



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

Monday, August 30th, 2021

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman and Jason Fergie present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Town Clerk and ACO Terry Donovan, COA Director and Librarian Angelique Toroni, and Chief Tammy Weidhaas. Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro was present as well as Bob Daley, Sister Judith Dalesandro, and Jessica Sakaske from the Finance Committee. Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease as well as Elizabeth Massa and Nick Chiusano from the Board of Health were participating virtually with Finance Committee member Andy Myers along with a few Chester residents. Per the agenda the Superintendent for the Gateway Regional School District Kristen Smidy was also with us. Kathy Engwer as well as a few others Chester residents were present.

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

- **Meet with Gateway Superintendent Kristen Smidy.** The Select Board welcomed Kristen and thanked her for meeting with us. Kristen discussed that since she began her position on August 1st, she has been attempting to meet with all of the towns to discuss their needs and ask questions about what people would like to see happen within the school. The first thing that was brought up John discussed how the regional agreement should be looked over as he believed it had been long overdue. John also mentioned that the two scholarships that we offer only had two applicants this year and after it was closed a parent contacted us and stated that they were unaware of the scholarship or the due date. He thought that we should look at how the scholarship information was being distributed to the students and seemed that there could be a better way to provide greater awareness. Kristen agreed and thought regular communication was important as well as the need to be more transparent. Jason addressed the declining enrollment, the transition from eighth to ninth grade we lose approximately half of the enrolled students. There has been a concern about the long-term viability of the school district. Rich commented that as he was the Superintendent for Gateway many years ago and discussed that the goal for the school should be to create a place for students that is beneficial

and affordable. Kristen agreed and commented that she was working on a collaboration with educational services their Director Todd Gazda who was a teacher and principal at Gateway and being from the area is familiar with the needs of the community and the school. Kristen has been encouraging the students to reach out to her and to advocate for programs that they would like to see so that they can build programs based on the students interests. She commented that this year we denied forty kids for preschool and believed that retaining students started with them being in the school from a young age. Another thing that was mentioned is that there is an orientation for students coming from elementary to the middle school, but we had no orientation when kids transitioned from middle school to high school. This could be an opportunity missed and a reason we lose so many students to school choice i.e., the vocational schools. If the students do not feel comfortable going into the high school, they will look elsewhere. She also mentioned that upon review the test scores for Gateway are pretty low and has been working with the teachers discussing the curriculum hoping to breath some life into what is currently being taught. She commented again that she wanted the students to know that we are listening and if they speak up that we can address their needs. Rich commented that he felt that interdisciplinary learning should be encouraged as well as a focus on the arts. We should be working on making us competitive with other schools as well as being cost effective. Jason discussed sports within the district stating that the current number of kids playing sports within the elementary and middle school is only 131 which is still approximately two times higher than high school students participating. He has done a lot of work on the fields used on Emery Street which has been great for the town but believed that the hub for sports should be at the school. Kristen agreed and thought it was a great idea to have the kids practice at the school so that they could watch the High School games after they were done. Rich commented that all of the schools should evaluate their space to ensure all of the classrooms are being used and if not what they can be used for. Jason asked Kristen if there was anything that the Select Board could do for her, Kristen answered that she wanted to hear from everyone and to not be shy.

John asked if there were any comments or questions for Kristen. Andy asked if there would be joint meetings with the Finance Committees regarding the budget, Kristen answered yes. Mary Ann asked regarding enrollment in the Chester Elementary School she had heard that many of the classrooms were not occupied. Kristen explained that any rooms that were not used have now been given another purpose whether it is a quiet or time out space or a study area they are designated with a specific purpose. Jason commented that this past year with the Covid-19 pandemic that enrollment in that school would have been down because it was only housing kindergarten through second grade and now, we are back to the normal kindergarten through sixth grade. Kristen commented that it would be beneficial to expand the preschool to assist with building the enrollment. Bob welcomed Kristen to the Gateway District and asked what the protocol would be if things were to go back to remote and was the school capable of handling that. Kristen answered yes all of the students have a device to use from home but also commented that the state's directive this year is to have kids in school in the building. Bob asked Kristen how the first day of school went today. Kristen answered that things went great she went around during lunches everyone seemed happy; she was concerned about students wearing masks but there did not seem to be a problem so far. Currently the state says that all students kindergarten through twelfth grade are required to continue to wear a mask. Rich

invited Kristen to the ceremony on September 25th that is being described as national historic landmark day. This is to celebrate that the Keystone Arches as well as the Chester Rail Station have been labeled historical landmarks. He encouraged all students and their parents to attend this significant day for Chester. John thanked Kristen for attending the meeting and looked forward to seeing her again.

- **COA Director Angelique Toroni update on the COA.** Angelique presented a progress report for the Council on Aging, COA, for the month of August, the Select Board all received a copy of the report. The monthly community pick up meals have been being distributed on Monday, Thursday, and Fridays with a total for August being 200 meals distributed. There have been two medical equipment rentals, and they are currently working on alerts for residents who suffer from Alzheimer's and dementia. Doing this entails a form to be filled out which explains the person's health and if they were to be missing where is a general idea of where they could be to begin a search. They have moved the location of where they are holding the foot clinic to the building inspector's office to offer more space within the COA room for other things. Currently they are offering this service once a month on the third Tuesday and will see twelve to thirteen patients every month. The COA room had a kitchen inspection which we passed, and the inspector was pleased to see that we would not be hosting the foot clinic in the same space where food is being stored and prepped. Angelique has been in contact with Adam Frank who is the Council on Aging grants coordinator. Our Formula Grant from last year still has a balance of \$4,395.80 which she was told that the state is allowing us to roll over the balance to this year's budget, she will be finalizing the details in September. She met with Chief Weidhaas last week to discuss working with the Hampden County TRIAD program. The TRIAD program is meant to be a collaborative partnership between law enforcement, fire and medical personnel, county government, public safety, senior service providers, hospitals, as well as senior groups and organizations. The goal is to create a cohesive unit between all organizations to provide a safe and welcoming community for seniors. This would include daily phone calls to seniors who live alone just as a check in, a house number initiative having all house numbers clearly posted to assist with the ability for Police, Fire, and EMS to respond to 911 calls quickly. They are also working on doing workshops both virtual and in person regarding issues of identity theft, domestic violence, and scams that target seniors. John thanked Angelique for doing a great job, the updates she has done in the COA room look great and this was a good update for everyone.
- **Discussion and vote on the Theodore Steinhardt Scholarship amount to be awarded each year and to continue the practice for it to be awarded to the Chester student with the highest GPA, it will be paid at the beginning of the second semester directly to the college. Also, to award this amount to the student that applied this year.** John read out the brief description of the scholarship.

"The Scholarship will be awarded every year to the Chester graduating student with the highest GPA. The amount of the scholarship will be – this is being determined. The fund is deposited in the Westfield Bank and will be paid to the college after the completion of the students first semester. After the scholarship has been awarded by the Select Board the Town Treasurer will oversee the completion of the award. It is the student's responsibility to furnish the Treasurer with the information that is necessary to complete the award. As of August 12th, 2021, \$38,600.00 will start the account."

Kathe mentioned that depending on the amount we choose to award the money can go quickly. John asked if this needed to be a savings account or a money market account, Kathe answered that currently it was a savings but changing it to a money market account was possible. Jason commented that a money market account we would see a higher return and the funds are still protected. John asked what we gave as an award last year Kathe believed it was \$2,000.00 Jason commented that typically what we make as a return is what is given. John stated that he believed we should set this up as a money market account with a five percent return. Jason stated that he could speak with Jonathan Glionna from the Finance Committee to see if he had any suggestions. John asked if the other Select Board members felt that we should stay with the \$2,000.00 award or if it should be based on the return. Jason commented that he thought the \$2,000.00 was a good amount if we base it on the return if there is a good year the granted amount could be significant.

Jason made the motion to set the awarded amount for the Theodore Steinhardt Scholarship to \$2,000.00 per year. Rich 2nd, all voted Aye.

We began discussing the applicants for this year, the first and only for the Theodore Steinhardt Scholarship was Grace Lebarron with a GPA of 3.67 and she will be attending Wheaton College in Norton Massachusetts.

Rich made the motion to award the Theodore Steinhardt Scholarship to Grace Lebarron, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye.

- **Discussion and vote to award the Frank Hamilton Scholarship. There is \$8,000.00 to be awarded to any Chester student/resident for higher education.** The Frank Hamilton Memorial Scholarship which there were two applicants with \$8,000.00 to be awarded. Kathe commented that it is never lower than \$1,000.00 and the trust for this scholarship stipulates the amount awarded. The two applicants were Brian Fogue who will be attending UMASS Amherst, and Grace Lebarron applied for this scholarship as well. Jason was asked to abstain from this vote as his son is one of the applicants. John stated that since there were only two applicants that we could award \$4,000.00 to each student.

Rich made the motion to award \$4,000.00 from the Hamilton Memorial Scholarship to each applicant Brian Fogue and Grace Lebarron, John 2nd.

Kathe stated that students can reapply every year whether they have already received this scholarship or not.

- **Discussion about the FY22 Police budget with Chief Tammy Weidhaas.** Chief Weidhaas approached the Select Board at the meeting on August 9th to discuss the Police Department budget. She is meeting with each town and the respective Finance Committees to discuss current needs. When she started as Chief she had not been included in the proposed budget for the year and stated that what was available was insufficient for the needs of the department. Most of the problems lie in the necessary administrative time of the Chief creating a lack of available patrol hours. There is officer training that is necessary every year which has not been done as well as a payment for the 2018 cruiser which Chief Weidhaas was unaware of and was not factored into the budget. This will be the final payment and there is another payment for the 2020 cruiser coming up in December which will also be the final payment. The training that will be necessary for any of our part time officers has a high cost and also requires us to purchase the necessary ammunition. Chief Weidhaas thought there may be a waiver for the ammunition because it has been difficult to come by, but she was unaware if that would indeed

be the case. The current budget in place even without removing the budget for training only allows for fourteen hours per week of patrol time for both towns. With only two officers on patrol per shift for the State Police we can not rely so heavily on them as they cover eleven towns including, Chester, Blandford, Huntington, Worthington, Middlefield, Russell, Montgomery, Granville, Tolland, Westfield, and Southwick. Chief Weidhaas commented that this was a very large area to span and could be dangerous if both officers are busy at a call a good distance from either of the towns it could be hours before we have a Trooper available. From January 1st to June 30th, they responded to 153 calls, from July 1st to now they have already responded to sixty-eight calls. Chief Weidhaas discussed that with training her budget will be gone, and she stated that she strongly encouraged the training as it trains the Officers to make the best and smartest decisions on the street.

Kathe discussed that she had looked into the bill for the cruiser, and it was in fact correct. Previously we have waited until one cruiser is paid off before moving onto purchasing another, but obviously there was some overlap. Chief Weidhaas had received a printout from Ford showing all payments. John stated that we need to pay for this and most likely was an oversight by former Chief Illnicky believing that it had been paid off.

Jason stated that as a member of the Finance Committee when she had come to them with her proposed budget as it was much higher than the one proposed by Chief Illnicky there was a discussion on how to modify it to be more in line with what they had already look at. Jason brought up the idea that was discussed at the previous meeting with Chief Weidhaas having an administrative assistant to help with administrative tasks allowing for more patrol time. Chief Weidhaas stated that she had been speaking with Kathe and the Town Administrator for Blandford Josh Garcia about this and agreed that it could help. John commented that this was a good suggestion as we have had administrative help in the past. Chief Weidhaas stressed that we should not reduce Officer time as it is important that we have a visual presence. An assistant will help her to get on the street. Rich asked how many hours she spent each week with meetings, Chief Weidhaas answered that it was non-stop, and she was also doing work from home. She has also spent approximately six hours to write our policies and procedures as currently there are none in place. Rich asked if it was possible to do any of the necessary paperwork or participate in meetings when she was on patrol in the cruiser. Chief Weidhaas answered that would be extremely difficult as she needs to be safety conscious and there is typically too much going on to provide her full attention to the meeting or to her first job while on patrol the safety of herself and the community. Rich asked what the current trends were in relation to crime and the calls they have answered. Chief Weidhaas stated that in her short time that she has been Chief she has seen a trend of domestic violence calls going up which she believed was related to the Covid-19 pandemic. A high rate of unemployment with people being stuck at home could contribute to these problems. There has also been an increase in calls dealing with self-harm as well as many calls dealing with people who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. She commented that in the last few months there have been a number of domestic violence calls many of them have included someone who is under the influence. John stated that we need to find funding to support our Police Department.

Andy commented that this funding would require a thirty percent increase over the ten percent that has been done already. He stated that when former Chief Illnicky was leaving the suggestion of the full time Chief would not require any additional money. He encouraged that

we look into the hours used for administrative time, with the money needed for training that was not factored in on top of the payment needed for the cruiser we do not have money in the budget. John stated that we should look into stabilization as well as continue to pursue the American Rescue Plan Act, ARPA, funds to see if this can be used toward our Police Department. Andy commented that this has been difficult to organize financially but we should keep looking for a way to deal with the administrative time so we can have Chief Weidhaas on the street. Jason stated that he was concerned on how we would come up with the funding. In the past six to nine months the town has taken steps to hire firms for the Accountant and Treasurer's position without looking at how we can afford this. He was not saying that this has been a wrong decision however increasing the budget by ten percent every year will be a hard sell to the residents in town. Andy asked if there were any state or federal grants that are for rural police departments, Chief Weidhaas answered that she had applied for a grant but had not yet heard anything. She was unsure if this would supplement her budget and has currently applied to four grants but knows of one that we will not have awarded. Sister Judith asked if Chief Weidhaas had any luck with the possible intern from Westfield State University. Chief Weidhaas answered that she was still working on it and is looking into what an intern could actually have access to and what tasks they would be allowed to perform. Jason stated that the ARPA funds could not be used to supplement the budget, but we could create a position such as a "Covid Related Coordinator," which would possibly allow us to retroactively take care of some costs. He stated that if this proposal was done and worded properly it should be fine.

John stated to Chief Weidhaas that everyone understood the predicament she was in. He did not want her to think that the Select Board did not understand and was not going to support her. Even being a new Chief, he believed that even with if she had several years' experience as Chief, she could not have known what to do during this difficult time. Jason stated again that as long as the language for creating a position through the ARPA funds is done correctly we would not need to bring this to the town floor. John also stated that we could address the training along with this and could claim that this training was not and could not be done due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The cruiser payment has been made out of the general expense budget. John thanked Chief Weidhaas for her hard work and her willingness to discuss this with the Select Board.

- **Appointment of the Water Commissioners – Elizabeth Massa, Kathy Engwer, Lyle Snide, and Bob Daley.** Kathe gave the names of the people who were interested in the Water Commissioner positions. There had been a fifth person who put their name in but they were not a Chester resident and therefore could not be appointed. John stated that we have four applicants with only three positions and suggested that the fourth be an advisor. He did not believe that we should turn away anyone who would like to help. Jason asked if there was a conflict of interest for Elizabeth Massa due to the fact that she is already on the Board of Health. Elizabeth asked if anyone had heard anything in relation to that and if it was an issue, she would be willing to be the alternate. John commented that the problem lies with ethics because Board of Health should oversee the Water Commissioners. He stated that she would need to contact ethics as they will not provide information to anyone other than the person in question. Kathe commented that moving forward until January 1st that the Board of Health and Water Commissioners meet together for discussions and collaboration within the two departments.

Rich made the motion that we appoint Kathy Engwer, Lyle Snide, and Bob Daley as our three Water Commissioners with Elizabeth Massa as the alternate. Jason 2nd, all voted Aye. John welcomed everyone and stated that the Select Board was here to help and was happy that the people who are focused on the problem can have the time to do the work. Rich agreed stating that they were a highly qualified group and was optimistic of the results.

- **Review and possible vote to award proposals for energy audit.** Jason was not able to have all of the information for the energy audit. He stated that he believed the cost would be between \$3,500.00 - \$4,000.00. Kathe commented that if the cost is under \$15,000.00 it does not need a vote. John stated that as long as that is the case, we should go forward with it.
- **Possible updates from William Ivey Long and Chester Grammar School.** Kathe did not have an update on William Ivey Long and how moving his things out of the old Chester Elementary school was going. John commented that he has a deadline of September 1st and Kathe stated that she would be contacting Town Council Tom Mullen. She told us that in the parking lot across the street from the Town Hall there will be a U-Haul truck for the Chester Community Theatre while they are moving things out of the old Chester Elementary School.
- **Update on solar at the Highway Garage and Fire Station.** John asked if we had any information from Elm Electric which Jason answered he had not. He stated that himself as well as the Electrical Inspector Jon Vanheynigen would be looking at the Highway Garage to turn on the disconnect which is inside the garage. Kathe asked that he let her know when they do this because currently there has been nothing in the reports for a reading since July 14th. Jason commented that the usage is on the meter we do not necessarily need the report. John mentioned that in the meeting with CMELD they explained that they were willing to hook everything up and connect to the panel when we were ready. We should have a quote from Eric Weiss from PVPC hopefully by the next Select Board meeting and we can get CMELD moving on installing everything necessary.
- **Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro with a highway update.** Rich took control of this portion of the meeting as John needed to recuse himself as Carl is a family member. Rich stated that he had asked Kathe to contact Carl to provide an outline of the issues and the plan going forward. Carl stated that he had just received the email about that this morning and as he asked to be put on the agenda for this meeting, he was focused on the things that he wanted to bring to the table. Carl stated that the roads that were damaged by the rainstorms that we had on July 18th have been repaired to make them safe and passable. On Maynard Hill there is a culvert that they were planning on starting to work on today but they needed to have tires put on the equipment trailer so they will be starting that tomorrow. Abbott Hill still needs repairs to the shoulder as does Lynes Road. The main damage on Skyline Trail as well as another culvert on the road still need to be finalized but we are waiting to hear from FEMA about funding. Carl discussed their budget and how the gravel portion of his budget has been exhausted due to that damage as well as work they had done prior such as grading a few of the roads. He stated that there is substantial work left to do but we are waiting to hear from FEMA. He reached out to Dave Stokes about pre-approval for Chapter 90 money who told him that he could use that. Kathe commented that she had followed up about that and was told that we should not use Chapter 90 money for any work on roads that were submitted to FEMA. If we do that and everything is fixed, we have to remove that road from the list with FEMA. Rich commented that he believed there was a severe safety issue on Maynard Hill which Carl commented that they

had placed cones as well as a pile of dirt to alert people to avoid that area of the road. Rich stated that he did not see that and at one point driving on the road there were not any cones out either. Kathy Engwer commented that she travels this road several times a week and she knew that the dirt was placed there along with some cones. Rich stated if we cannot fully repair the road until we hear from FEMA, we need to make it safe and asked for Carl's best recommendation. Carl stated that since we can not do the necessary repairs until we have heard from FEMA what they will be able to contribute the best solution would be to have the road closed except for the residents who live on that road. Rich stated that if we are doing that, we should notify the residents, but Carl believed that the signs alone would alert people that the closed is closed except for local traffic. Rich stated that he would take care of notifying residents. Carl commented that was fine and that he would be putting signs up that the road is closed tomorrow. Rich continued and asked while we are waiting to hear from FEMA what can they be working on. Carl stated that they are doing day to day operations such as clearing out culverts, maintaining ditches as well as raking and grading necessary roads. He has been planning for the projects to come with repairing the damaged roads. Such as ordering material, as well as contacting any contractors that we are looking to have work with us, with the storms there has been no shortage of work. Rich commented that with us looking for an assistant for Chief Weidhaas we could also look for someone to work with the Highway Department as an assistant to help with any paperwork. Jason commented that an assistant was factored into the budget for the Highway Department so there would be no issue for funding. Kathe stated that she would put an advertisement together for both positions. Jason asked Carl if having an assistant for a few hours per week would be helpful, Carl answered yes it absolutely would help. The Select Board thanked Carl for the work that has been done. Bob asked if Carl had any results on the water issue that is on Maple Street. Carl commented that the water had dried up today, but the Mass Rural Water Association was sending someone to look at it on Wednesday. He stated that they would have been here last week on Monday but due to the hurricane they rescheduled to this week.

- **Town Administrator update:** Kathe explained that the Chester Cultural Council has been looking to have a collaboration with other towns. When she was contacted by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, they stated that surrounding towns were already part of a group however Kathe commented that they had only reached out to one town. She is currently the Chair for the Chester Cultural Council, but the paperwork is extensive. She stated that after this year she would like to be done and pass that along to someone else. Jason commented that Chesterfield send out a notice to every household asking for volunteers for various committees and groups. Kathe stated that was a good idea and commented that Jason could probably also use some help in the Recreation Committee which he stated that he could. Kathe mentioned that we received a thank you for hosting the vaccine clinic last week and was happy that we were able to host it outside.

The elevator in the Town Hall has been fixed but the state requires a test which is going to cost approximately \$1,300.00. When they do this, we will find out if we need an alarm system for the elevator or because of when it was installed the laws have changed and we would be grandfathered in.

Kathe brought up that on Monday September 27th both her and Jill would be out of town and asked if the Select Board would like to skip that meeting or they could conduct it

without them. The Select Board all stated that they were fine with skipping that week. Kathe reached out to Regional Resource Group, RRG, and they will be with us on September 15th for an update.

Kathe stated the three Select Board members should look downstairs as there has been an accumulation of furniture that we need to get rid of. She reached out to everyone in the building and told everyone to take a look to see if it was anything they could use and everything else she would like to donate to the Re-Store. Jason agreed stating that anything left should be donated. Rich commented that he believed that we should offer it to the community before anything leaves. He stated that himself and Bob would be able to be present when we decided to allow residents to look. Bob commented that it would be good to do it on a Saturday morning as people are going to the transfer station. Kathe gave the date of Saturday, September 11th from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM.

Kathe discussed our budget for the Gateway School, she stated that she knew the Finance Committee had a difficult job and we are dictated by the school's budget. However there comes a point where we must look at what is fiscally responsible for our town. When the school presents their budget, we have to accept it with no discussion, but we are having a difficult time finding the funding for things that are needed within our offices and our community. Jason commented that being on the School Committee he asks a lot of questions and goes through that budget line by line looking for trends and opportunities to do things differently to help all the towns within the district. Jason commented that the budget is difficult to put together especially when it comes out to be twenty percent higher but only has half of the students from twenty years ago. Kathe stated that she knows that the school is important but everything else needed for the town is as well. Jason stated that there has been talking of leaving the school district, but he believed that it would cost more to do that than staying. He mentioned that there is a meeting on Wednesday night with Russell and Montgomery and he is hoping that the new member of the Select Board in Russell is willing to work with everyone.

Jason mentioned that he had looked into our contract with Hilltown CDC regarding the library tenancy. He stated that in the copy that we have there is a provision for dealing with water damage stating that the landlord will be responsible and will be covered completely. However, when he received a copy of the signed contract that section was missing. Mary Ann commented that she knew the apartment in the building that is right above the library had been having issues previously with water and agreed that the damage that is within the library should indeed be covered by the landlord, Hilltown CDC. Mary Ann stated that she believed the lease should be re-written and signed again by all parties.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

There were no further questions.

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

Meeting Adjourned 8:42 PM

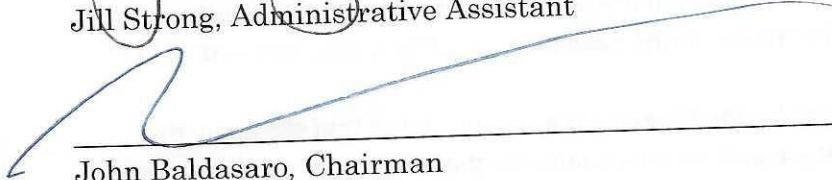
Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

9/13/21

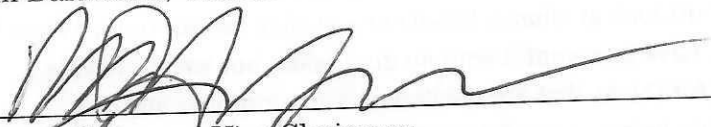
Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

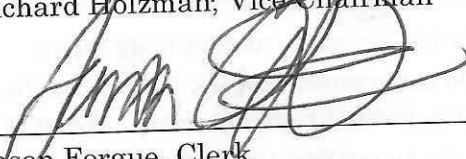
9/13/21

Date Signed



Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Jason Forgue, Clerk

9/13/21

Date Signed