



TOWN OF CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN
WATER COMMISSIONERS & ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
15 MIDDLEFIELD RD
CHESTER MA 01011

Monday June 1, 2020 at 6:00pm

Open meeting - Town Hall Auditorium. Signing of warrants, minutes and signing of graduation cards for High School Seniors. Being recorded and web-based meeting. John called meeting to order at 6:01

#1 - Hilltown Community Development Corporation - to discuss and possibly vote to support the Chester Commons project and to discuss other properties the Hilltown CDC could purchase to develop – Paul Lischetti came to discuss purchase of future properties the CDC would be interested in purchasing for rehab; specifically, two downtown properties. Paul asked if the non-support from Selectboard was specific to Chester Inn or if the Board does not support any Main St property? CDC has a contract to purchase the Chester Commons and has submitted loan applications to Federal, State, and Historic Agencies for grant money. The program that provides the most money is for low income housing but the State wants 20 or more units. Without these tax credits from the State, the amount of money that will be put into the Commons will be considerably less. All of the present Chester Common residents fall in the low-income category and would qualify the CDC for these grants. Selectboard explained that their non-support was specific to Chester Inn due to the historical nature of the building and hopes that it can be used as business space. Paul asked about A&L and Barbara asked about mixed use and requested the store remain. Paul answered that if there was a tenant that wanted to rent the store, then perhaps. The rents must support the loan and payments. Very difficult to market mixed-use and to get mixed-use grants. Paul would not hold out a lot of hope for that. Barbara suggests that our town is hoping downtown will become more vibrant and doesn't want to preclude potential business by using that space a just housing. Paul pointed out that the downtown isn't exactly hopping. Rich commented that there is historical value in the refrigerators in A & L. He is also suggesting buying homes, from present owners, turn them all into two families and give owner life tenancy but as renters. He is averse to turn prime pieces of property into apartments and feels none of the store fronts should ever be apartments. Dave Christopolis, of CDC, joined in via GoToMeeting to say that commercial development is not their priority. Mention was made of the former Rest-a-While on Route 20 for potential future housing project. John assured Paul that the town is absolutely willing to support housing projects in town. Jason Forgue pointed out that there are other programs available for the suggestion Rich had to rehabilitate single family or two families. There is a program available in the form of no-interest loans for income qualifying homes. The program needs to be promoted better, as there are not as many applications for this as there used to be. Used to be a very popular program but over the last few years it has not been utilized. There was a 2-year period, where there was no funding available so since then there



have not been as many applications. It is run thru Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Erica from PVPC stated two meetings ago that there is still money available for housing rehab.

Paul stated that they cannot find an active lease for the Library at Chester Commons and will need to have one in place for the purchase and the funding applications. They cannot find any agreement with owner and Town for the Library space. John thought there was something in the deed, but Paul says there is not. Kathe will investigate. Paul asked if there is a Historical Commission and a Historical Society and Barbara answered, yes, both. Paul will get a hold of them as he will need a letter of support from them to apply for historical rehab grants. Paul also mentioned a piece of town-owned property behind the Baptist Church and asked if it is available for sale for new construction. Paul thought it was land locked but John and Barbara think there is a right-of-way. Selectboard would not be opposed to selling that parcel. Barbara asked if it would be elderly or Section 8 housing? Paul responded that Chester Commons was restricted to elderly but there are some people that are there that should not be there. Owner says it is for people over 55 or a disabled person and Paul is not sure that is true. If State money is used for rehabilitation the age would be 62 or over. State would require an elevator and other accommodating features for 62 and over. Barbara asked why it was 62 and not 55. Paul's understanding is the rule was caused by a developer(s) wanting to do a housing project and weren't sure how receptive the Town would be so made the application for an over 55 development with the benefit for the town being no children in the school system, etc. Barbara asked what the use would be for the new construction. Paul thinks the need is for single bedroom apartments which could cater to elderly and younger people. John feels there is a need for the Chester Commons staying elderly but there is need for affordable housing in Chester and would not be opposed to mixed-use for elderly and younger folk. Barbara asked again about an on-site manager realizing that it is not reasonable to have a fulltime person on site. CDC manages their own properties and have a Property Services position that handles day-to-day operation. Barbara asked about a maintenance position for CDC properties, and Paul explained that they use Pancione Associates as their property management company for that. The Property Services person will call Pancione or any of the contractors listed to correct whatever problem comes up. Rich asked about the chance of these projects being successful in securing funding. Paul said there would be a better chance if it was a larger project. When pinned down Paul guessed at 80% chance of success. Barbara made a motion to sign the letter of support for CDC to go forward with the purchase of Chester Commons. Rich seconded and all voted aye. Letter signed.

#2 Discussion about complaint filed for 8 Emery St. – Discussion was held regarding the owner of 8 Emery Street not responding to building inspector's cease and desist order. Building Inspector Jason Forgue stated he frequently walks the property to ensure no further deterioration. Property was previously condemned by the Board of Health. The back side of house is missing. Jason believes the property owner is living in the shed. Liz from BOH stated house is still condemned according to records. Cannot confirm owner is sleeping there. John asked for next step. Jason wants to officially condemn the property, which is a process that will



incur expenses. Note was made that once the house comes down if not rebuilt within two years it would no longer be a building lot and would be property removed from the tax roll. Discussion was to go forth with condemning the property and demolishing the property should the owner continue to not respond to building inspector. Jason and BOH will draft a letter to owner explaining what will happen should owner not respond.

#3 Discussion about the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education letter and vocational tuition increase – Vocational tuitions are increasing, especially Westfield Technical Academy which is increasing by 9.71%. Town questioned it and got a response from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education which stated, yes, the tuition is going up and that is that. Very disappointed in DESE's lack of explanation and response. Vocational Education per student will now be \$22,430.00 including transportation. If the Town was not part of Gateway and were able to "school choice" vocation ed the cost would be about \$7000. Board agreed to send senators a letter about the increase and the difference in cost. The Town has already sent letters to Senator Adam Hinds and it was his assistant, Jon Gould who reached out to DESE on Chester's behalf. Basically, comes to the Regional Schools applying for the school choice students by the difference in the tuition. Board still questioning why the Town had to pay for 4th quarter education when school was not in session.

#4 Discussion for plan to reopen town hall – Kathe has scheduled an employee meeting for Tuesday, June 2nd. Conditions and expectations for re-opening Town Hall will be discussed with all employees. There must be COVID-19 signage supplied by the Mass. Department of Public Health. Town Hall will open June 29th with appointments only with appropriate employee meeting the public at the door and escorting them to auditorium to conduct business and escort them out of building. No wandering. Chief Illnicky will be scheduling appointments and people will use his door and not have a line of people in the hall. Meetings can be held but each board will be responsible for wiping down anything touched and used. A limited hours opening is scheduled for September 1st, tentatively.

Kathe contacted Tom Mullin, legal counsel, in reference to the deed for the Williams Street that was gifted to the Town by the owner. It has been filed at Registry of Deeds. Town needs to declare this is a public way. Has to be on annual town meeting warrant. Tom is putting the language together for the warrant, town will notify abutters, and Kathe will request money from finance to cover these expenses.

Next Monday the Selectboard will award scholarships, meet with finance committee and on Friday, June 12th, the Board will have to accept and sign Annual Town Meeting warrant.

Kathe is applying for CARES Act, must complete a spreadsheet and can be put in at two different times. The first is due on Friday.

Annual Town Meeting game plan is to move Selectboard and Moderator to the stage and space chairs out six feet apart and require masks.



Barbara told Rich he she has not had time to tweak Bob Daley's letter for the Selectboard to sign in support of the East West Rail Initiative. On next Monday agenda to discuss and possibly sign the letter of support.

Barbara asked Rich to represent the Selectboard at Gateway during a Senior send off. Montgomery and Huntington Fire Departments are doing a water arch with the hoses for the seniors to drive through.

Public Comments and questions

None

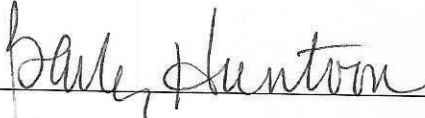
Motion to adjourn meeting made by Barbara and second by Rich. All voted aye.

Meeting adjourned 8:30


Respectfully submitted
Kathy Engwer - Administrative Assistant



John Baldasaro, Chairman



Barbara Huntoon, Vice Chairman



Richard Holzman, Clerk