chester and things the Town already has to offer including hiking, the Theater, and the Train Station. It was acknowledged it can be difficult to get here. There is NO public transportation available out here. Kate said to send flyers to Chamber to be handed out. Asked Kate to look for the marketing materials that were started and not finished through the Hilltown Collaborative.

Chamber gives a \$500 scholarship to a Gateway student.

Kate asked about recyclables. Chester went to meeting in Northampton. Chester just signed a 3-year contract so our costs are not going up significantly.

More discussion about rail. We have some of the best rail infrastructure and a train station.

Talked about how the new gas tax will not benefit Western Mass or Chester at all. It will just hurt us out here even more.

The Selectboard thanked Kate for coming and her offers of assistance.

Dan Illnicky, Police Chief

Dan introduced potential new police officer recruit, Chris Barton who has gone through the interview process with Dan and Dan recommended him to be hired as a police officer in Chester. Dan provided an information package on Chris and the Selectboard interviewed him. He is available for up to 3 shifts a week, he lives in Southwick, and currently works in Agawam. He has been through the police academy and has volunteered on Emergency Management. Barbara Huntoon made a motion to appoint Christopher Barton to the Chester/Blandford Police Department. Second by John Baldasaro; Unanimous decision.

Chester Grows, LLC

Barbara Huntoon wants it officially noted that while she is going to sit there and listen so we have a quorum, she will not be asking any questions, not be making any input and she is recusing herself from any discussion because her husband is co-owner of the property that Chester Grows is looking at.

Therefore, this will be an information only meeting. John B may ask questions.

Heather Anello is the owner of Chester Grows and is looking to purchase the property owned by Revive Chester, LLC., (the old Cortland mill) for a marijuana growth and manufacturing facility business called Chester grows. Heather introduced her business partner, Glenn Posey, and Compliance Consultant, Casey, to give quick overview. Packages had been provided.

Questioned the vote with just two and was told it would not be an issue.

A marijuana manufacturing and growth facility, for wholesale distribution to other licensed retail outlets.

8AM to 8PM are the planned operating hours. When fully operational 50 employees.

Only traffic will be employees and transportation and delivery to wholesale/retail outlets.

Implemented water usage and odor control plan. Explained carbon filters for odors.

Will be harvesting collected rain water to cut down on consumption and cut down on energy use.

Will follow Cannabis Control Commission rules during site build-out and beyond.

After securing a Host Community Agreement, it will be approximately 60 days to procure a provisional license, and during that time they would be conducting the build-out. John B. commented that was hopeful. Casey assured him the process has gotten a lot better. Glenn pointed out they just opened up priority applicancy for veterans and female and other protected classes so it accelerates that process. Heather explained the aggressive time line, that she already has a license in operation at another location and that most of her crew are veteran or female so they are going for certification for priority applicancy and it does expedite it considerably. Feels she has an elite team.

John asked about facility.

Casey answered they will not be using butane to make solvents. They will be using water and ice. Solvent-less extraction is much safer for end user.

Neil, the cultivator, is a Harvard graduate in neuroscience. He is looking for innovative ways to help returning vets so clean products.

Casey explained in detail the security, fencing, cameras inside and out, alarm system, agents on site during operation, system for visitors per CCC, limited access areas, sally port, monitoring

agent contamination plan, and John told them to be sure to contact and set up appointment police chief on the security plan.

Andy Myers asked about investment and ownership? Not willing to share much investment info until Host Community Agreement is secured. Hoping to go local, not planning on getting big outfits from Colorado but it is a venture capitalist.

John B. stated the company will have to share their business plan with Selectboard because the Board will not sign a Host Agreement without a business plan. It is part of the Board's job to ensure the company is financially stable and that they can meet these commitments and negotiate what that is. John made the offer to show Heather past Host Agreements for use as a template. Also discussed revenue forecasting through next 5 years.

John sked if they plan to use the existing building or build a new one. Heather answered: Once Host Community Agreement is signed a contractor will decide that. They hope to use both eventually. First license is for a Tier 1, 5000 square foot canopy to start.

John voiced support especially this location. Asked about any plans for retail. Answer was no but John encouraged it in the future.

Glenn asked about license count, if there is an amount. John answered that only applied to retail. With the Planning Board, Chester did not put a lot of restrictions on licensing, they wanted to address each individual plan.

Discussed first right to employ Chester residents and Hilltown people. Waived traffic study as there is no traffic on Baystate Drive to study.

John reminded them to get with police chief. Bring rough draft Host Agreement after Community Outreach.

Mary Ann Pease representing Hilltown Community Ambulance

Provided packets RE: Hilltown Community Ambulance

Finance committee has same packages.

Huntington wants to sell ambulance building on Bromley Rd for \$50,000. HCA is starting a capital campaign to accrue funds as well as fundraisers. They have 6 months to purchase. Last year on a 3-year contract at 5% and the next 3 year is 2.5% each year.

Ambulance is running at 75-80% paramedic. Selectboard is happy with ambulance service.

She left the contract for Selectboard to sign at next meeting.

Kathe Warden

Discussion and vote – ATC is the monitoring company for the wood dump at the school. Past we have year to year contract. Asked about a 3-year and he called back with fixed price for a 3-year contract with no increases. Selectboard signed the contract.

To add to what Paula mentioned for special town meeting, town counsel, which was only funded \$5500 last year, was \$7000. This year is was level-funded but there have been extra issues and we will run short. Town Hall general expense may run short \$3000-\$4000. Kathe has to review when doing DPW expenses.

Thinking ahead because it cannot be on special town meeting but for annual town meeting.

When Chester changed its annual town meeting day, it falls into Chester Theater time. Again this year, town meeting is during set up week. Kathe suggested contacting the school to see if we can use it. Next year is June 14th which is during the season because it is so late. Meeting was moved to June because we have much clearer financial picture from state and school. And John B does not think changing the venue is going to work. People want to come to town hall like always for town meeting. Discussion about changing back to May. Selectboard not in favor. Andy thinks the theater will accommodate us and he will ask them.

Theater is starting work on downstairs bathroom. Price for us to replace the flooring that is peeling and the ladies' room is \$1800 and we can take it off theater rent so it doesn't cost anything. All agreed. Kathe did the 5-year contract for the theater that was agreed to previously. Suggested change to remove word "special" and leave "town meeting" in the paragraph.

Sanitary Survey has arrived for Water. Hire a third party to answer and set things up. Set up a meeting with Matt Cassidy and Richard Gullick to make plans on how to attack for March 23rd if not sooner depending on schedules for a water-only meeting. Have deadlines to meet. John thinks there are 4 items that can be done very quickly. 23rd ok for next water meeting and move town meeting to see if we may need to move money to fix plant.

Bob Daley says Matt Cassidy, RCAP, asked for access to WCS proposal. Can they have it now? John replied yes, they can share it. Meeting should happen ASAP. Trying to get the right people together for this meeting will be a challenge. John B wants to review the Sanitary Survey prior to seeing Bernie so we have a plan. Matt and Dr. Gullick will have a copy in the morning.

The handbook is done, the two people Kathe sent it to are finishing up and she asked legal counsel the cost of a review and they said they would cap it at \$1000. Selectboard to look at it.

Health insurance costs will remain the same for coming year.

The solar is just getting ready to do the hookups and get it going for solar on Highway garage and Fire Department. They are working with CMELD are on the actual meters to be installed.

Next Wednesday Zack Blake and Marcia Boheek of DLS are coming out to start work with Administrator, Accountant, Tax Collector, Treasurer, and Assessor's Clerk.

Need new FOB readers at fuel pumps. Aged-out from windows. \$5000 for us and \$5000 for CMELD. Kathe to ask different groups that do use the pumps to contribute from their general funds. Police already agreed. John suggested to contact Middlefield to chip in, as they get fuel from us for police and fire.

Louis Magni, of East River Road wants to build a book house on the "V" near his house. Willing to do it. Selectboard said to send Corey out to see if there is a plowing issue; there is a utility pole in middle of the "V" and the plows plow against up to it.

Closing on Emery Street property is Friday at 9:30. Kathe is going to registry of deeds to file.

Legislation RE: changing certain positions from elected to appointed should be done in the House and moved to Senate.

No assessors listed on warrant. Minutes should have the amendment. Was amended on the floor. Check with Town Clerk.

No luck with CSX about removal of RR ties hanging around

Public Input

Tom Huntoon asked if there was a consensus on meeting with Chester Grow. Told no comment or consensus.

Ed Meacham off River Road said the town needs to "use someone other than Lane Construction" and that "the road is worse than before they did it". He said the road is destroyed and heaving as well as a pot hole. Can't see how plow didn't tear it up it so heaved. John said he'll take a look at it and if necessary we'll get Lane to get back up there and fix it.

Andy Myers, Hilltown Collaborative, has more funds this year for marketing and Jeanne is working on that. Will have more info at next meeting. Looking at a promotion to attract young families and businesses.

New proposal for wind towers in Chester. There may be a spot on Round Hill Rd and a working group will meet to have an exploratory meeting.

Gateway presentation of the budget will be March 4. Should have numbers for census by March 1. Finance meetings has had a lot of discussion. Have spoken with all departments about their budgets, fine tuning it now, a little above where is supposed to be but trying to bring it within 2.5%. Next meeting will be after Gateway figures come out. Will create a list of recommendations from Finance Committee and make a date to present to Selectboard.

Jim Higby glad to hear Dr Gullick is coming to meeting on 23rd. Proposal is not cheap.

DEP is requesting a 3rd party engineering.

Bob Daley, Chester Water Improvement Committee, met with Matt Cassidy from RCAP. He wants to review Dr Gullick proposal. See proposal from Dr Gullick. May be federal funding to hire RCAP to work in tandem with Dr. Gullick.

Wants to know if Corey will come in with an update and John B assured Bob that he will.

Rich Holtzman asked UMASS chancellor about water issues to see if they can be of help. They have a whole water department that could be used. Will continue to work on seeing what is available.

Andy brought up the need for a new highway truck and try to find a way. John B suggested going out to bond for that. Got 16 years out of that truck so it owes us nothing. The 350 is a hazard.

Discussion about Montgomery and Russell not agreeing to the regional agreement. School committee has invited the two towns to public hearing to discuss it.

Rich spoke of Rail Advisory Committee meeting he and Bob attended and made sure they know where Chester is. Discussion followed about the six options for East West Rail that are being discussed and Chester is in two of them. Discussion of feeder buses also.

Meeting Adjourned 8:19PM