



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

**Monday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021**

Open Meeting – This meeting is held in the Chester Town Hall auditorium.

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman and Jason Forgue present. Other Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Town Clerk and ACO Terry Donovan, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, and Librarian and COA Director Angelique Toroni. Also present from the Finance Committee Andy Myers, Bob Dalery and Jessica Sakaske were participating remotely. From the Library Board of Trustees Linda Koske, Karen Savoy and Lucia Brown were present as well as Lauren Stara, and Andrea Bunker from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, Andrea was participating remotely. Cemetery Commissioner Brain Forgue was present as well as a few residents that were participating remotely.

John opened the meeting at 6:00 PM, minutes were signed there were no warrants.

- **Meet with Andrea Bunker, Lauren Stara, and Hamilton Memorial Library Trustees for a discussion about the Small Library Pilot Project.** Lauren opened the discussion stating that herself as well as Andrea were building specialists who were apart of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. She explained that this started with a book that they created as a best practices for creating a library and they are now implementing those to discover how well this document works in the process. Lauren had six copies of the book and distributed them to the Library Trustees and stated that if anyone else would like to view the documents it is available on their website as a pdf for free. She stated that this best starts with a discussion regarding what we need and want in our library, whether it be collections of books, different spaces for reading etc. Lauren stated that there is no cookie cutter plan for creating a library, it should be specific to the town and its needs. She explained that out of all the libraries in the state many small towns have been unable to take advantage of this program and hoping a partnership with Chester will serve as educational for other towns that wish to go through this program. In viewing the map that was shown of the towns that have gone through this program none of our surrounding Hilltowns, Middlefield, Blandford, Worthington, Huntington, Montgomery, and Russell, have participated in the program. Lauren and Andrea have been working on streamlining their current grant process separate from the Pilot Project as well. The current grant process requires a planning and design grant followed two to three years later with a



construction grant. They would like to combine these two steps to lessen the monetary burden on the town applying. Lauren stated that their goal was one to give the town a library that supports their community, two, to work closely and collaboratively with small towns, and three, to build a new library that is functional and economical that can be a model for other small towns. John asked what the number of applicants was to participate in this program, Lauren answered that they had received four letters of intent however one of the towns had to drop out so now there are only three. Andrea commented that they were working with state agencies to comply with the Climate Act which included creating a building working toward net zero and is carbon neutral. She asked if we were a green community which John answered yes. Andrea explained that the maximum that the Pilot Project could give was to contribute 75% to the eligible costs. Andrea discussed things that were not covered by the Pilot Project which included paving or landscaping, equipment, and furniture. Also not included would be any possible demolition costs or hazard mitigation. The things that are covered for the building need to all be attached to the main building. Things that are covered by the Pilot Project are the building itself as well as wiring or solar panels that could be mounted to the roof. They explained that what is different about the Pilot Project from the regular grant is that in the Pilot there is no input on the design other than costs or durability. There may be various suggestions made but the town is the one who decides what is needed and how they would like the building designed. Lauren discussed that the Covid-19 pandemic had put a delay on the Pilot Project, and they would like to move things along quickly with construction escalation some costs are uncertain. If we are selected for the Pilot Project before we work on a design local funding for the remaining 25% of costs needs to be approved. John stated that our current Board of Trustees has done great work and is well funded and hopefully will have no problem meeting the final number. Angelique responded that they would indeed need more than was available to them. Lauren explained that the money could come from anywhere such as a trust, donations, free cash etc. as long as it is obtained legally. Our application for the Pilot Project is due by December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Jason asked if In-Kind grants were considered, Lauren answered yes and that we would discuss that. Lauren stated that this December and January would be very busy as they will be working with a review team an architect, two librarians that went through the grant as well as another member of the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Their plan is to do a community interview with the towns who are applying and decide on the town who will be a part of the Project by late February early March. At this point we can work on a design to have an approximate idea of the costs and bring it to the floor at our Annual Town Meeting next year to approve the funding. On July 1<sup>st</sup> the bidding can be started for the architect and design work with the hope that by May or June of 2023 we can have a shovel in the ground. Andrea commented that we should, and they assist with using a professional to evaluate the design and costs before we bring this to the Annual Town Meeting. Jason stated that he thought it may be difficult to approve at the Annual Town Meeting without the completed design and finalization of costs. Lauren stated that she was working with Angelique to best calculate what is needed for square footage etc. to have the most accurate estimation of costs possible. John asked what they have had on record for costs on previous Projects, Lauren answered that the last two projects have worked out to be very close to the projected costs even with the initial design being created in 2017 and finalized this year. Lauren estimated the costs of the last two Projects to be between three and five million dollars and that a major difference between the Pilot and their regular grant is that they will



cover 75% of the costs even if the costs for materials goes up. Mary Ann asked if the Pilot would contribute to costs if we wanted to simply renovate our current building or the old Chester Elementary School across the street from the Town Hall. Lauren answered that the Pilot Project would not cover that but applying for their regular grant would work if we decided on that route. Jason asked if mitigation would be covered in the grant as we were told it is not covered in the Pilot, Lauren answered yes. Kathe asked what was the town that dropped out, Lauren answered that it was the Town of Florida, and it was believed it was because they had no director. Lauren understood that this was a significant amount of work for Angelique as well as anyone who can be involved. John commented that Angelique and the Trustees had done a great job with the current library. Mary Ann asked if they had been to either site, Lauren answered yes. Andrea stated that we need to factor in physical space as well as the economical need with the ability to fund the project, which Lauren commented that it sounded like we had all of that. Andrea stated that within the book there is a graph showing the size of the building for every library in Massachusetts. Lauren stated the next step was to get Angelique the application which is not as extensive in the document they just completed which Mary Ann commented was seventy-two pages. Jason asked what the option of the In-Kind grant would be, Lauren answered it could go toward our 25% of the costs and would be basing the costs also on the assessed land value. Mary Ann asked if they would be going off of our assessor's value or if they would be bringing in a professional, Lauren answered that they would be going off of our assessed value. John asked if it would benefit us in any way that we have a shared septic at the old Chester Elementary School from when it was an active school as well as an existing parking area. Lauren answered that all of that would have to be evaluate by the architect.

John commented that Chester has been a leader as a progressive small town being the first in the state to have a combined police force and with the current Select Board and the Library Trustees they want to continue in that direction. As we already have shared services, he stated that he was open to the idea of combining this with another town as well. Mary Ann commented that we could reach out to Middlefield as their library is currently in a classroom at their Town Hall which was an Elementary School years ago. Lauren encouraged us to reach out to other towns such as Middlefield and loved hearing that we were in support of shared space. Andy asked if there was an option in the building to combine services such as having a space that is available for the Council on Aging. Lauren answered that with the Pilot that was not an option but was through the grant process, through the Pilot the building was to be only a library. Lauren asked what Angelique and the library Trustees had in mind for what their vision of the library should be. Angelique answered that she would like a large open area to be used as a space for programs stating that they have had a lot of luck with the programs they currently offer and would like to do more. Mary Ann commented that she would like to have a small kitchenette along with the bathroom. She also mentioned that in the book they received there were several plans that had big picture ideas, but she did not see the need for us to have something that was big and glamorous with individual rooms for each section. People in town are mostly looking for a clean new library with everything on the first floor to be easily accessible to everyone. Angelique agreed stating that being that she is the only person present for the majority of the time the library is open and we do not have the need for separate rooms. Linda commented that when she worked for the library in Chicopee when they did an expansion, they needed to increase their staff by approximately fifteen people to accommodate



the changes. Lauren stated that the Irving Library which she will be giving Angelique a tour of currently has a staff of three people. Angelique asked if they were full or part time, Lauren answered that she believed the Director was full time. Mary Ann discussed further that the building needs to be affordable to the town as the library pays for all bills associated with the building with the exception of the electric bill which CMELD gives them at no cost. Kathe then asked if we were to do the application and did not want a large design for the building how would that affect our application, Lauren answered that this is the process to decide what will be done and we could figure things out over the next few months. Rich asked about creating a shared building such as using the current Chester Elementary School which Lauren explained that we could have towns share the library, but the building could not be for shared services. She stated as well that a library with a shared building in a school has issues due to the primary concern in a school is security and safety for the students and a public library needs to be open to the public. Lauren stated that we have six weeks to discuss this further and if Middlefield is indeed interested, we can include them in the application.

Karen asked what the feasibility was to use the old Chester Elementary School which John answered that a study needed to be done to evaluate the building. Kathe stated that we will own the building hopefully by September 1<sup>st</sup> and that she had sent all the paperwork today to William Ivey Long. Angelique and some of the Trustees discussed things they are looking for in the building which Angelique reiterated needing a space for programs but mainly wanted a clean building with good air quality. Karen suggested a computer area which Angelique commented that we could offer classes as well as allow a space for summer school. Lauren asked about having a meeting space as the auditorium in the Town Hall is the only large meeting area, John stated that we should not factor that in due to the square footage necessary. Mary Ann asked about the mineral collection which they believed would be taken by the Historical Society. Andy commented that we should view the designs and spending more upfront could help us to save money in the long term. Lauren stated that we should keep flexibility in mind when choosing the design as things change over time and we have no idea what our needs could be in twenty years. Mary Ann asked Jason who is also our building inspector what he thought about the project cost. Jason stated that he thought that our only option would be to raise the money and not need to present this for funding at the Annual Town Meeting. Lauren asked if he meant that we should not peruse money through taxes he answered yes and suggested again an In-Kind grant. Lauren asked if there were any questions Bob who was participating remotely commented that he appreciated the idea of a shared library with Middlefield. Andrea mentioned that looking at designs we should look at the library in Monterey which also has a part time Director. John stated that it seems like we have a lot of paperwork to fill out which Lauren commented that they will be working with Angelique on the documents and needed to plan a day to visit the Irving Library. Lucia asked why Irving and not Monterey if it has similar needs to Chester, Lauren answered that they had made visiting the Irving library a requirement as it is a new facility. John thanked Lauren and Andrea stating that this was all good information.

- **Discussion about Solar and weatherization of Town buildings.** It had been discussed at a previous Select Board meeting on that we have a remaining balance in our previous green communities grant. The balance that we had discussed was \$65,669.00. We have been moving forward to pursue the idea of having solar panels installed on the roof of the Town Hall. Kathe



and Jason have both talked to green energy and have some results. Jason stated that upon review we did not have the balance that was originally thought, the available funds is \$28,908.00. Upon discussion with green communities Jason was informed that the company we used to install solar on the town garage is no longer funding solar projects. Andy asked the Select Board to discuss with the accountant how there was such a large miscalculation in that account. Jason explained that the company we were looking at for installing solar going forward is encouraging using a mini split system which is a ductless air conditioner and heater. Also, our previous plan did not include the old Chester Elementary School which we would like to have factored into this. Jason explained that if we would like to include the building, we would have to re-write the plan. His suggestion considering the company is moving away from solar to use the funds to have new insulation installed and anything else that has been suggested through the energy audit. As of now they are requiring a level two report which he thought would be more expensive than the initial report, he would have an idea of the cost and bring the information to the next meeting. Another thing that was brought up is that the energy audit needs to be completed at the fire station. This has called into question how much we would be saving in the fire station as it is not occupied every day, John mentioning that there are people there mostly on the days they have drill as well as when they are going out on a call. Andy commented that he knew that the fire department was interested in a new heat source being installed at the fire station that is on Bromley Road. He continued saying that the sooner we close out this grant we can apply for the next, even with the extension we have been given he encouraged the Select Board to complete this as soon as possible.

Mary Ann asked if they had made any progress with the solar that is at the town garage as well as the fire station. We have been waiting on PVPC to fix the problem of moving the energy created by the solar panels into our buildings. Rich stated that he had spoken to Eric Weiss from PVPC, and he was told that he would be contacting Kathe and Jason and he was willing to work with us on this. Jason went to the garage to see how things are connected and has been speaking with Elm Electric to help us. Upon looking at the garage there are three disconnects for the solar panels two outside and one inside which allow the energy from the solar to feed in. The one that is inside the garage was switched off which he was unsure if it had ever been turned on in the first place or was off for some particular reason. Kathe commented that the solar generated should not only cover the garage, but it should be feeding into the grid enough to have credits towards the energy used at the Town Hall. John stated that doing this project we have had no direction from PVPC and because things were never explained it may indeed have never been turned on. Mary Ann also mentioned that as the garage is shared with CMELD, and the bill is split this should have been looked at after they were installed if there were no credits being generated for the garage thus never lowering the bill. John stated that they would bring this up at the meeting on Tuesday with CMELD. Andy stated that he thought we should move forward on fixing this and that we should not continue to wait for PVPC, if they are willing to work with us, we can send them a bill later, we need to keep the people from Green Communities happy. Jason agreed and stated that this project was started in 2019 when they received the permits, but no work was started until 2020. John commented that we could discuss at the CMELD meeting as well, charges and credits for the solar.

- **Town Administrator:** Kathe updated us about the old Chester Elementary school and our acquisition of the building from William Ivey Long. As she stated earlier in the meeting, she had



talked with our Town Council Tom Mullen, and they had sent all the paperwork to William Ivey Long to be completed by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Also, at a previous Select Board meeting there had been a discussion that an account for one of our scholarships needed to be changed. She had the new account number and let the Select Board know that the name of the account was the same to keep consistency. The requirements of the trust are all the same but now we can set a percentage or a dollar amount that we wish to give in the scholarship. Previously the scholarship was not given to the student until the second semester, but it was not actually paid to the college, they would like to change this, so that it is paid directly to the school.

Kathe stated that all the paperwork has been submitted to Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, MEMA, regarding the damage to the roads from the rainstorms in July. We should hear next week how everything is moving along there was the concern that the state would not meet the number necessary to authorize assistance. John commented that he spoke to Scott Flebotte our representative from MEMA, there has been a few more things factored in, and Scott thought there would be no issue reaching the number.

Jason asked if Kathe and Jill would be meeting with the webmaster Wendy to discuss updated procedures and allowing a town employee to have access to post things to the website in her absence. Kathe stated that she did, and we were working out a date to meet so that Jill can have access. Jason also asked about the agenda for Select Board meetings, he does not see it until Thursday and thought they should be able to provide input before it is too late. Kathe stated that she could start to put a rough draft together on Tuesdays to send out to the Select Board so it can be discussed before it needs to be posted.

Kathe let us know that she has a meeting in Blandford tomorrow with Chief Weidhaas as well as the Town Administrator from Blandford Josh Garcia. They will be discussing the proposed budget that Chief Weidhaas discussed at the meeting on August 9<sup>th</sup>. Jason asked if this would then be distributed to each towns finance committees, Kathe answered yes. Andy stated that this was a matter of timing and could see putting this in for next years budget. However, a concern that was raised by Chief Weidhaas is that she has a lack of time available to be on patrols due to administrative duties as well as additional paperwork that has been required due to the Police Reform Act. Kathe commented that something that had been discussed is that the current budget was put together by the previous Chief Dan Illicky and felt she had no input. Andy stated that the finance committee had viewed the proposed new budget and the extra work required from the Police Reform Act was unforeseen however thought that this was necessary this year and all of this time may not be necessary once things have been worked out. John commented that he agreed this was an unforeseen change to the Chief's role, but it was as the Chief necessary. Kathe reiterated that Chief Weidhaas wanted to be out more on a role of community policing because being in the field is what she loves. Another concern that was mentioned at the meeting on August 9<sup>th</sup> was that the state police are understaffed as well, and we needed to be able to provide coverage from our Police Department, so we were not relying on the State Police as much. Andy commented that it was difficult to propose an increase in the budget as there is currently no serious issues and crime has not gone up. John stated that it does not mean that we should wait until there is a problem to justify the increase, the focus of our Police Department is on crime prevention. John reiterated that the new amount of time that has been required by our Chief due to the Police Reform Act is incredible and previously any officer with only a part time academy should have lost their certification by July 1<sup>st</sup> which we



were fortunate that this was changed. This would have caused us to lose not only some of our officers but the surrounding towns as well. Andy asked if there had been a Police Funding Bill that was discussed to be passed, John answered no that it had been a lot of talk but was never sent through legislature. Rich asked about the clerical assistant that formal Chief Illicky had which Jason commented was years ago.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

Jason discussed that he had looked over the lease we have for the library and there is a clause that requires us to have approved by them if we are making any changes to our space even adding it as available for other towns or creating a space in the library for the COA. He commented that hearing the presentation about the Pilot Project he thought if we are intending to use the old elementary school the regular grant process would be the best option. Rich commented that we should go through the process and work toward the best possible outcome. Jason also let us know that there is a school committee meeting that will be discussing the mask mandate and continuing it until October 1<sup>st</sup> in the schools. He also stated that there has been discussion about the regional agreement for the schools specifically Russell and are hoping to review the agreement. Andy asked if there would be meetings set with the Finance Committee, Jason answered yes but they had not been set as of yet as they were going to be scheduled closer to when they would be working on the school budget.

Rich stated that he had attended a meeting with Representative Richie Neal last week at Union Station in Springfield. There has been an infrastructure Bill passed promoting intercommunity rail stops. Rich believed this was of historical importance and that Chester is in a key position to take advantage of this and connect the two sides of the state. He was please at the Select Board meeting with Erica Johnson from PVPC on August 16<sup>th</sup> that she was interested in the first and second phases of this and stressed that parking for the station would be a priority. He commented that being a member of the Chester Foundation he believed that the station would be willing to sell land to the town for improved parking as with movement on a possible rail stop in Chester it could become a very busy road for being such a narrow spot to drive through or park.

Andy commented about the property that is owned by J & J Timber off of Middlefield Road and Ed Lebleau Road. There have been questions raised regarding the deed to the property and he reached out to Tom Griffin an attorney out of Holyoke for advice. The property has been questioned because Mass Fish and Wildlife has expressed interest in purchasing the land and we would like to know what would be available to them. Andy also asked if we could put on the agenda an update with Harald Scheid from RRG, he reached out to him about a month ago and has not heard back. Kathe stated that she could work that in on the Select Board meeting on September 13<sup>th</sup> where we are meeting with our accountant Eric Kinshurf and the treasurer Sara Hunter. Andy mentioned that upon looking at our expenditures the budget for the Highway Department was very close to being gone and some of the salary had come out of the snow budget. Kathe stated that should not happen nothing is withdrawn from the snow budget unless it is something that pertains to it. John also commented that due to the road issues from the rainstorms their budget would indeed be gone. He stated that we are currently in dangerous territory, and we need to have a declaration from FEMA so we can have the funding to do the necessary repairs. Another thing that was brought up is that there was not



enough money in the budget allocated for the sanitary survey for the water department by Richard Gullick of Water Compliance Solutions. Kathe explained this was because there was a late bill and money had already been moved to another account. Andy stated that upon review it looks as though we have already paid the full retirement costs as well as insurance which Kathe stated that when this is paid ahead, we received a discount. Another thing that he noticed was that there was money in a police donation account, \$8,000.00, that could be used to help with problems brought up by Chief Weidhaas.

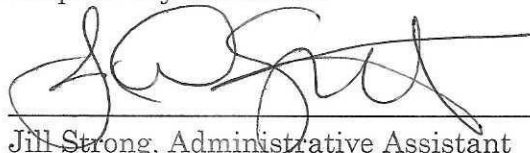
Brian stated that he had reached out to other towns regarding regulations for their cemetery and had received a copy from the Cemetery Commissioner from Blandford TJ Cousineau their rules and regulations. He had some ideas for our town and would be working on writing ours and hoped to have them for the next Select Board meeting. Kathe asked Brian when he goes to college in the fall how he would be handling his duties. There was a burial this past week which we were unable to get ahold of him, so Kathe and Jill went to Pine Hill Cemetery to mark the grave on Wednesday and communicated with the Highway Department what needed to be done and by when. Jill explained that if this had been a Jewish family with their custom being a burial should be done within forty-eight hours this could have been a problem. Upon looking into their customs after the meeting Jill discovered that their customs dictate a burial is done within twenty-four hours. Kathe further explained that there had been an issue with the location of the grave that the family wanted rectified. The family had visited the cemetery on Thursday the day before the burial and told the funeral home that they believed the grave had been done in the wrong place. Jason asked why we were the ones who went to mark the grave, Jill answered that she had reached out to Brian multiple times and by Wednesday when nothing had been done her and Kathe took care of placing the markers. Jill explained that she also went to the cemetery on Friday the day of the burial because the family wanted the grave in the correct spot. The vault had already been placed but the driver for the company that had placed it stayed around so he could help. Jill explained that when the Highway Department was probing the spot for the grave, they thought they were hitting another vault or some ledge and that is why they had moved to the other side of the family's plot. They stepped aside so that the family could have their service and upon the family leaving the funeral home agreed that they would take the deceased with them back to the funeral home until we could move the vault. The Highway department explained that they would take care of it that day and would be in touch as soon as it was completed. Once digging in the new spot, the Highway Department discovered that there was another vault very close to the spot and the new one would need to be placed against the existing vault. Another reason for thinking that area was full was there were several large stones in that spot that they were aware of once they began digging the new spot. John stated that the cemetery work is not always easy, and we would have to figure out a process. Jason stated that as Brian's father he had the expectation that he would be marking the grave sites himself for Brian and that the idea had been to take this off Kathe and Jill's plate and hoped this would not happen again. John reiterated saying that communication is key.

Rich made the motion to adjourn, John 2<sup>nd</sup>, all voted Aye.

**Meeting adjourned 8:35 PM**



Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

9/30/21

Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

8/30/21

Date Signed



Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

8/30/21

Date Signed

Jason Forgue, Clerk

Date Signed