



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

Monday, October 25th, 2021

Open Meeting – This meeting is held in the Chester Town Hall auditorium with a virtual option. There was a problem with the Gotomeeting platform, and no one was able to participate virtually.

Select Board members John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman, and Jason Forgue present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, and Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease. From CMELD, Manager Jill Moretz, Administrative Assistant Rosanne McClafin, and Commissioners Duane Pease, Deryck Savoy, and Terry Murphy. Water Commissioners Bob Daley, Lyle Snide and Kathy Engwer were present as well as Finance Committee members Andy Myers and Jessica Sakaske. Per the agenda Ira Brezinsky from PVPC was present, Ann Daley for the COA, as well as a few Chester residents.

Warrants, minutes, and any correspondence were signed. John opened the meeting at 6:00 PM, noting that the virtual platform no one had yet joined the meeting and there may be an issue. This is the first meeting that we will not be recording.

- **Ira Brezinsky PVPC final report for the LRRP grant.** Ira was with us to discuss the Local Rapid Recovery Plan, LRRP, grant that is currently in motion. This program is intended to provide every municipality in Massachusetts the opportunity to develop actionable project-based recovery plans tailored to economic challenges and the Covid-19 pandemic related impacts to downtowns, town centers, and commercial areas across the commonwealth. There are 124 cities and towns in Massachusetts that have received this grant. To evaluate and discuss the challenges for the town and have insight into how this money should be allocated a committee was created composed of town staff as well as others representing local businesses, non-profits, and other organizations. The LRRP Committee discussed and recommended five projects, the formation of a Chester Business and Civic Association, development of a town wide brand, develop a town wide signage and wayfinding system, create a historic and cultural walkway that connects the village center, and to develop a façade, signage, and physical improvement program. Ira explained that the idea of a brand has been worked on in the past but has not officially been adopted by the town. Improved signage around town assists in getting people passing through to slow down and take a look around town to see what we have to offer. The historical walkway has been worked on by the Western Mass Hilltown Hikers group in addition

to the walkability study that was conducted a few years ago. Ira stated that the Littleville Fair and its board members have been very involved in this project and although the fairgrounds is not located in the village center it is a beautiful location that can be supported to make them more sustainable.

John stated that he believed that forming a Civic group was a good idea to keep businesses in the loop and aware of things going on within the town also so we can get information from them as to their needs. He explained that there had been a façade improvement grant several years ago that some businesses took advantage of and went well. There also had been a program to develop branding but it had been directed more toward the Gateway region rather than specific to Chester, John stated that there is also a video on YouTube that was created. He commented that improved signage was important, and all of this went hand in hand.

Jason asked Ira how “rapid” he saw this moving, what things out of the suggested projects did he feel would be best for the town to start with, or if we should just work our way down the list. Ira answered that he expected to hear in a few weeks, hoping early November what had been approved for funds in our grant application. He explained that a few of the towns that are waiting to hear have taken care of some things that could be done quickly and inexpensively. He believed that developing signage and wayfinding could take a while, but we could get started on developing the Civic Group as well as the façade improvement program. Ira stated that there is money left with PVPC and although their role with planning is officially done, they could offer assistance with implementing these projects. John commented that if there is money left that we would be happy to have their help. Jason asked what we needed to do to make this official, Ira answered that the plan needed to be voted as accepted by the town.

Jason made the motion that we accept the LRRP plan for the grant for Chester as created by PVPC, Rich 2nd, all voted Aye.

Rich stated that as a part of the LRRP Committee he felt that the group was very productive and thanked Ira for his work on the project. Ira stated that the Committee should organize another meeting to decide which two projects to start with and pursue another grant for further funding which will be due on December 17th. Andy commented that he has spoken with several of the business owners and many of them are interested in this project and he felt if there is money available, we could move things along quickly. Jason asked Ira if there was anything else that we could do for the project, Ira answered that recruiting people to be a part of the project as well as posting the report to the town website would be great. John thanked Ira for all the work that he has done on the project.

- **Appointment of Ann Daley as the Interim COA Director.** Kathe discussed that there is still an active search for a permanent COA Director. There was one person who applied but things did not work out and she is going to be speaking to someone else but was unsure how that would go. She spoke with Ann who has been a volunteer for the COA and is currently assisting with getting the meals planned and asked if she would be interested in taking the job on an interim basis. They decided on a ninety-day term to keep meals and the foot clinic moving and after the ninety days will discuss if she would like to continue the position. Rich made the motion to appoint Ann Daley as the Interim COA Director, Jason 2nd, all voted Aye.

- **Appointment of Kathy Engwer as the Highway Administrative Assistant.** Kathy has applied for the position for Administrative Assistant for the Highway Department. Kathe has already spoken with her as well as Carl to discuss the position. Kathe stated that she believed that Kathy would do well in the position as she is knowledgeable to what is needed as well as the warrant program. She has currently been doing the job as a part of senior work off, but we have now funded the position for three hours per week.
Jason made the motion to appoint Kathy Engwer as the Administrative Assistant to the Highway Department, Rich 2nd, all voted Aye.
- **Discussion with the CMELD Commissioners and Andy Myers of a financial review of the CMELD Dept.** John opened the discussion stating that he appreciated everyone from CMELD for being present at the meeting with us. Before getting started Deryck asked if this had been requested by the Select Board to be completed and in what capacity was Andy presenting the information, as a member of the Finance Committee or as a concerned resident. John answered that there had been questions raised from the finance review, Andy added that the Finance Committee had discussed reviewing all the departments and thought that CMELD should be included.

Andy began stating that he hoped this would start the discussion with CMELD that would be helpful for them as well as the town. John added that this was an open and honest discussion not an attack and was trying to bring everyone closer together. Jason commented that although he is new as a member of the Select Board, he is a resident and has been involved with the town for a few years now and was happy to hear responses from CMELD so that we could move forward all with a better understanding of things.

Andy stated that in creating this report he had done research on municipal electric light companies across the state, which there are forty. He commented that most of them are in considerably larger cities and towns and in the comparison, he believed that CMELD was very well administered and financially sound. Andy stated that our rates are higher but as previously stated we are a much smaller town with a limited tax base. Andy gave a copy of his report that he was referencing to the members of CMELD as well as the Select Board, Town Administrator, and Admin Assistant. The town of Princeton was listed as having a large debt as they had purchased wind turbines which has raised their taxes. Andy stated that he has been an advocate for wind power but upon reading this information he was unsure if this would be a good solution in Chester due to the cost and amount of debt it posed on the town.

In the report from Andy, it lists all the cities and towns that have a municipal electric company and the number of users, Chester and Russell have the lowest amount of users of all the towns with Chester having 699 customer meters. Chester also has the lowest amount of kilowatt usage and the lowest revenue all of which contribute to our rate being higher. Andy also compared CMELD to Eversource, in March of 2021 the kWh rate for Eversource was .2255 where as CMELD was .2111 resulting in a savings of over nine dollars for CMELD customers with the customer charges added in and using the average customer usage of 600 kWh. Deryck commented that these rates do not reflect the discount that CMELD offers if paid by the early date. Andy added that in his research he thought that CMELD did a great job on negotiating power contracts. In the report all the accounts were compared stabilization, depreciation, as well as the income vs. expenses. John asked what the depreciation account was used for, Jill Moretz answered that it was used if a new truck needed to be purchased or in the event of an emergency if poles need to be replaced this money needed to be available.

Finalizing the report Andy listed the advantages vs. disadvantages for having CMELD. Some advantages were that they provide local and good service, they issue Watts News with all bills giving information to residents. The power for the streetlights as well as to the Historic Jail and Library are donated to the town. CMELD built and paid for the Town Garage, they assist with brush cutting, and tree removal or pruning on town roads. Andy also added that they have a historic presence of over ninety years of service to the town. Some disadvantages are that they are a non-taxable entity to Chester, costs are growing higher than the inflation rate, we have a non-competitive residential solar program, and there is a lack of accounting oversight with no audits. Before moving on Jill Moretz commented that CMELD has always participated in audits and that we could check with the former Accountant Paula Beck for clarification. Andy added that we have an audit scheduled for this year which will cost approximately \$18,000.00 and thought that CMELD could possibly contribute to the cost, approximately \$1,000.00. John also stated that he had been under the impression that CMELD did not participate in the municipal audit. Rosanne added to the discussion that an advantage that was not listed in the report is that CMELD will pay for an energy audit for any resident. She also stated another benefit was that they are willing to work with residents to establish a payment or budget plan for their bills.

Andy continued stating that he wanted the green community grant cleared up that had solar panels installed at the Town Garage. He stated that he believed it would be beneficial to pursue purchasing batteries for power storage which would assist in keeping costs down. Jason added that he had been told that unfortunately green communities would no longer fund any solar projects or batteries. Deryck added that he had been told that they are focusing on reduction only and not on the creation of power.

Terry Murphy asked what we learned here, Andy answered that he had learned a lot about CMELD and the rates and how we could work together. Jason stated that he learned that CMELD does participate in the town audits, and with the transition to a new Accountant and Treasurer would like to see CMELD contribute to some of the expenses. John added that the more we meet the more any misconceptions can be dealt with. He thanked Andy for his research and work that was put into this report also stating that at the Annual Town Meeting would be an opportunity to show work that is done by CMELD to assist with transparency.

Deryck discussed what green power Chester has and is looking to use. He explained that it has been mandated by the state that we need to be at fifty percent green power by the year 2030 or there will be a fine and in thirty years we need to be one hundred percent green. He was unsure of the cost of the fine, but he assured everyone that CMELD was focused on trying to get there. John asked what percentage he thought that we were at now, Deryck answered that he thought we were around six percent. He explained that they are looking at a program to partner with residents who have or would like to install solar, and they can be paid for the power that they feed into the grid from CMELD. They have also looked into the Vineyard wind project which is a proposed offshore wind farm that will be located off the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. Deryck stated that he has been informed that Western Mass has the only remaining land available in the state left for increased solar options.

John moved on to the solar project that has currently been completed at the town garage that we have discussed at previous meetings still needs to be fixed. He stated that we have been strung along for several months now and this needs to be taken care of. It was

suggested by our Electrical Inspector that the necessary wires be installed underground rather than strung overhead. John stated that he was not in favor of digging up the driveway and parking lot of the town garage. Deryck commented that CMELD was willing to help in any way that they could. Jason asked if they were to run it overhead would they go straight over the garage or they would be going around along the existing poles, Deryck said they would go around. Jason stated that he had drafted a letter to PVPC and is waiting for the last quote so that he can provide that to them as well for the repair costs. He suggested that we make a decision as to how to proceed once we have a response from them. Kathy suggested reaching out to Anchor Electric for the second quote. Andy asked if we could commit to a date to have this completed, Jason answered that he could not yet.

Rich commented that something he thought would be beneficial in the immediate future would be to have a sole person who is responsible for the mowing and tree work. He stated that this person could keep track of the equipment and parts used so that there can be a log of how often things need to be replaced. We have the equipment, and this could save us money and the whole town would benefit. Jill Moretz asked if someone additional would be hired and if so suggested that it be a part time or seasonal position with no benefits. Deryck asked what trucks Rich had in mind that this person would be using. Rich stated that he thought we should look at what we have and discuss the idea and determine what could be used such as a bucket truck when it is retired could be given for town use.

Jason asked if CMELD had received and reviewed the Municipal Light scorecard, Deryck answered that he had not reviewed it yet. Jason commented that if we were not designated as a green community then we would be in last place. He stated that as a Building Inspector for six towns Chester has the lowest amount of solar users. Deryck commented that he has been told that when residents reach out to solar companies, they are told that CMELD does not allow solar as a municipality which is false. Andy stated that he believed it was due to the fact that we would not feed into the grid other than for our use and this hinders the solar contractor to justify the costs. Deryck commented that if people want it that there should be no issue with it being installed at their homes. Rosanne also stated that she has heard on multiple occasions that solar is not allowed because the town does not allow more than six or seven solar customers, this is also false. Deryck stated that when solar was first discussed they had thought they may put a cap, this was suggested because if too much solar power is created that effected the amount of power that CMELD purchases it could increase costs for the power purchased. At the time residents could put their name in for a lottery for the option of solar but the maximum amount of people did not enter their name and thus the cap was never instituted. Before closing John suggested that CMELD publish in Watts News that residents are eligible to have an energy audit as well as any information they would like people to know about solar. He thanked all members of CMELD for coming and participating in the conversation. Rich stated that he would put together a plan for the tree work position.

- **Discussion with Water Commissioners about the ACO from DEP.** Lyle began the discussion stating that the Board Water Commissioners had received a month extension from DEP to complete all the tasks that they have asked for. The Board has already set up a contract with Berlin Instruments for the calibration and with Housatonic Labs for all our necessary testing. The contract with Housatonic is for twelve weeks and the state would like this done for a year so this will be discussed further within the Board. Lyle discussed that the town should have a

succession plan for our water operator. He stated that our current primary water operator Bernie St. Martin had participated in their meeting by phone. The SCADA system is done all by computer and thought this may be an issue with Bernie. He stated that it could be beneficial to discuss a joint effort combining with other towns to be cost effective and although he was unsure of the current salary and cost to have our own operator, he believed that it would be more than what we are paying now no matter our route and we should have a plan. John thanked the Board stating that they are making positive moves forward. Jason suggested looking to DLS for wage comparison reports that are available where they could view the surrounding towns. Rich stated that the Select Board was committed to the work that is being done by the Board of Water Commissioners and wants to ensure that all the necessary funds are available for their needs to keep the town in compliance with DEP. Kathy commented that there is money out there for water and sewer, Rich stated that the Select Board would support their work and that they could work on any grants that are available. Kathe commented that the Select Board should keep in mind that the budget for the Water Department is \$40,000.00 for the year and is one that typically goes over budget. Andy mentioned that the SCADA system could be paid through free cash and through the ARPA funds. Jason stated that he had discussed this at the first ARPA meeting on Saturday the 23rd and funds could be available for this without hesitation.

Before moving on Bob wanted to discuss the water leak on Maple Street, he was informed that we are losing 10,000 gallons of water per day. Mass Rural Water came and looked at the area but had a problem with one of their instruments. He stated that he was told that they would not be coming back and that a contractor needed to be hired. John asked if they knew what Bernie was doing to locate the problem, Bob answered that Bernie was driving around trying to locate the source of the problem. Kathe asked Jason if he knew if the mill on Middlefield Road that has been purchased had turned on the water and was using much more than anticipated, Jason did not believe so. Bob asked if keys had been made for the Board to have access to the water treatment plant. Kathy commented that she did not believe that all the Commissioners needed to have a set of keys. When at the plant there needs to be a logbook of anyone on site to know who is in and out and if there is ever a problem the license still belongs to Bernie. Currently she handles the Water Department for Huntington as well and stated that they do not all have a set of keys for their plant. Bob stated that he did not care what is done in Huntington and he asked a simple question, "Where are the keys?" Kathy answered that she had them. Jason asked if Housatonic Labs were to call and say that they needed access to the plant on Thursday if that could happen, Kathy answered yes there would be no problem having someone open the gate for them. Jason suggested that they continue the discussion amongst the Board, Bob commented that it was critical that one Water Commissioner was present with Housatonic Labs for testing.

- **Discussion with vote to put up for sale the COA van and the Highway pickup.** At the Select Board meeting last week it was discussed that the COA van should be sold as it has not been used in a few years. Kathe also spoke with Carl regarding one of the pickups that is not currently being used by the Highway Department. He stated that he thought it would be smart to keep the truck for now, heading into winter it would be good to have as a back up in case there is a problem with one of the other trucks. It was discussed that the profit from the COA van when sold needed to be put into the town's general funds. Ann asked why the funds could not be given to the COA, she had the understanding that no town money had been used to purchase

the vehicle it was donated. Kathe stated that if Ann had documentation that she should bring it to her but without it the money needed to go back to the town. Jason commented that the sale of any municipal property is required to have the profit put to general funds, but it could be voted on at a Special Town Meeting.

Jason made the motion to sell the COA van, Rich 2nd, all voted Aye.

- **Town Administrator Update:**

- *Update on the CDBG Prospect St. project.* Kathe discussed that Jill and herself had met with Erica Johnson from PVPC last week to have an update on the project. She was asked to remind the Select Board that this project dates to 2018 and has already been engineered so there can be no changes. She explained that due to the ledge and the scope of the drainage project this is a high-ticket item. Erica was hoping to have phases one and two go out to bid in January.

Kathe also wanted to discuss something that had been brought up to her by Liz Massa from the Board of Health. She was told by Liz that she had been approached regarding hosting events in the Town Hall COA room that had been done prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. She was told that Kathe had been asked about starting this again and told them no and they believed Kathe was discriminating against them because we had allowed Tae Kwon Do to start again in the auditorium. Kathe stated that this was absolutely not the case, her number one reason was safety that we have worked really hard to keep the Town Hall safe and to date have had no Covid cases. Her second reason was that food is prepared in this area bringing a higher concern for sanitization. Her thought was that we should get through the holidays and make a decision after that. She brought it to the Select Board to make a decision and would honor whatever they decided. She stated that in her opinion the health of the staff was more important and that there could be another location that they could meet for now but was disheartened that they chose to go to the Board of Health instead of having an open discussion. John stated that he agreed with Kathe and that we should wait until after the holidays and we are working towards this. Rich asked how many people they were trying to have use the room, Kathe answered she thought six or so. Jason stated that he had a hard time with this because we are in a room now with more people than that which is ok, but we are telling COA that it is not ok for them. He believed that we should follow the recommendation from the Board of Health. Bob commented that this creates extra work for the COA to clean to ensure the cleanliness of the area when preparing food. Ann added that currently there are two people who prep meals and with winter the amount of meals increases which should be a priority for the COA. Rich asked what and how often people wanted to meet, Kathe answered that she was unsure how often, but she understood in the past they had a knitting group, to play mahjong, and watch movies. John stated that at the next meeting on the 8th we should discuss this with the Board of Health. Rich suggested the COA groups using the Chester Rail station as a location instead.

Public Comments and Questions:

Mary Ann asked Jason what the status of the mill on Middlefield Road was. Jason answered that there were permits that were not taken out but that he understood they are working on engineering plans for a leach field as the previous area did not perc. As of now there is no approved septic plan. Kathe mentioned that CMELD would like to know in the future if there is a new commercial property as it requires more energy. Jason continued stating that it is a \$1.5 million dollar project with a \$90,000.00 permit fee.

Jessica asked if Kathe had a timeline on the Prospect Street project and what happened if we were not approved for all phases. Kathe estimated February and explained that there is a one-month bidding process. John stated that as a drainage project he estimated things to start in May and that it would be extremely rare for only a portion of the project to be funded. Kathe added stating that phase one should have been completed already but due to the pandemic it was postponed.

Bob thanked Andy for his presentation and wanted to remind everyone of the Veteran's Day luncheon that will be hosted on November 11th. He hoped that the Select Board would attend and asked everyone to give him any names for residents that they should invite. He stated that at the first ARPA meeting that was hosted they came away with a few ideas of how the money should be spent. He added that in the past two audits the executive summary gave concerns on CMELD.

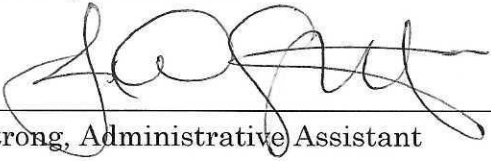
Jason stated that on Saturday the 30th the Recreation Committee will be hosting trunk or treat in the Emery Street ball field. They will also have a haunted trail and are going to confirm with Fire Chief Richie Small if they can have a bon fire. He stated that they have thirteen cars participating. Jason has been working on the discrepancies with the lease for the Chester Library. Mary Ann commented that the carpet in the library has been removed and the Trustees went into the building to view the progress. Under the carpet is a wood floor that they would like to keep. As of right now Servpro has not been there yet to clean, the ceilings and walls also should be painted and estimated a few months before they could return to the building, hoping for the beginning of the new year. John stated that they should check with a flooring contractor regarding the floors, he believed when they were done previously, they were told that they could not be sanded down anymore. Mary Ann also added that there are cracks in the walls and commented that everything needs to be structurally sound before moving things back. She stated that she was unsure if it was a wise investment to put so much money into a building that we do not own. Rich stated that we have a ninety-nine year lease and we should not give up the building. Jason commented that in the lease the space is meant to be used as a library only and was clearly defined. Rich stated that we could come up with something, a meeting room for the library as an example and that we could fight it legally if necessary.

Before closing Rich reminded the Select Board and Kathe that he would not be present for the next meeting on the 8th, he would call to participate. Kathe stated that the next meeting currently we have the Tax Classification hearing planned, meeting with the Board of Health as previously discussed, as well as discussing the acquisition of the old Chester Elementary School from William Ivey Long. Mary Ann stated that she had spoke with his assistant Donald who stated that he wanted to work something out, she knew that they were currently working to empty the building. Jason asked if everything had been submitted to the tax attorney to begin the tax title process, Mary Ann answered yes. Performing arts programs at Gateway and Westfield State have been contacted about the availability of some of the costumes and props and some of the display cases were donated to the Historical Society.

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

Meeting adjourned 8:56 PM

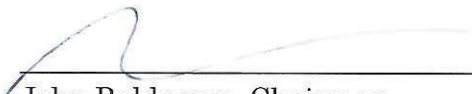
Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

11/2/21

Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

11/5/21

Date Signed

Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Jason Fergie, Clerk

11/8/21

Date Signed