



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

Monday, September 13th, 2021

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman, and Jason Forgue present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, and Town Clerk and ACO Terry Donovan. Bob Daley from the Finance Committee was present as well as a few Chester residents. Elizabeth Massa and Nick Chiusano from the Board of Health were participating virtually with Andy Myers from the Finance Committee and a few residents. Per the agenda Treasurer Sara Hunter, Accountant Eric Kinsherf, and Harald Scheid from RRG were participating virtually.

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

- **Meet with Sara Hunter, Treasurer, RRG Associates, and Eric Kinsherf, Accountant.** John thanked Sara and Eric for meeting with us. The Select Board had all received the latest copy of our expenditures and revenue report. Eric commented that there still was revenue to be posted for July and August, but all of the expenses are up to date. Sara and Janice are currently working on closing the FY21 books. Sara stated that they are slowly moving away from the old style of posting things and as of now when we have people in the office on Wednesdays, we will be able to turn things over to them on those days and things will be posted once a week. John asked with them closing out the FY21 books if everything was going smoothly or if anything came up that did not match with what should have been there. Eric stated no that things were going along as planned. July to November needs to be finalized and then they are moving onto December which he commented might have things come up because there was a change of people working in the office. Mary Ann asked Sara if she had a list of what she would need or would be looking for on Wednesday morning, Sara answered yes and that she would send her an email tomorrow morning with the details. Eric wanted to thank Sara and Janice another member of his staff for working so hard to finish this. John asked if Eric thought we would meet the October 31st deadline that was previously discussed. Eric stated that he was pushing hard to get this accomplished. John thanked them both stating that he appreciated the work they were doing, and the reporting format was very helpful not only to the Select Board but to the Finance Committee as well. Andy also commented that the reports have been very helpful and upon his

review of them he believed that things that have not been posted could be taxes and any abatements. Sara stated that it has been difficult to reconcile, and Eric mentioned that on the report it looks as though there is a cash flow problem which is due to the fact that they are waiting to post some receipts. Andy asked if Chapter 90 was also up to date, Eric answered that he would check and get back to him. Andy commented that we are running out of time to do that, and Eric asked if we had a member of DPW or our Highway Department took care of this. Andy stated that we have a Highway Foreman John agreeing that the Highway Department should be taking care of this. Andy wanted to make sure this did not slip through the cracks he also brought up the discrepancy of the funds left in the Green Community Grant. John stated that we had initially thought through their reporting that there was \$65,000.00 available but once Jason started to look into it, we actually had \$28,000.00. Eric stated that he would look into that as well and get back to us. Andy asked if they were working on reconciling FY22 as they are moving along or were they solely focusing on the back log. Sara answered that they were entering both the turnovers and the vouchers as they go along. Sara assured Andy that they were indeed working on having Free Cash certified by October 31st. Looking over the report it seemed as though there had been no money expended from the Police Department salary, Eric deferred to Kathe as she enters payroll. Kathe stated that she has indeed been entering the Chief and Officers salary but would check to verify the account that it is being taken from. Andy also commented that in the report it lists \$143,000.00 as unclassified numbers. Eric answered that this account was for programs from various departments as well as some employee benefits. John thanked them both again stating that he knew we were putting pressure on them to get things completed. Eric stated that it simply motivates them to work harder. Sara thanked the Town Hall staff for all of their help in the transition.

The discussion was then moved to Harald Scheid from RRG our Assessing firm. John thanked Harald for meeting with us and that it had been a little while since we had touched base. Harald discussed that they were overhauling any new growth with inspections that have been completed. He stated that there has been a new mandate from the Department of Revenue, DOR, that utilities need to be reviewed for their value. Harald commented that with the information they have already gathered it seemed that utilities have gone up approximately thirty percent. John asked if they had overhauled any properties that have been sold as well as any new construction that have not been visited in a while. Harald answered that due to the Covid-19 pandemic they have had to reinvent the process of evaluating homes. In the past they had canvassed the town and done a street-to-street inspection. With the pandemic there is not as much accessibility to homes from the property owners without a notice ahead of time. They currently have a plan with DOR to do a town wide canvas in the winter months. Harald stated that there is also a new option with EagleView which is a geospatial software with aerial imagery and data analytics. This gives a 360-degree view which gives measurements to the Assessors right from their computer. This gives better information so that they can narrow down properties that need a full inspection and then schedule them by appointment. Jason asked how successful they had been pre-pandemic with the old way of doing things and visiting homes one by one, Harald answered that it was not terribly effective. Jason stated that since that is the case, they should not blame the pandemic for the inability to evaluate homes. Harald commented that there was no blame placed however the process was ineffective and needed to be updated. Jason inquired about the geo mapping and if there were drones flying around

people's homes would we be notifying them. Harald explained that it was not done by drones it was done by airplane and whether it was them or a state agency this is done all the time. Jason asked how effective this would be as we are not in an easy place to map from such a high viewpoint. Giving Easthampton as an example they are located in a flatter area and the entire town is not as spread out as Chester is. The larger size and amount some of our homes are spread out along with hills could make it difficult as well as tree cover of many homes. Harald commented that technology really was the way to go although it is more expensive. Andy stated that there should be notices in advance to the residents ever if it goes out in the monthly electric bills as well as discussing that any of their employees that would need to do in person inspections are fully vaccinated. Jason then asked about the utility reevaluation, Harald stated that there has been between thirty and fifty percent increase in public utilities. John asked how this would affect us because we have a municipal electric company, some people do have Eversource, but the majority of residents have our electric company. Harald stated that this would make it different for us and not as applicable. Andy mentioned that in speaking with our Assessors Clerk Laura Lafreniere she felt that she had been taking on several projects that should fall under RRG. Harald stated that he was disheartened to hear that, and he had just received an email about this today. He stated that if there was anything that she was doing that she felt they should have done she could have reached out to them. Jason stated that this should not be anything new as this has been discussed before. Harald commented again that if there are things that should have fallen on their plate such as the Annual Report, we needed to let them know. John and Jason both inquired if Harald would be available again next Monday to participate in the meeting for any questions. Harald said that he would and agreed he would be participating virtually at the Select Board meeting next Monday night.

Rich asked if they had a date as a goal that they would like to have all the inspections commercial and residential completed by. Harald answered that working with the Bureau of Local Assessments they are verifying the data but there are no requirements for doing inspections for exterior and interior of the homes other than once every ten years. Rich then asked if there was a goal to have it one hundred percent complete, Harald answered that by December 2023 they should have a full assessment. Andy asked if they had a number of in-home inspections that would be done by the end of the year, Harald answered no the new protocol is that there are no requirements to do every house. Andy asked if they were discontinuing in home inspections, Harald answered no but they are only performing them if needed. Andy asked if there were currently any homes that were in need, Harald answered no. Mary Ann asked if they had looked at any of the properties that have changed hands as her and Laura have noticed that many of the homes that have been for sale the pictures of the home advertised have not matched what the town has on file for a property card. Harald commented that they had and that this did need to be verified, the MLS listing has available imagery which allows them to evaluate if the property needs to be updated. John asked if they had been comparing all of the property cards with the MLS listing, Harald answered yes. Jason asked if this was being done only when homes are sold and stated that we should be exploring all avenues to determine the current value, Harald answered yes and that he agreed. John thanked Harald and stated that we would continue this next Monday.

- **Discussion and possible vote to mandate wearing masks in Town buildings.** Kathe began the discussion explaining that the Board of Health has reached out regarding mask mandates for the

town. There has been a recent recommendation to mandate masks again in public municipal buildings, in all indoor public spaces which includes private businesses, houses of worship, fitness clubs etc. Elizabeth stated that this is at the towns discretion to put this into effect. Kathe stated that at a meeting she had last Thursday it was discussed implementing this was recommended and not mandated. John stated that he felt strongly that the Select Board should not dictate what people can do, it should be recommended but not mandated. Jason stated that his primary concern was the liability for the town and that it should be strongly recommended. He commented that being on the School Committee he has sat through multiple meetings regarding masks being mandated for children in the school, but he stated that we should not go beyond what the state currently has mandated. Rich stated that his son in law is on the front lines of Covid-19 as a medical professional. Although in Chester we are less exposed he maintained an open mind and would vote for a mandate if necessary. John stated that as the Governor has not issued an executive order the Select Board was not above that decision. Rich stated that everyone was entitled to their own opinion but that this was a complicated issue, and we should defer to the facts. A resident asked how other towns have done this using Amherst as an example. Jason commented that he agreed with John that the Board of Health did not have the authority to supersede the federal or state government. Elizabeth stated that other towns like Amherst have done this, and it was up to the Board of Health, but she personally did not believe in a mandate only a recommendation. Nick commented that his belief was that if someone wants to wear one, they should but he was also against a mandate as there have been no cases in a while. Rich asked Liz what the percentage of vaccination was, she answered from her current records we are at fifty percent. Bob commented that when he looked at the Covid Dashboard for Massachusetts they have our population at 1,358 residents and fully vaccinated there were 612 residents at forty six percent He asked if there were any plans for holding another vaccine clinic, Liz answered that we could at any time. She spoke with Hilltown Community Health Center, HCHC, and she was told that they did not have any of the Pfizer vaccine, but HCHC also asked if there was an interest in hosting a flu shot clinic. Rich stated that we should maximize the number of people vaccinated and hoped to have a one hundred percent vaccination rate.

- **Carl Baldasaro Highway Foreman – update on roads.** Carl was not with us tonight as he was not feeling well so this will be discussed at the Select Board meeting next Monday the 20th.

Town Administrator Update

- **Update the website with community and business advertisements.** Kathe explained that we would be doing some updates to the town website and that there was an idea to promote local businesses and place ads on the website that people could pay to be highlighted. She had not had a chance to reach out to other communities to see if and what they charge. The thought was that if there was a charge this could help offset the monthly fee for the website. Jill explained that in researching the other towns for ideas for our website Middlefield had two options on their page listed under Attractions and Community. Attractions listed Glendale falls and the fair and the Community section listed businesses in town as well as ideas for places nearby to visit such as museums, galleries etc. Jason asked what the fee was for the website, Kathe answered that it was approximately \$300.00 per month with a yearly charge for all licenses. There would also be a new charge of \$7,000.00 for an upgrade on the web platform.

Kathe was looking at a Community Compact Grant for IT which would help with that cost as well as the digitalization of records that Terry is working on. Bob asked if the \$7,000.00 was a onetime charge and if any other towns had done this. Kathe answered yes it was a single charge and Blandford, Huntington, and Russell are doing this with Blandford already completed. Rich suggested reaching out to the Business Bureau to inquire if they had businesses to list. Jill stated that she already had a list going for things to do within a certain radius this would be helpful for people visiting town such as staying at an Air BNB. Norman Rockwell as an example also mentioning that breweries are big right now and commented that it would be a good opportunity to highlight the Sena Farm Brewery located in Worthington. John stated that this was a good idea on all ends and believed that we should move forward.

- **Update on William Ivey Long project.** Kathe opened the discussion stating that we had received a letter from Town Council Tom Mullen and things are not going the way we had hoped for. William Ivey Long is claiming that he has no money to continue with this also does not have the finances to not only rent rooms in the building but lacks the finances to forgo the occupancy. William Ivey Long stated that he is willing to deed the building to us subject to a use and occupancy agreement allowing him to continue the use of two of the classrooms until the end of April 2022. If we did not agree he would sell the property subject to the tax lien. Kathe reminded the Select Board that for rental of the rooms we had voted to charge him \$500.00 per room including paying for any utilities and carrying the insurance. Rich asked if currently more than two rooms were still occupied. Jill stated that her and Kathe had gone into the building when there was a discussion of what we could offer the library for use and all of the rooms were full including the hallways. Jason stated that he believed that we were wasting our efforts with the building and asked if William Ivey Long was still accruing penalties and interest as he thought if so, it would well exceed the original amount owed from him of \$90,000.00. Mary Ann stated that he was indeed still accruing fines and that she could turn everything over to the attorney and possibly force his hand. John stated that we should do that, and Mary Ann said that she would do that tomorrow morning, this would prevent him from being able to sell it. John stated that she should gather all the information and send it to Town Council Tom Mullen. Mary Ann commented that there is a separate attorney for taxes but that she would CC him on the email. Jason asked if we could add any legal fees that have resulted from the lengthy correspondence, Mary Ann answered that we could. Resident R. Duane Pease asked why the town was ok with allowing the taxes for the building to go so long as he believed any resident would not be given the same courtesy. He asked if the other properties that are owned by William Ivey Long are in the same state of being behind in taxes. Mary Ann answered that the school was the only property currently owned by William Ivey Long that is behind in taxes.
- **Update on MVP project.** Kathe stated that she hoped to receive the designation hopefully by next week.
- **Discussion about applying for a Hazard Mitigation Grant, Community Compact IT Grant, and a Risk Management Grant.** Kathe discussed that there is \$10,000.00 worth of grants that could be pursued for the Police Department, the Fire Department, and the Highway Department. She has reached out to all of the departments to discuss their needs and has heard back from Chief Weidhaas but not from the Fire or Highway Departments. Our MEMA representative Scott Flebotte has recommended a Hazard Mitigation Grant for the necessary repairs of Abbott Hill Road. John stated that doing that was a no brainer, this was done for the repairs on Smith Road

which is why we have had little problems there during storms. Kathe stated that she is also looking into a culvert grant with DCR. Scott had also suggested to Kathe that with the Hazard Mitigation Grant the plan is typically completed by PVPC, but he felt that the town could accomplish it without their assistance and MEMA would help if there was a need. She stated that Scott would be participating virtually at our meeting next week to discuss things further and answer any questions. John stated that would be great to ensure there is no misinterpretation.

Before moving to public comment Kathe also wanted to update the Select Board about the scholarship that they had been working on the new account. She stated that next week she would be meeting with Bank of America to discuss how they will be distributing the scholarship to students. Jason stated that he had spoken to Jonathan Glionna from the Finance Committee who thought that the account should be sixty percent equity and forty percent bond. Rich had also spoke to someone from UMASS and they were not going to be helping with the account but would offer advice. Kathe stated that she could discuss this also with the bank and move everything to the other account with a sixty forty stipulation. Jason also mentioned that we should look at any fees associated with the account, Kathe stated that she would, and she would bring the information to the meeting next week.

Jason discussed the solar issue that has been going on at the Town Garage which he had previously noticed was turned off. Carl told Jason that when they had lost power in July when they had been using the generator it could have been shut off and never turned back on. Jason stated that himself with John Vanheynigen our Electrical Inspector had been there to turn it on to ensure there were no problems. He spoke with Green Communities and was told that they will not fund any more projects until the solar is fixed by PVPC. Jason will keep following up with PVPC and stated that he wanted to go to PVPC and present them with the cost of fixing the project. Kathe asked Jason if Green Communities would still be doing the audit which he answered that they would but would not start anything that is suggested through the audit. He stated that we should be conducting the audit around October 25th. Kathe asked if the audit would be conducted only on the Town Hall, Jason answered that it would be done at the Fire Station as well.

Jason also wanted to discuss how things were moving along regarding taking care of junk cars as well as campers and trailers that have been a concern. Currently the fines that have been given for anything that is a violation of current bylaws is totaled approximately \$90,000.00. Two properties have corrected any problems but still need to pay off the balance of the fines. Jason was unsure if the newer version of our bylaw had been accepted yet by the Attorney General's office but as soon as we find out it will allow any fines to be added to resident's tax bills. Jason has also issued two cease-and-desist notices for properties that have done improvements but have not pulled any permits. Rich asked where we were at with the reports of tractor trailers and campers that are visible. Jason stated that if the property owner is ok with the storage of another person's equipment etc. there is no violation of the bylaw. If the property owner were to state that they had not granted permission to have someone store anything on their property, they need to file a formal complaint and it could then be pursued. Rich stated that he was going to be checking on the bylaws at the next Planning Board meeting. Jason commented that there was no limit on what people have on their property as long as everything is registered. Mary Ann stated that we should follow up with Laura about getting a list of the

properties so we can continue to issue fines. Jason stated that he had a new list and spreadsheet and would email it to Mary Ann.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

Resident R. Duane Pease of Prospect Street brought to the attention of the Select Board current problems with Prospect Street. He stated that although he understood that we have had a difficult spring and summer with the storms there are long standing potholes as well as a necessity that the roadsides be mowed. Another resident on the street took it upon them self to trim some of the brush because it was so thick that it became difficult to see. He also stated that Cooper Drive which is off of Prospect although it is unused has a large stream of water that has cut through and is sending water as well as any debris into the road. He stated that a large amount of money has been spent on Round Hill Road with very few residents living on the road but Prospect with a larger residency has had little work done. Duane stated that he had gone to the Highway Garage to ask questions but has had no result. The mower had been parked at the bottom of Johnson Hill Road for a few weeks and he asked if there was an issue with the mower if it was broken. He was told no that it had been too hot to mow. Duane stated that he believed that it was the Select Board's obligation to have a general idea of what the Highway Department was doing on a daily basis so that if a resident were to contact them that they would be able to give an answer. John stated that in the past there had been a weekly plan with a priority list which we could do again as a working document that could be added to or marked when things are completed. Jason stated that he did not necessarily agree that we needed to know what the Highway Department is working on every day, but he should be able to defer any questions to the Highway Department and they can provide residents with an answer. Mary Ann added that there is a sign going to the Highway Garage that states there is no access to the buildings unless you are an employee. She stated that she believed allowing residents to go in and out checking on things at the garage was a liability with the equipment that is in the building and the gate should be locked. Kathe commented that there had been a discussion previously with the Highway Department as well as the employees of CMELD that the gate should be locked but has noticed on multiple occasions that it has been open when no one is around. Rich stated that with the Highway Department being a large cost to the town which moves to the cost of the taxpayer the Select Board should have a plan on a weekly basis.

Bob informed us that the first Water Commissioners meeting would be held this week on Wednesday the 15th. Bob wanted to clarify if the Water Commissioners would be a collaborative with the Select Board and that they would have support and funding when decisions are made. Specifically, Bob wanted to ensure that the required two-week testing has and will continue to be done. John stated that there should be no issue with funding and commented that he thought our Water Operator Bernie St. Martin had been doing the testing. Jason mentioned that the reports need to be turned over to DEP so we could check in with them to verify if the testing is being done. Bob asked if there would be funding if the Water Commissioners voted to recalibrate the instruments at the Water Plant which should cost approximately \$2,600.00. John stated again that there should be no problem and as long as it is under \$5,000.00 to go forward with it. Kathe commented that the water expense account budget has not been increased in the past few years even with the cost of things going up. Jason stated that we could pursue the American Rescue Plan Act, ARPA, funds to assist with this if

necessary. Kathe stated that at a meeting she was at it was explained to her that the state is also receiving their own funds through ARPA, and it was suggested that small communities reach out to their legislature for assistance if their received amount is insufficient. John suggested that the Water Commissioners meet then come back to the Select Board with their decisions to discuss. Jason stated that we should contact Housatonic Basin Sampling and Testing out of Lee which has been a suggestion from Bob. Bob stated that he would indeed do that and planned to contact them Thursday morning.

Andy discussed that he had a conversation with Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro about Maynard Hill being closed. Andy commented that we can not have a road closed for an uncertain amount of time. Rich commented that there were signs placed but they had been taken. Rich also met our MEMA representative Scott Flebotte and stated that he was able to explain things clearly regarding what we are able to repair at the moment. Scott is going to be with us at our Select Board meeting next week. Kathe mentioned that she was also told that we can do repairs at the moment, but we need to keep accurate records of time spent and hold any receipts for materials so that it can be included in our report with MEMA and FEMA. John mentioned that last week Carl stated that he had approximately \$90,000.00 in bills left to pay. Kathe stated that at the moment it looks like sixty two percent of the gravel budget has been expended and she would check with Carl what bills are currently left to be paid. Andy mentioned that if there are indeed no funds we would need to have a Special Town Meeting to withdraw from stabilization. John agreed and stated that right now we are still waiting on the declaration from FEMA and that the Select Board was working to make this happen.

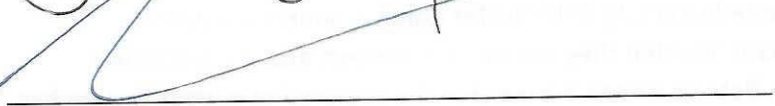
Jason made the motion to adjourn, Rich 2nd, all voted Aye.

Meeting Adjourned 8:15 PM

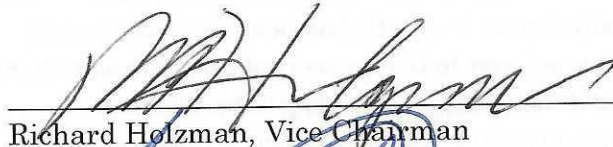
Respectfully Submitted


Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

9/20/21
Date Signed


John Baldasaro, Chairman

Date Signed


Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

9/20/21
Date Signed


Jason Forgue, Clerk

Date Signed