



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

Monday January 13, 2020 at 6:00pm

Selectmen present – John Baldasaro, Barbara Huntoon

Selectmen and Country Journal were recording

Open meeting in Board of Selectmen's office. No warrants to sign.

John opened the meeting at 6:00pm.

New Business

#1 Erica Johnson, PVPC discussion about the Community Development Block Grant – Erica talked about the Community Development Block grant due March 6th with Huntington and Middlefield. She will be asking for funds for constructing first phase of Prospect St project. This will be done in pieces. Phase one will start at the bottom, from train station and up lower prospect to go as far as possible. This one will be the shortest distance due to drainage. Another part of the grant there is an RFP out for social services, she hasn't received any yet but due on Thursday of this week. Erica expects there will be more requests than funds allow. She is looking for someone to be designated to help her out making the decisions for the social services designation. Erica said there is some money still available in the current grant. Erica encourages everyone to apply and get on the list to be considered for a housing rehab grant or the upcoming grant. Once on the list always on the list. John asks if the Prospect St will be 3 or 4 phases, Erica said there will be at least 3, due to the amount of drainage that needs to be done but could be a 4th.

#2 Paul Lischetti, Hilltown CDC discussion about the purchase of Chester Commons - Paul introduced Dave Christopolis who is director of Hilltown CDC. They have entered into an option to purchase the building. They would maintain the use of the building as it is now, will be applying for funding from Dept of Housing among other sources. The money will be available in 2 years but will purchase the building now. To have a successful application they would like the support of the Town. Closing is available in approximate 5-7 months. They are looking at \$4-5 Million in renovations. Most of the loans will be grant differed. All apartments are in the Mass Rental Voucher Program with fixed rents. They are one bedroom apartments. John asked them if they are aware that there are issues with the building inspector. Paul said he wasn't aware of the issues and they would bring all issues up to code as soon as possible. John reminded them that the library is in there and will be there for many years while the library tries to build a new one. Paul wanted to talk about the Chester Inn, Hilltown CDC is typically looking to do larger projects. Want to make a larger project to access more grant money. He would like to access the low income, tax housing credits. By including the Chester Inn, it would make the project more



feasible. John said they wouldn't get support from the town for making the Chester Inn low income housing. Paul and Dave understood that. John said there was a house on Route 20 by Bannish Lumber. Andy Myers asks if they are interested in Green Community. Paul said they would look into what is available. Barbara asks if there would be an onsite manager and Paul said there is room for office space and would be a part time manager. There is a 24 hour maintenance company that takes care of CDC properties and would include this one too. There was a discussion of other properties that may be available. John and Barbara said they would both support the Chester Common property.

Old Business

#1 Continued discussion with Board of Health for a discussion of joining HRMC - Liz
Masse had said previously there was a discussion and meeting about benefits of joining HRMC. BOH was not impressed with presentation, did not learn anything new except there has been no new members that have joined in 20 years, viewed as another negative. She feels the only dollar value with membership, is that they offer and for a 3rd party inspector which the BOH organized their own 3rd party inspector this year at a cost of \$400. As far as permit to operate, current BOH did that themselves this year. With a full board they feel confident they can run and operate the transfer station efficiently as it has been since June. Liz as clerk has been keeping track of everything coming in and out, all the record keeping and reporting. The other 2 BOH members, Greg Harrison and Nicholas ????, submitted letters to Selectboard stating they were not in favor of joining HRMC. The BOH can apply for grants on their own. Liz mentioned they called a different electronics recycling company which charges half what the previous company did. Several parties Liz spoke to said the contract price we have with Wickles, present company, is very reasonable and is up for renewal in the next couple months and the BOH is already working with Wickles on renewal. John B thanked the BOH for all their hard work and what a difference they have made at the Transfer Station. No vote was necessary, just a matter of not moving forward.

Town Administrator update

#1 Discussion about establishing Petty Cash accounts with Debit cards

Treasurer Input

John Lumbr, was asked his opinion credit cards and he is not in favor of them. It is an unsecured line of credit. Run the risk of interest and penalties if payment is not made on time due to warrant period time frame. Primary reason for need was for reoccurring multi subscriptions of MAA events. Create a line item, approved through the budget process, called "Petty Cash", assigned to an employee, who is responsible for it and signs a paper saying if there is anything wrong with it the employee's wages will be garnished to make it right again. A dollar limit is set, example number is \$5000, a debit card is obtained with this amount as the limit. When you charge something, a receipt is submitted, goes through the warrant process, a check is cut for the amount spent back to Petty Cash account. Worst case the Town would be out the \$5000 dollars



if the employee in charge disappeared and was no longer employed. Much less risk than a credit card. Kathe and John to do necessary paperwork to get this in place.

#2 Provided packet for Selectboard review to discuss at next meeting. The stabilization balance, as of 2 days ago, \$248,000 at 1% interest, around \$2400 per year, interest must stay with stabilization account and can only be voted out by town meeting. Fine way to invest money but in today's market it should be moved over to Treasury Bonds, no way to lose on bonds. The portfolio is approved by the state and included in packet, is at 10.5%, would be at \$26,000 - \$30,000 on this one account. John L plans on doing the same with CMELD. No vote needed as this is a Treasurer decision, John is just informing the Board of his intentions.

#3 February 19, can Selectboard meet with Natalie Blais? She wants to talk about her budget. Yes.

#4 Matt Drenen has come back to replacing meters. Jill from CMELD needs another person in case Matt cannot respond. John asked Kathe to call Cory and have him pick someone.

#5 Sister Judith wanted Board to know that 50% of the Town street census has come back. She will have to do a second mailing which is another \$100 or so. The explanation of the two different census reasons were a good explanation as far as when the Town benefits more from one than the other.

#6 Included in the Selectboard packet is the January 1st Gateway census. Kathe has to call Westfield because the numbers Kathe has and what we paid 1st quarter are different from those numbers, less. Town needs to know why the numbers don't match. Westfield bills quarterly not bi-annually.

Bob Daley asked what the enrollment numbers for Gateway, how do they compare to the numbers. Chester is down 18 kids. Have to wait till 1st of March for final numbers.

Andy Myers went to budget meeting last week, Working budget moving from a 2.5% increase to 2% increase. Appropriations that were at 4.4% are at 3.5% now but they do not have good numbers yet. Another two weeks they will have better numbers about what revenues will be.

Bob Daley Any news on the Gateway superintendent search committee. Andy Myers answered that they had decided to go with an in house search committee. Chose not to spend \$15000 on a search committee. The Committee felt they were, capable of performing a professional search. Only the Committee is in house not the search.

John B wanted to address the tax bills and misprint information. A clarification had gone up on Town website immediately addressing the error. Some tax bills went out correct and some were incorrect as far as printing and the rate per thousand. Some peoples bills said \$25 per thousand instead of the \$20.70 per thousand it should have been. People have called concerned and John has assured them it was an error and was being taken care of. RGB was using property cards to



assess if they could not get in the home. So, a property card could say you have 4 bedrooms but in fact you only have 3. People need to look at their bills and check for an error.

Carl Baldasaro had a tax question in reference to cell towers in town. The towers are not being assessed very differently. Similar tower as his, with branches looks like a tree, and only one carrier and one is assessed considerably lower. The cell tower company pays the additional taxes, so it is not a burden on property owner, just mentioning as there is potential missing revenue without hurting homeowner. Barbara said that it is an assessor issue and with the new people there will be some changes coming., John said it is well worth mentioning.

Kathe had this item go ahead of her updates, as the people were at the meeting early, but the item was listed here under public input. Kathe introduced some new Chester residents, Chris Martenson and Evie Botelho, that are purchasing Brookside Lodge at 11 Johnson Hill Rd., and will be living there. They found out that 14 Johnson Hill Rd could be purchased also. Chris was able to put together interested investors to purchase #14 in 48 hours. Both parcels where a YWCA Camp back in the day. Equity finance the whole thing. Tim Ukitas will be point in dealing with Building Inspector and Permits and on the ground issues on Chris behalf.

Want to start with the lodge, needs wiring, trees taken down, septic to accommodate what they are. Expects a 3-4 month build out for the lodge to be an Airbnb and glamping. Looking to hold weddings and other events. They want to sustain regenerative farming, edible landscaping, have chickens so company picks their own egg for breakfast. Looking to have a restaurant, but possible just for their, but is still a work in progress.

Bringing all the investors out for a weekend in February and would like to have everyone met these people. Will potentially have a meet and greet.

Barbara asked about a vote from John and James H, before James, and John said yes. Barbara asked if the Board had sent something to Jill and he replied yes.

Public Input

Andy Myers went to Blandford Meeting for their very positive State of The Town Address, something maybe Chester could do next year. A real success story, showed where the Town hit bottom, financial house was not in order, taxes were not being collected properly.

The report shows the last couple of years of improvement, money being collected timely, found properties they didn't know of, their free cash is up. Chester is prime for the same.

Communicate with RRG about the budget for next year. Looking to create a new filing system for the Assessor Office, about \$1200, which Andy feels they can do. RRG has been making good progress, keep momentum going. They have contacted a GIS company to update our maps.

Jason Forgue



Asked about water lines at ball filed. It will be a one day project, and \$250 for pipe. John said yes still on, use highway as discussed before.

Asked if the school budget concerns had already been discussed before he got there. Andy replied yes.

Liz has been pushing Jason in terms of cleaning up some of the abandoned and boarded up properties, have made some strides towards that. One thing is an Abandoned Home Registry, which is allowed by MGL, and Chester does not take advantage of. It requires the owner of any vacant property, to register with the Town and allows Town to keep better track of these homes., Jason has spoken to a couple receivership companies in the last week. Most Towns charge a fee and if Chester goes in that direction the Town should charge also. Liz commented it is just part of the revitalization of the Town. Will need to be approved and Jason will provide statute. Jason has the ability to issue fines.

Linda LaGasse from Crane Rd and saw Chester Community Forum and complaints about roads. Discussion about knowing if people on certain roads that are difficult to get to and if there is anyone with health concerns on certain roads. Crane Rd is pretty muddy and coming from Maynard Hill is extremely icy. She has medical deliveries and sometimes meets them at end of street. Told a story of an altercation when two vehicles were on the road and neither one would pull over for each other. There was room for one of the vehicles to stay in his lane but the party refused due to branches that may scratch his vehicle. That same party left vehicle in middle of road and walked home. The parties wife came to get the car and Linda said it was not until the FedEx driver came and needed to get down the road did one of the parties move his vehicle. There was a physical altercation at some point between the party that left the vehicle, the driver of the first vehicle and the FedEx driver. Linda stated that the driver of vehicle left in road was coming at her when the other two intervened. Linda also feels the other party was intoxicated. Board and public all suggested that Linda should have called the Police and to not wait for it to get that far. Board apologized to her for the experience. Linda thought they may be at meeting to complain about the roads to the right people instead of on the Forum. Selectboard were quick to inform her that the people who complain most on the forum, never come to meetings, or voice their concerns in public. Linda feels they are after the Highway Department and defended the new employees who need to learn the roads, where to plow and they need time to learn. Linda feels that people feel entitled. Dirt roads are much better and wider now than when most people moved there. She was hear to compliment the Highway.

Liz Massa, promoting Cher hiking to bring people to Town as well as Chester on Track. Looking for any ideas to promote anything Chester, she will put it on the web site. Going heavy on promoting Chester on Track and bringing new people to Town.

Town Clerk Sister Judith talked about census, and that she was pleased with the response. If a second mailing is necessary, it should only be half the postage cost as first mailing as about 50% have come back. Barbara congratulated Sister on officially being the new Town Clerk. She



has spent 100 hours on the census alone. There was a timing problem with having CMELD fold them and she had to do it. It is normally never an issue.

Barbara asked why the Coach Newsletter came in the mail separately. Andy said she could not get off the hill that day due to ice. It must be printed, folded and delivered to CMELD in time to go in envelope. Ann Daley said Peg had all the information ready the week before but did not get it in on time.

Bob Daley stated the Foley's were not in attendance due to the condition of Abbott Hill Rd. Carl Baldasaro noted that it should be in good condition today as they put a lot of material on the road today.

He stated that, as one of the people who attempted to facilitate the proposal, he was very disappointed that we did not agree to join HRMC. Pragmatically he agrees with the decision the BOH made, if they are going to do the work they should be able to make the decision. The second part of this comment on that is, somebody, most likely the Selectboard, has got to have some sort of clear agreement with BOH, as to what is going to be done and by who and what the cost will be involved down the road. An agreement formally or not to make sure the BOH does not revert to the past. He applauds the present BOH on their job well done but would like a clear plan and at what cost to the Town.

CWIC Chester Water Improvement Committee is meeting with Dr. Rich Gulick on Wednesday night and invited anyone who is interested to attend and listen to what Dr. has to say. Bob feels this man is brilliant and will be a big help dealing with the water plant issues.

Bob went out on a limb and signed the Town up with an advocacy group called T4MA, (Transportation for Massachusetts). A 3.5 million grant for regional transit authority has been released today on top of the 4 million last year. His point is that our legislative team is on board and that they understand how we suffer with the lack of transportation out here and they are starting to do something. Money is earmarked for innovative start ups. He feels encouraged. As a Town we will have to write a letter of support to some advocacy groups saying that yes the need is great here and get on board formally that way.

Ann Daley stated that she has been speaking not only to the Seniors thru the Board, The PVPC and the Federal Census to encourage, develop a liaison for The Hilltowns. The Library has an existing computer set up, how can we supplement and support. The presentation to the Town, we loose a minimum of \$2300 per person for 10 years if you don't fill out your census.

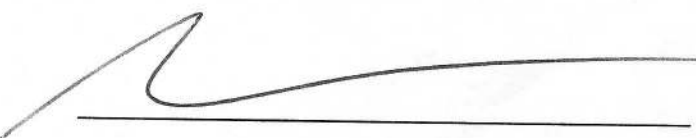
Barbara made the motion to adjourn

Adjourn at 7:33

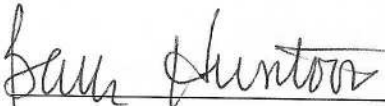
Respectfully submitted



Kathy Engwer - Administrative Assistant



John Baldasaro, Chairman



Barbara Huntoon, Vice Chairman



Richard Holzman, Clerk

Dept. & Committee Updates

Public Comments and questions

Any other matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair at least 48 hours before the meeting.