



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

Monday, August 9th, 2021

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman and Jason Fogue present as well as Blandford Selectmen Tom Ackley and Ted Cousineau, Chair Cara Letendre of Blandford was not present. Town Administrator Kathe Warden for Chester was present as well as Town Administrator Josh Garcia for Blandford and Administrative Assistants Jill Strong of Chester and Joann Martin of Blandford. Also, from Blandford Assistant Town Clerk Mary Kronholm was present as well as Highway Superintendent Dave Waldron. Chester Blandford Police Chief Tammy Weidhaas was present as well as Andy Myers from the Chester Finance Committee. Also participating remotely were residents from Chester and Blandford. Highway Foreman from Chester Carl Baldasaro, Fire Chief Richie Small of Chester and Fire Chief Dave Motter of Blandford were not present.

Blandford Selectmen Tom Ackley opened the meeting at 6:00 PM. Tom moved to begin the meeting with the first action item on their agenda which was to have a joint discussion with the Chester Select Board regarding the Chester Blandford Police Department.

- **To have the yearly review of all matters of the Chester Blandford Police Dept.** John thanked the Blandford Select Board for hosting this meeting and that the next meeting would be hosted by Chester. John stated that combining the two Police Departments has been the most successful joint venture we have undertaken thus far, it was a seamless transition and has had great feedback. Tom agreed thanking Tammy for doing a great job. Chief Weidhaas stated that she had believed this was also to be her six-month review and provided everyone with a copy of a list she had made about the things she has accomplished since becoming the Chief. Chief Weidhaas commented that as we could see by her list, she has been quite busy and there has been little opportunity for her to have patrol time. For four months she was operating with only two Officers but was happy that on July 26th Chester had appointed two additional Officers to bring her back up to five members of the Police Department including herself. The two new members of the Police Department that have joined us are experienced Officers and will bring a lot to the Department. Chief Weidhaas discussed the things she has accomplished since becoming Chief which included donating sixteen unused radios to the Fire Department, six to Chester and ten to Blandford. The current focus has been to upload the trainings for each of the

Officers which needs to be done by June 30th to ensure the Officers can recertify. Six policies have been created which she reached out to the South Hadley Police Department for a copy of their policies and has been re-writing them to fit our needs. Chief Weidhaas has been attending monthly meetings with the Mass Chief of Police Association as well as the Western Mass Chief of Police Association which has helped her to learn more information regarding the Police Reform Bill. The bridge academy which will need to be attended by any part time Officers has been a topic of discussion for the number of hours of training that will be required. The estimated number of hours required will be between 200-370 hours, in two weeks she has another meeting and hopes to find out more. She commented that this bill is going to heavily effect the small towns. Chief Weidhaas would like to also bring one to two more Officers to the Department, but the current budget does not allow for that. The budget for officer wages after deducting her salary is only \$30,000.00 which only allows for twenty-eight patrol hours per week, fourteen per town. The FY22 budget increased slightly and allows \$32,100.00 for Officer wages some of which needs to be used to pay officers during their yearly training hours which are required to be completed every year by the Mass Police Training Counsel. Also, every year Officers are required to take an additional eight hours of firearms training and every two years an eight-hour CPR and first responder recertification. With the cost of training withdrawn it brings the budget for Officer wages to between \$27,172.00 and \$27,876.00 depending on the required training of each Officer that year. Another thing that was noted by Chief Weidhaas is that our Police Department has not been certified for seven years which is a violation against Mass Policy, she is working on remedying this. There have been complaints on Facebook regarding the lack of presence which Chief Weidhaas addressed in person to a resident who came to see her, being short staffed and covering two towns it has been difficult to cover everywhere. Speaking with the State Police as well they currently only have two officers per shift and they cover eleven towns, we need to be properly staffed so that we do not rely so heavily on the State Police. Chief Weidhaas' suggestion was that the Officer wages budget should be brought back to the amount that remained when the Chief's salary was deducted when Chief Ilnicki was on the Department this was smaller due to the fact that he was only part time while Chief Weidhaas is full time. Doing so would bring the Officer Wages budget after Chief Weidhaas' salary is deducted to \$74,400 annually. This would allow after subtracting the cost of Officer training to \$69,000.00 providing sixty-one patrol officers per week or thirty and one half hours per town. Tom asked Chief Weidhaas if she had submitted a request to the prospective Finance Committees, she answered no her email to the Select Board including the details of what was needed was her official request as she believed the Select Board was the first stop. Tom asked that she speak with the Finance Committee from each town to discuss this further. John stated that her presentation was accurate to the current situation and believed this was something that needed to be funded. He commented that this has been a difficult year including the Covid-19 pandemic and we could look into the ARPA, American Rescue Plan Act, funding that we will be receiving. Jason asked Chief Weidhaas if she thought that her role would remain administrative permanently or thought things would change over the next six months. Chief Weidhaas answered that she hoped not and that she was seeking a criminal justice intern from Westfield State University for any help that they could provide. Chief Weidhaas stated that her goal was to have two Officers on at all times during waking hours, 7:00 AM – 11:00 PM only relying on the State Police during those off hours. John agreed that this was necessary to

provide adequate police service and that he supported this and could be addressed again the next fiscal year. Rich asked if the training was in addition to the patrol hours, Chief Weidhaas answered yes and that the training was the minimum allowed hours to keep Officers certified. Ted asked how often we are paying for training, Chief Weidhaas answered every year for the regular and firearms training and every two years for the First Responder and CPR training. She also stated that any Officers required to attend the bridge academy would not also have to take the normal yearly training on the same year they attend the academy. As some of our Officers work for another Department in addition to ours and she was going to reach out to the prospective towns to see if they could contribute to the cost of the trainings for these Officers. John thanked Chief Weidhaas for her presentation stating that he knew there would be difficulties and that this is not an easy job.

- **To have a joint discussion with the Police Chief Tammy Weidhaas, Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro, Fire Chief Richie Small, Blandford Fire Chief Dave Motter and Blandford Highway Superintendent Dave Waldron about emergency services.** Chief Weidhaas discussed that when Chester declared a state of emergency on Sunday, July 18th at 8:40 PM she was not notified. She stated that she was disappointed that no one reached out to make her aware of the situation as if there were problems she and other Officers could have been needed. Chief Weidhaas asked if the group had any input on how to better the communication between everyone in these circumstances, giving an example of having a group text between all of them. She stated that we are all on the same team and wanted there to be open communication. John and Josh both commented that they thought a group text was the easiest option. Josh stated that he would like an emergency preparedness group which was discussed within Blandford a few years ago which puts a plan in place for dealing with any emergencies. John commented that Chester does indeed have that in place but thought that it could be updated. Chief Weidhaas commented that in the heavy rainstorms if we had needed to evacuate the Walker Brook Campground as was necessary with Hurricane Irene it would have been necessary for her to know of the circumstances so that she could have herself and other Officers in place.

John made the motion to adjourn this meeting and allow each town to move into their own meeting to discuss items on their agenda. Tom 2nd all voted Aye.

Meeting Adjourned 6:41 PM

All participating from the town of Chester moved into a new room to carry on our own meeting. The virtual option was available for this portion of the meeting as well.

John opened the meeting at 6:48 PM.

- **A review of the Water Commissioners responsibilities with the possibility of vote to approve posting the position.** Kathe and Jason both worked to create a job description for the Board of Water Commissioners which we have been discussing over the past few meetings. The Select Board had all read the description and agreed that it was appropriate. Jason asked about the reference in the job description of working along side with CMELD. Kathe answered that all of the billing is completed by CMELD which they do a good job, so it was important to have them

working together. Jason asked if the Commissioners would be distributing the notices that were necessary. Kathe answered that the idea is to keep things efficient and hoped that any notices completed in time would be able to go out through the monthly electric bills to save money on postage. Rich asked about the stipend, if the responsibilities of the Board compared to that of the Commissioners of CMELD or the Board of Health as he did not want there to be any problems with compensation also did not want it to look as if the position was a Commissioner with a part time staff job. John answered that he was unsure how it compared but stated that this would not be a staff job. Rich asked if there was a reference in the job description regarding supervision of the water operator. John and Jason both stated that it does however Rich thought that it should be spelled out more specifically. Jason said that we could adjust the language, Kathe remarked that doing that it would give the Board permission to both hire and fire employees within the Water Department. Jason stated yes it would as well as hiring their own consultants. John made the motion that with the editing changes that we accept the job description for the Board of Water Commissioners, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye. Jason and Kathe remarked that an ad had been put in the Country Journal and can be posted to the website after our webmaster has returned from vacation.

- **A review of the RFP for solar on the Chester Town Hall.** Jason created an RFP, Request For Proposal, for the solar project that has been discussed for the Chester Town Hall. In the document he listed that any questions regarding putting in a bid should go to Kathe our Town Administrator and all others could be addressed with him. Kathe stated that if and when he is contacted regarding this, he should write down who contacted him as well as the questions they had and the answers he gave as they should be uniform with any information given to others. John and Kathe both thanked Jason for putting this together recognizing that it was a lot of work. Jason stated that his idea was to not limit the project to be based on kilowatt hours but to maximize the energy that can be produced. Rich and John agreed, John stating that with a project this small there is minimal risk and thought we should move forward. Jason stated that a pre-conference was scheduled on the 30th of this month and bids would be due by September. He asked Andy when the remaining money from the Green Communities Grant needed to be expended. Andy answered that it needed to be spent by the end of September, John stating that if it was encumbered that we could work through it. Jason commented that he was hopeful that the project could be completed by the end of November.
- **To sign meeting minutes and review correspondence.** Minutes and correspondence were signed at the beginning of the initial meeting with the Blandford Select Board.
- **Town Administrator Update:** Kathe gave a copy of a packet for a grant for drinking water that we are looking at. The grant requires the new sand filters to be put in, but we have two years to do this. Because of how the grant needs to be completed Kathe is going to reach out to the state regarding having technical assistance to complete the grant. John stated that this was the start of building a bridge with DEP and it was time to get the proper people in place.

Before moving to public questions and comments Jason brought up the budget and finance software that is used for the School Committee called Clear Gov. The basic package for the software is \$2,500.00 per year and the one that is used by the school is \$6,500.00 per year. He stated that this software is easy to read and provides better transparency for the budget as a whole. Providing an easily understandable

budget could assist with any questions that residents may have. John stated that he agreed and thought it would be a good investment.

Public Questions and Comments:

Andy stated that he would provide the Finance Committee with all of the information regarding the suggested increase in the Police Department budget. John thought that this was good for now, but it was necessary to move forward on this. Jason commenting again that we could look at the ARPA funds. Andy also commented that with the proposed solar project we needed some expertise, and he was impressed by the man who was on the call with them regarding solar. Because of the issues with the project that was done on the Town Garage and Fire Station he was not confident in PVPC on getting everything done properly. Kathe asked about contacting Elm Electric which Jason stated that he had done. The discussion of who would be completing all work required needs to be finalized because there could be issues if there are multiple entities working on this. Rich had stated at the meeting last week that he would draft a letter to PVPC explaining our grievances with the solar project at the Town Garage and Fire Station as he believed that this should be put in writing. He stated at this meeting that Jason would be the one doing this letter and he would be copying him with the final draft of what would be sent.

Kathe told us about the next few Select Board meetings which will cover our meeting with the Finance Committee as well as a meeting with PVPC about the Prospect Street project. We also will be discussing at another meeting how things are moving with the air quality issues in the library.

Andy asked regarding the administrative work that Chief Weidhaas has been doing, is there any clerical position that is dedicated for the Police Department. John answered that there had been years ago, but he believed that the pursuit of a Criminal Justice intern was a good idea reiterating that we should look hard at the ARPA funds to help with the Police Department budget. Kathe stated that there also was Covid money that had not been spent that we could possibly use as well. Andy remarked that next week we could combine the Select Board meeting into the normal financial review and did not need to wait for the following week.

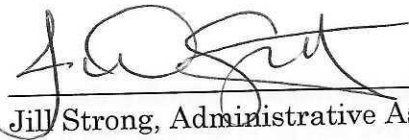
Jason commented that the Littleville Fair which was this past weekend was a success. The Recreation Committee is hosting a Family Fun Day at the Emery Street ball field on Saturday, August 21st at 4:00 PM. They will have food as well as horseshoe and cornhole games and are hoping to have the volleyball court set up by then as well as having a movie. Kathe suggested posting this on a website called Macaroni Kid which gives the information of any family activities going on in the area.

Bob Daley who was participating remotely wanted to remind everyone about the Covid-19 vaccine clinic that will be hosted in the Chester Town Hall by the Board of Health on August 25th from 5:00 – 7:00 PM. He thanked Kathe and Jason for their contributions for a job description for the Board of Water Commissioners and stated that he believed this would help our current issues with our Water Department.

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

Meeting adjourned 7:37 PM

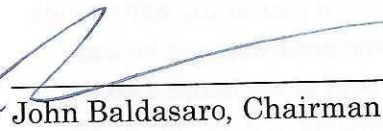
Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

8/11/21

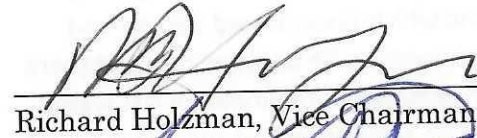
Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

8/16/21

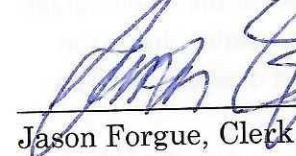
Date Signed



Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

6/9/21

Date Signed



Jason Forgue, Clerk

8/17/21

Date Signed