



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

Monday, July 26th, 2021

Open Meeting – This meeting is held in the Town Hall COA room, a virtual option was offered however there was an issue, and no one was able to connect to the meeting.

Selectmen John Baldasaro and Richard Holzman present, Jason Forgue is on vacation and due to problems participating remotely he was on speaker phone. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, COA Director and Librarian Angelique Toroni, and Town Clerk Terry Donovan. Andy Myers, Bob Daley, and Sister Judith Dalesandro from the Finance Committee were present as well as residents Norma Macdonald and Linda Koske who is also a library trustee. Chief Weidhaas was present as well as Santi Messina and Frank Murphy for interview to appoint as new Chester Blandford Police Department Officers.

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.

- **Police Chief Weidhaas requesting appointment of Santi Messina and Frank Murphy as Police Officers.** Chief Weidhaas opened the discussion stating that since former Chief Ilnick's retirement we have also lost two other Officers. The two applicants have been Officers in other towns for several years, Frank for twenty-three years and Santi for twelve years. They both would be coming to us as current Officers in West Stockbridge. Frank is also a teacher for South Hadley public schools and took on the position of acting Chief in West Stockbridge in 2018 until the Select Board was able to fill the position full time. Chief Weidhaas commented that she believed Frank would be a valuable asset as an Officer for the Chester Blandford Police Department. John asked Frank if he had gone to the full or part time police academy, Frank answered that he had attended the part time academy. This has been an ongoing discussion among hiring Officers as with the new Police Reform Bill any officers that have only attended the part time academy will need to attend a bridge academy or loose standing as an Officer. Chief Weidhaas stated that both Frank and Santi would be willing to attend the bridge academy if needed. Chief Weidhaas also let us know that with the Police Reform Bill there has been a discussion of allowing part time officers to continue depending on years of service, however she has not yet heard from the Police Commissioner as to if this will be happening. John stated that

he thought that would be very beneficial as an adjustment to the Bill as these restrictions are not workable with small towns. At this point Chief Weidhaas has had to submit the number of officers she believed would be attending the bridge academy as well as the ammunition that will be needed. John asked Frank why he was interested in working for the Chester Blandford Police Department. Frank stated that he has heard great things about Chester and about the merging of the two Police Departments. John commented that being an Officer in West Stockbridge it is also a small town and would be familiar with community policing. Frank stated yes and that he knew an important task is getting to know the people in town. Chief Weidhaas began discussing Santi and stated that with his years as an Officer as well as the work he had done with starting community fund raising events he also would be a valuable asset to the Police Department. John asked Santi as he did Frank why he was interested in working for our Police Department. Santi stated that he enjoys working within small towns, he is patient and is never looking for trouble. John stated that he was glad to hear that, we enforce the laws but are not looking for a "hot shot." Rich made the motion to appoint Santi Messina and Frank Murphy as part time Officers to the Chester Blandford Police Department, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye. John told the Officers that there is an open-door policy among the Select Board and as he served on our Police Department and as Chief, that they could come to any of them if they needed anything.

- **Water Commissioners – discussion about job descriptions and stipends.** We have had an ongoing discussion about creating a Board of Water Commissioners instead of having this controlled by the Select Board. Kathe had reached out to many communities, and no one had a specific job description but were interested in seeing what we came up with. Mass General Law in their description states that they give the Board of Water Commissioners more than just supervision of the Water Department they give the consent to allow the Board to watch and set the rates as well as taking care of the finances and expenses. Kathe explained that both descriptions one from Mass General Law and the other she found through the New England Water Works Association were generic. Jason stated that he was concerned with allowing the Board to have sole authority to set rates and thought there should be some oversight. Jason suggested a Board of seven people, the three Select Board members and four others. Rich stated that with our current situation being complicated he wanted the members on the Board to have focus solely on water. He had no problem with the Board setting rates as long as they were subject to review by the Select Board. John made the point that according to Mass General Law once we give the authority to the Board of Water Commissioners, they do not report to the Select Board. Rich thought we should review what they wanted to set as a job description, but the current set up that we have is not working. Bob asked if we had a follow up on the rate study, there had been no update in three months. John stated no that they had been out of the loop with that. There was a concern if we do move to a Board that the Select Board would continue to be out of the loop with anything pertaining to water. John stated that sometimes these things start out with great intentions but do not work out to be positive for the town. Andy asked if we did create a Board of Water Commissioners and they are aloud to dictate their own finances etc. would they still be subject to the Town budget, the Select Board answered that they would. Jason voiced his concern that within the job description from Mass General Law this gives the Board of Water Commissioners a lot of authority. John stated that we would need a safeguard in place in our job description or a bylaw that would create check and balances. Bob asked in the job description from Mass General Law did it state anything related

to personnel. John stated that the description was exclusive for the water systems, but he believed because it stated "exclusive control" personnel would be included in that. He suggested that we table the discussion for now until we get some advice from our Town Council Tom Mullen on writing an effective bylaw. Jason commented that he would take a stab at writing the bylaw and then we could review it with Tom. Andy asked about the stipend we were considering and suggested \$700.00 per year as this is the same amount that we give to the CMELD Commissioners. John agreed that it was a smart idea to use the same amount as CMELD and was a good stipend to work with. Kathe mentioned that in creating the Board she believed that they should take over all facets of the department mailings, emails etc. which would include the annual CCR report. Andy commented that he believed mailings should still fall under administrative and not the Board of Water Commissioners as it could be difficult to find people who would want to take on all of these tasks. John stated that the Board of Water Commissioners should be handling communication with DEP as well as mailings that they should be apart of the entire Water Department. Bob commented that there are multiple mailings and would be more coming. Norma mentioned that she believed all of what we had been discussing should be entered in the job description. John agreed and stated we would define everything clearly after the bylaw is written. Bob brought up that he believed having a Superintendent would work to share with other towns Blandford as an example as they also have their own water department. Bob asked about the TOC testing and if the Select Board knew if it had been ongoing. John stated again they he was unsure as they have been disconnected with the Water Department, this was why this idea has been brought up there needs to be structure and responsibility in place as this is one of the biggest issues in town and we need to be on top of it. Jason stated that he was looking forward to the involvement of Bernie St. Martin out current Water Operator and that he would begin working on the bylaw.

- **ARPA – designate a trustee of the account, continued discussion.** The money that the town will be receiving from the American Rescue Plan Act, ARPA, requires a trustee of the account to monitor the funds and how they are spent. At the Select Board meeting last week Monday the 19th it was discussed the possibility of having one of the Finance Committee members designated. Andy commented that he did not believe it should be a member of the Finance Committee, it should be a town employee who is under the control of the Select Board. Jason asked if it could be a member of the Select Board, John said yes, and Jason stated that he would not mind being the trustee. Kathe explained that the person designated will need to meet with the Tax Collector Mary Ann, and our Treasurer Sara Hunter every quarter to go over the account. John made the motion that we designate Jason Forgue as the trustee to the ARPA account, Rich 2nd. Kathe let us know that we had received the first installment of these funds, but it was lower than what we were initially told we would receive. The first amount should have been \$206,000.00 and we only received \$70,000.00. Kathe stated that there had been some discussion that they would be changing the amounts and instead going to a per capita rather than what the initial figures which were based on. Kathe will be reaching out to Representative Natalie Blais to investigate why a change was made as we currently could use the money to assist with the damage of the roads over the past week. Jason asked Kathe if she would CC him on that email to stay in the loop, Kathe said that she would.

- **Continuation of discussion of William Ivey Long renting up to two rooms at the old Chester Elementary School.** Kathe stated that there was no update, Donald Saunders the business assistant to William Ivey Long was on vacation and would be speaking with him when he is back.
- **Library discussion with Library Trustees about the Library options for the future.** Last week we had a discussion with Mary Ann about air quality issues that we have become aware of within the library. Terry explained that the landlord had attempted to clean the mold that was discovered in a closet, but they were going to have a company come in on Tuesday the 27th to test the air quality. They were unsure when they would have the results back but understood that if there was indeed a mold problem it would be extensive work to have things professionally cleaned. They also would need a temporary place for the books and staff to work out of. However, if it did not come back with anything related to mold, they planned on boxing up the books and doing a deep cleaning possibly the same company that we used to clean the Town Hall during the Covid-19 pandemic. As of now the plan was to have these things paid for by the Library Trustees. John thanked the Library Trustees for being on top of the problem so we can have actions taken to ensure this is taken care of in the right way and suggested filing a formal complaint with the Board of Health. Terry asked if when the purchase of the old Chester Elementary School has been completed if and when the library would be allowed to relocate. The Select Board had no issue with the library relocating to that building and Rich stated that as the school is a monumental building within the town it would be a prime space for the library. He discussed that the hope was to make renovations but the cost to renovate vs. a new building needs to be considered. He believed that this building would be very useful as the population gets larger it will be good to have the space and we should exhaust all options. Linda commented that we should weigh out the cost of renovation vs. a new building, and Terry mentioned researching state programs and grants. John and Rich agreed and stated that we would need to keep all options open. Mary Ann commented that they planned on filing a complaint with the Board of Health but were waiting to have the air quality test results back. John stated that he thought that was a good decision and commended Angelique on being creative and moving the story time that they are doing down to the Emery ball field and was in full support of what they were doing. Norma made the comment of once we find out what the problem is this should be a landlord issue and hoped the costs would not fall on the Library Trustees. Jason had reached out as the Building Inspector to the CDC regarding the windows that we were informed are sealed shut with the exception of one. He was told the issue had been addressed they had also cleaned the closet with "Moldex," and believed they had been doing everything right to remedy the problem. He stated that without the formal complaint right now it is difficult to move forward.
- **Update on roads, emergency aid funding etc.** Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro could not be present but had been working with Kathe on the progress of repair with the roads that were damaged during the rainstorms. We have already done a preliminary filing with Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, MEMA, and they were meeting with our representative tomorrow the 27th to complete paperwork and discuss if they could raise the limit of what we could file. Currently we have twelve to fourteen roads that need to be addressed and roughly would need \$750,000.00 John mentioned that he received a call from a resident on Skyline Trail that there is another culvert that is collapsing which also needs to be addressed. When Kathe spoke to Representative Blais there was a concern that the combination of costs for each town

would not be meet the threshold of what is necessary to declare a State of Emergency which qualifies us for the aid. The total damage for all towns needs to hit \$10.4 million. John asked if we had an idea of what the other towns were filing, Kathe stated she knew Lenox and Belchertown were filing. Lenox had a bridge that was out and they had a temporary fix and installed a foot bridge as there had been families stranded for over thirty hours. Belchertown also had issues as they had a few beaver dams break causing further flooding. Kathe mentioned that if we can file that it was recommended that we reach out to the Granville Highway Department as their Superintendent has had to complete many of these. John stated that it was essential that this comes through as the repairs would cost us our Chapter 90 money for the next few years. Rich told us that Lenox had given us some signage for road closure, as well as barriers barrels and cones. Andy stated that he had a meeting this past Friday the 23rd about state owned land where he met with Senator Adam Hinds and his assistant Jon Gould as well as the State Auditor Suzanne Bump. They discussed the towns that had been hit by these rainstorms and were concerned and wanted us to have state help. John asked if there was any money received from Covid-19 that could be used, Kathe answered no. Andy mentioned investigating the possibility of climate change funds, John stated that our best hope was MEMA. Jason asked if we could have the state legislature meet with us next week, Kathe said she could look into it but wanted to first see what MEMA says at the meeting she has with them tomorrow. Rich asked if we had an idea of the cost for the repairs on Abbott Hill Road, Kathe answered that she was not sure on the total yet. Rich mentioned adding in a bridge to Abbott Hill Road as he thought this would help alleviate some of these problems in the future. John and Kathe both explained that because there was not an existing bridge on the road, we could not claim it for cost of repairs. Kathe also mentioned that the DOT was not going to issue any guidance on the repairs as it could come back to them if there were problems. Jason suggested contacting Representative Richie Neal to make an appearance, and Rich had already spoke with Representative Blais and Senator Lesser.

- **Town Administrator update, discussion of updating Hazard Mitigation for FY22 due in December of 2021.** Kathe discussed that our current Hazard Mitigation Plan expires this year, it is renewed every five years. A Hazard Mitigation Plan defined by FEMA is set to, "reduce loss of life and property by minimalizing the impact of disasters. It begins with state and local governments identifying natural disaster risks and vulnerabilities that are common in their area."

Before moving to public comment Jason mentioned that he had reached out to have an energy audit done of the Town Hall and the old Chester Elementary school which would begin tomorrow the 27th. The results will give us a plan of what we can do as far as improvements in both buildings and what we could qualify for among grants. Mary Ann had started making phone calls to solar companies outside the one that was used to install the solar panels on the Highway Garage. Jason also let us know that the Recreation Committee would be hosting a family fun day at the Emery field ballpark on Saturday August 21st.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

Andy explained his meeting that he was at regarding state owned land and PILOT programs, Payment In Lieu of Taxes. Our records for our town state owned land did not match the state's records which stated

we have 3,781 acres and our records state we have 3,321 acres. Andy was informed that in 2016 DOR was no longer maintaining these reports and that a group in Boston was setting the values. At that point a base rate was decided, and the group decided the value. He gave an example of Edgartown which is located on Martha's Vineyard the money they receive for their state-owned land is \$1.7 million as opposed to the \$19,000.00 that we receive. Andy was willing to go to Boston to get further support for the town and recommend that the formula be based on acreage not the suggested value. Andy mentioned that Littleville Lake is a back up reservoir for the city of Springfield and we should investigate if we can receive something for that.

Andy asked if we had any feedback from PVPC about the solar project that we are looking to have remedied. Rich and Jason had both spoke with Eric Weiss who told Rich he would make it right, when Jason spoke with him, he was told that he would dedicate as much of his time that is necessary but did not mention any monetary funds.

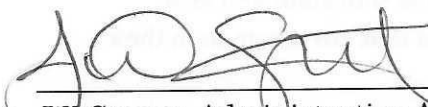
Rich discussed the Chester Becket Railroad and Chester Historical Tour that took place on Saturday the 24th. The event was a success with over one hundred people from various states attending and commended Dave Pierce for doing a fantastic job. He commented that since the Keystone Arches and the Chester Railway Station have been made a historical landmark, we are working even more on pursuing a rail stop in Chester. By rail we are twenty-five miles from Pittsfield and Springfield and fifty-nine from Albany. There has been an issue with getting information to the Governor's office the benefit of the rail stop and with under-reporting which would help us to qualify for federal aid.

Mary Ann let us know that there would be a zoom meeting about solar on Thursday the 29th at 9:00 AM with New England Solar. She suggested that the Select Board as well as CMELD be on the meeting.

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

Meeting Adjourned 7:33 PM


Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

8/5/21


Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

8/9/21

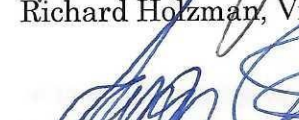
Date Signed



Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

6/9/21

Date Signed



Jason Fogue, Clerk

8/9/21

Date Signed