



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

Monday, July 19th, 2021

Open Meeting – This meeting is held in the Town Hall auditorium with a virtual option.

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Jason Forgue, and Richard Holzman present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, and Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease. From the Finance Committee Andy Myers, Bob Daley, Jessica Sakaske, and Sister Judith Dalesandro were present. Treasurer Sara Hunter and Accountant Erik Kinsherf were participating remotely, as well as a few residents. Resident Brian Forgue as well as a few others were also present.

Warrants and minutes were signed, John opened the meeting at 6:00 PM. He asked if anyone was recording the meeting, no one answered that they were.

- **Finance Review with Treasurer Sara Hunter and Accountant Erik Kinsherf.** Erik and Sara informed us that they have been able to have our FY20 free cash certified, they hope to have reconciliation finished by October of this year and should have free cash by January. This came up as a negative balance due to \$77,000.00 of Chapter 90 money that was not received in time, by September 2020 and due to \$65,000.00 for a grant, that also was not received by September 2020. There also was a cash variance of \$54,000.00 which was more than the Treasurer had in the books. Erik brought to our attention that the uncollected real estate tax was higher this past year than the year before, in FY19 there were \$114,000.00 in uncollected taxes and FY20 had \$193,000.00. We did have an extension for payment this past year due to the Covid-19 pandemic but will not this year. For FY19 there was \$31,000.00 that had not been entered into the ledger which was for expenses and payroll. Erik explained that writing off the difference would not contribute to our free cash, collecting the back taxes would be what made the difference. Andy asked about free cash being certified as we had been discussing that it would be done in the fall rather than January. Erik assured us that they would do their best to have it sooner however, having it completed by January will still be the best performance that Chester has had in the past six years. John stated that this being the first year that we are using Erik's firm as well as the first time we have contracted out these services we needed to meet our performance goals. Sara also added that this past year is difficult as they have discovered money moving from CMELD as well as transfers that were not completed. Their current plan is to have 2021 reconciled and note items that need to be addressed and set the process for FY22.

- **Board of Health – Appointment requests for the Transfer Station.** The Board of Health gave the Select Board a copy of letters of interest for two applicants that were interested in the Transfer Station attendant position. The people interested were Ann Daley and Greg Harrison, the Board of Health had interviewed them both and recommended Ann as the Attendant and Greg as an alternate. Rich made the motion to appoint Ann Daley as Transfer Station Attendant with Greg Harrison as an alternate, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye.
- **Continuation of discussion of William Ivey Long renting up to two rooms at the old school.** Last week Kathe discussed that William Ivey Long who currently owns the old Chester Elementary school across from the Town Hall would like to rent space after the Town takes ownership while they continue to remove their things from the building. Kathe explained that he was looking for two rooms and thought he would need them through the end of this year. Kathe spoke with a realtor, Kathy Engwer, who suggested \$500.00 per room as well as having him responsible for any heat or electricity used. Jason asked Kathe if she knew the rooms that he was interested in renting. Kathe answered that he was waiting for us before he decided. Jason mentioned that commercial space is usually rented by the square footage, which Rich commented that the rooms on the first floor were all relatively the same size. The Select Board agreed that in addition to the rent that he should be responsible for electricity used as well as heating the building if the rental goes into the colder months. Rich made the motion that we allow William Ivey Long to rent two rooms in the old Chester Elementary school at the rate of \$500.00 per room with the responsibility of paying any electric or heating bills, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye.
- **Continuation of discussion for Water Commissioners.** At the Select Board meeting last week while discussing the water department Rich mentioned that he thought it would be a good idea to have a board of Water Commissioners rather than have the Select Board take care of it. The Board would be able to focus solely on that and take some of the burden off of the Select Board. Kathe was informed that members of the Board of Health could not be apart of the Water Commissioners as they should be the checks and balances for this service in our Town. We also would need to host an election to create the Board of Water Commissioners. As we do not have anything current due for an election John suggested that we appoint people from now until May when our next election takes place. Rich agreed, and Kathe stated that she would post on the website that we are looking to create a Board of Water Commissioners, and all interested should contact her. John thought that was a good idea to post for one to two weeks, then we could make a decision on who to appoint. Kathe stated that was alright and we could schedule for the Select Board meeting on August 2nd to decide on appointments. Jason commented that we should have a description of the roll of the Committee as well as describing any authority they will have. John stated that we could pull a generic job description and the Select Board can review it and agree on the job description. Rich asked about the numbers of members on the Committee if it will be three or five people, John answered three. Andy mentioned that we should discuss a stipend for the Board and where that money would come from. Kathe said once we decide on a description of duties, we could discuss a stipend possibly at the next Select Board meeting.
- **Town Administrator Update:**

- *Timber Cutting:* We have been discussing the possibility of having some tree work done at the Water Treatment plant and sell the timber. The person Kathe received as a contact she has reached out to but has not heard back as of yet.
- *Moderator Update:* Our Moderator Melvyn Hook has given his letter of resignation and we are now in pursue of someone to fill the position. To elect a new Moderator, we would need to host a special town meeting, but in the meantime the Town Clerk is able to act as Moderator.
- *ARPA: designate a trustee of the account.* ARPA is the American Rescue Plan Act which will be issuing money to the Town to assist with any issues that came up due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Kathe explained that because the amount to this account is a large sum, they require a designated trustee to keep track of the account. John asked if there was any guidance as to who should be filling this role, did it need to be a member of the Select Board, Kathe answered that it did not say other than it was necessary due to the large amount. Mary Ann suggested a member of the Finance Committee, which John was open to suggestions, Rich added that if it was a member of the Finance Committee that they would be able to solely focus on that issue. Kathe said that we could continue this to the Select Board meeting next week while everyone thinks about the best course of action.
- *Request to combine to Easthampton Savings Bank:* The Town has received a letter from Easthampton Savings Bank regarding two accounts totaling \$34,386.66 that have not had activity in a while drawing money from the account or adding to it and they would like to place them in inactive status. Mary Ann explained that the accounts are an old payroll account, and the other is an LPL account. John asked if this was possibly the amount that could have been the discrepancy that was found by the Accountant and Treasurer, Mary Ann answered no the Treasurer was aware of these accounts. She also suggested that we keep the account with the large sum and combine the two for stabilization.
- Before moving to public comment Kathe brought up that she had spoken with Deidre Doherty from DEP to discuss the letter from DEP that we received on July 6th. Deidre told her that they could have a meeting this week on Thursday or Friday to discuss things. John asked if anyone was available to attend the meeting, Rich said that he was available either day, and Jason stated that he could make it work. John stated that he would be available Thursday and to ensure we could have Bernie St. Martin our water operator as well as Dr. Richard Gullick our consultant from Water Compliance Solutions present at the meeting. Kathe said that she would set up a virtual meeting for Thursday. The next thing Kathe wanted to discuss was the extensive damage that was cause by the rainstorms over the past weekend. On Sunday, July 18th, 2021, at 8:40 PM the Select Board called a state of emergency due to the damage. Kathe spoke with MEMA, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, on Monday and met with their representative at 2:00 PM to drive around and view the damage of the roads. She has another 2:00 PM meeting on Tuesday, July 20, 2021, to give them a list of the roads affected, she also has spoken with MASS DOT. The Chapter 90 money sum of \$236,021 for this year has been deposited and we could look into an emergency withdrawal. John discussed how they decide on a State of Emergency and that it needs to be a decision agreed upon by the Select Board as well as Fire Chief Richie Small as he is also the Emergency Management Director. After this was done a phone call to MEMA was made to keep them aware and updated to the current situation. Kathe commented that residents should not be driving around to view the extent of the damage as some of the roads are unpassable at the moment, further traffic will add to the damage. She

added by saying to please leave anything to be fixed to our Highway Department. We have already had a resident who thought they could fix some of the damage themselves which was not done properly and caused further damage to the road. John added that this is going to be a busy couple months to fix the damage and that there is no quick fix to these problems. He stated once we have MEMA approved we could hire contractors to assist otherwise we would need to use Chapter 90 money and the damage is far more than what we have received will cover. Our Highway Department does not have the equipment, material or the funds to take care of everything necessary to bring all of the roads back to their best state.

- Brian Forgue who was appointed as a member of the Planning Board last week also stated that he was interested in taking on the roll of Cemetery Commissioner. Brian put together a letter of interest as well as a list of ideas he has for our cemeteries. The Select Board had a chance to review the letter and thanked Brian for his interest. As Jason is Brian's father, he needed to abstain from the vote, Rich made the motion to appoint Brian Forgue to the position of Cemetery Commissioner, John 2nd. John commented that Kathe could help Brian with a list of priorities and thanked him for his enthusiasm. Jason thanked everyone who assisted with the Cemetery cleanup at the Pine Hill Cemetery this past weekend.

- Rich let us know that he saw Senator Lesser and asked him about the East-West rail. Senator Lesser assured Rich that it was on his mind, and he had met with Representative Richard Neal. Rich discussed that we should be putting pressure on the state as he believed that this is a critical issue and not being part of rail, we are missing a development opportunity. Bob added that there has been success with the compact of Massachusetts and Connecticut rail and the expansion has exceeded predictions for the number of riders. He suggested us reaching out to Governor Baker to put pressure on creating a compact with New York to hopefully assure greater success.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

- Andy discussed the Green Community Grant, if this is not closed, we can not apply for another. There are over one hundred communities who apply to these grants, they are difficult, and a lot of paperwork and he suggested to sign the responsibility to someone to take care of this. John added that we need to put pressure on PVPC who organized the grant that we are waiting to close. Rich stated that he has spoken to Eric Weiss and discussed that we require more accountability and want them to focus on our needs.

- Mary Ann discussed a meeting with the Library Trustees about the current air quality issues within the library. As there are apartments in the building the tenants who live there are currently allowed to smoke within the building. With the heat we have had it has intensified the smell of cigarette smoke which has caused our Librarian who has asthma and other residents to have breathing issues. It had been suggested to put a temporary modular unit as an alternative location for the library until this can be remedied. Aside from the smoke there also was a closet discovered that had severe mold damage which also poses a health risk along with air quality. Last week Kathe and our Librarian Angelique Toroni met with Hilltown CDC to walk through the library and Kathe also being an asthmatic needed to wear a mask to deal with the air quality. Hilltown CDC who controls the building has stated that they will not ask the tenants not to smoke in the building. There have been air purifiers put in the library, but this has made no difference, also there is only one window that opens all the others are sealed shut. Jason who is

also our Building Inspector stated that he could not do anything about the air quality as that does not violate any building codes. However, he would pursue the issue with the windows not being able to open as that is a safety issue. Mary Ann asked if they could begin searching for an option for a temporary site, the Select Board answered yes. Jason added that there are companies that can be brought in to address the mold problem. Elizabeth Massa from the Board of Health who was participating remotely commented that she had spoken to Paul Lichette from Hilltown CDC and explained that they can make a mandate of a no smoking policy. This is something that many apartment buildings do and there should be no problem. Liz suggested filing a complaint and put it in writing which would require Hilltown CDC at minimum to respond in thirty days. Jason added that because this is a direct impact to safety and health, they could require a faster response time. Rich added that as landlord Hilltown CDC is required to respond to tenant complaints i.e., our library, especially when they relate to a health concern. Mary Ann told the Board of Health that she would put together an official complaint and would send it to them by late morning tomorrow.

- Brian thanked the Select Board for the appointment as Cemetery Commissioner. He discussed some ideas he had for the Cemetery which included limiting the number of items that are placed on headstones as well as the idea of Adopt a Cemetery. Limiting the items put on the headstones will allow for easier upkeep, and the idea of Adopt a Cemetery would allow businesses to assist in the cost for upkeep. Brian added that he has been chosen to serve on the Young Democrats Board, he would be happy to be our voice when reaching out to legislature about the East-West rail project.

- Bob asked about the meeting to be scheduled to discuss the Water department, Kathe answered that it would be on Thursday, July 22nd, at 3:30 PM. Bob added that when we are working on the description for the Water Commissioners, we make their authority also known. John commented that they would and work on the job description at the Select Board meeting next week. Jason stated that he will be on vacation for the next two weeks so he will be participating at the meetings remotely.

John made the motion to adjourn, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye.

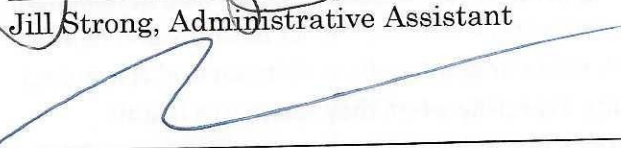
Meeting Adjourned 7:27 PM.

Respectfully Submitted



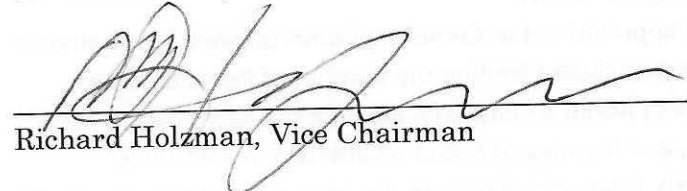
Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

7/21/21
Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

7/24/21
Date Signed



Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

7/26/21
Date Signed

Jason Forgue, Clerk

Date Signed