



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

**Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

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. Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro was present with Water Commissioner Bob Daley, and Finance Committee member Andy Myers. Eric Kinsherf and Sara Hunter were participating remotely. There were a few Chester residents present as well as participating remotely. Per the agenda Highway Department applicant Tyler Cormier was present.

- **Discussion with Sara Hunter and Eric Kinsherf regarding free cash.**

Eric opened the discussion explaining where they were currently at. They plan to have the cash reconciliation completed by December 20<sup>th</sup> and January 10<sup>th</sup> go over everything with the Select Board. They are completing reconciliation of receivables as well as working with CMELD. Eric also explained that there was \$100,000.00 that should have been borrowed for two trucks for the Highway Department for FY21. However, the Treasurer at the time took it out of general funds and never actually borrowed the money. Eric explained that this will go against our free cash numbers. There also was a shared economical director position between us and a few other towns which went against us. Kathe explained that we paid the bill for this and were reimbursed by the other towns. John asked if the discrepancies that they had found earlier had been resolved. Sara answered yes they had, there was still some variances in a cash book, but everything had balanced. John thanked their team stating that he knew this was a lot of hours of work. Eric stated that he had been discussing the free cash numbers with Kathe and approximated between \$100,000.00 - \$200,000.00 for our free cash numbers this year but still had some reconciling left to do to finalize the number. Jason asked if that figure was before or after the money for the truck, Eric answered it was after he had already factored that in. Sara commented that Mary Ann had also been working hard and all have done a great job working together. Andy brought up outstanding taxes that have been affecting our free cash, it was explained that the figures in question add to approximately \$85,000.00 and are more than twenty years old, these are difficult to collect because of the age and Andy commented would never be collected. It was suggested that these be abated by the Assessors and that we use ARPA funds to pay the balance. Jason asked how this could be done, Mary Ann answered that it



was lost revenue. Jason stated that this is not lost revenue that can be attributed to the pandemic. Eric commented that there was a way to do this. Rich asked if any of this is current property owners. Mary Ann answered that it was about 30% but otherwise it is people who have been gone for some time. She explained that this goes back to 1987 and because of the time and record keeping there is no way for her to prove that these were not paid. She stated that the money needs to be off the books, and this is a good way to get rid of this once and for all. John stated that we should wait until we have our free cash number and make a decision.

- **Highway Foreman update: Discussion, interview, and possible vote to hire Tyler Cormier.**

Carl gave us an update on what the Highway Department has been working on. There still have been some issues with the Freightliner, an engine code was fixed just before the storm this past week. Carl also purchased cameras to go on the trucks to view into the hopper. He explained that it is much easier to be able to see what you have for a load without needing to climb on the truck during the snow with the concern of falling and getting hurt. They installed one already and it is working great.

Tyler Cormier was with us this evening for the Highway Department laborer position that has been posted. We have an employee that is out intermittently for medical reasons which makes it difficult going into the winter season, this position will help to fill the gap and Carl explained would be used similar to a contractor. Jason asked if Carl had an anticipated number of hours Tyler would be working. Carl answered that there would be three days as an expectation as well as during any storms. Kathe discussed that there are no benefits until you reach twenty hours and if he exceeded that we would need to change his status to full time. Tyler explained that he had all of the licenses necessary for Mass DOT and had also applied with them and is also on their civil service list. He was happy with this arrangement but if offered a position with DOT he was going to take it. Tyler went through Smith Vocational school and did an internship with the Becket Highway Department before graduating. Jason asked if he had worked with Becket through the winter, Tyler answered yes, and he only did not stay on with them because they did not have an open position.

Jason made the motion to higher Tyler Cormier for the part time laborer position with the Chester Highway Department, Rich 2<sup>nd</sup>, all voted Aye.

Jason next discussed with Carl his current schedule as he is taking his CDL classes. Jason commented that he thought that the timing to schedule the classes was odd for the winter. Carl answered that it had been suggested to him to do in the winter because there are no major projects being done and the crew could handle a storm without him for a few hours however he is always accessible by phone during the day. Carl also told us that his permit expires at the end of January, and he has simply been trying to fit it in. John asked how much time he had left, Carl estimated fifty to sixty hours. Jason asked Carl how he was managing the other employees while he was in class. Carl answered again that he was available by phone, but he gives them all his expectations of the duties for the day. Jason asked Carl if he could let Kathe know on the days that he is in class and the tasks that he has left for the crew. Rich added that the Town Administrator should know where key people are at all times and if they are available. Carl answered that he would do that. Jason stated that the working document that has been discussed to list projects for the Highway Department needs to be utilized. Carl stated that he had been told that Jason would be helping to create that, which he replied that he would and they could discuss this further.



Rich asked Carl if all of the equipment was ready for the winter season. Carl answered no that they are always working on things, the International, Freightliner, and the grader are good. He stated that the white 550 was being looked at tomorrow and has had issues since the emissions recall was addressed. Carl also let us know that they were going to be working on the loader tomorrow. Rich asked what percentage of the work being done on the equipment is being completed by town employees and what is being sent out or contracted. Carl answered that it depends on what breaks or what is needed, oil and other fluids being changed they can take care of but something like air brakes or the engine codes are done outside because we do not have the proper equipment, Carl estimated that it is fifty-fifty.

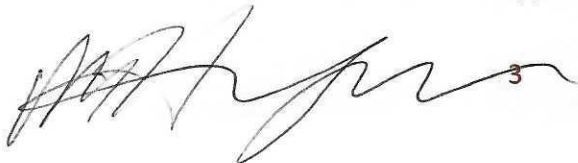
- **Town Administrator update:**

Kathe discussed that this morning she received an email letting her know that William Ivey Long has finished emptying the old Chester Elementary school across from the Town Hall, they are planning to contact CMELD about shutting off the electricity. Once the paperwork has been completed to transfer the deed, we can contact MIIA about getting our insurance quote. John stated that he had spoke with Town Council Tom Mullen who gave him some recommendations. One thing that Tom suggested was that we evaluate the building before insuring it to determine the policy. We could possibly do a fire or water policy or liability only. Rich and Jason agreed, Rich stating that he believed we should pursue a basic policy with minimum fire and liability. John commented that we also should speak with CMELD about the power and keep it on for the time being because the lights for the parking lot are attached and should remain on.

Rich made the motion to move forward with the recommendation of Town Council and sign the deed in lieu of foreclosure for the property at 10 Middlefield Road, Jason 2<sup>nd</sup>, al voted Aye.

Kathe stated that the Select Board should stay for a few minutes at the close of the meeting so that they can sign the deed. Andy stated that he thought before we signed anything and took possession that we should do a walk through of the building. John stated that he knew there had been no damage since moving things out, Kathe commented that we have a key to the building, and we can do a walk through at any point.

Kathe then went on to discuss the budget request form that had also been discussed at the last meeting on December 6<sup>th</sup>. Kathe explained that she had sent the new budget sheet out last week to everyone which was approved last year for use. Kathe stated that she was not trying to go around anyone but simply wanted to get things started. Andy reviewed the sheet and simplified it as he stated last week, he felt that the new form was long and would not get completed. Kathe explained that her interest in adding to the form was to have the departments all more involved. She stated that she would like to have the departments all thinking about what their revenue might be as well as looking at if they will go over budget. Kathe requested that these two forms be combined to create a good budget analysis also pointing out that it is time for the town to start capital planning. Each of the departments should meet and present their budget to the Finance Committee as well as the Select Board so everyone is aware and on the same page and we can plan ahead and work together. Andy stated that the new form contains some things that the Town Administrator would like and things that the Finance Committee would like. He commented that creating the budget is difficult enough and that we all need to be on the same page. The questions regarding staff he did not feel were necessary because we already know what would be happening with staff positions. John commented that





he agreed with the questions about staffing, but he felt that it would be beneficial to have departments involved but commented that this form may be a different project than the budget request form. Jason stated that he also agreed regarding the questions for staffing as he did not feel that it applied. He commented that he did not see why the information requested would not be helpful to have. Specifically asking about projected revenue and if departments felt they would go over budget, how could revenue be projected without checking with the departments. Also, the departments do not expect to go over budget, but Jason stated why not know and hear from them ahead of time if there are upcoming unexpected expenses they have encountered. Andy stated that maybe this was a chance at a new direction but that if the Select Board were going in this direction, he would not be apart of it. Andy asked what the departments all thought of the new form. Kathe stated that only one the Police Department has asked about it and Kathe explained to Chief Weidhaas that if something did not apply to her, she simply needed to write not applicable, N/A. John commented that he respected both points made and stated that Andy has been an asset that the town can not afford to lose, there needs to be a middle ground. Jason commented that the form could be used and if there is information that the Finance Committee does not need, they do not need to use it and can ignore it. Again, commenting that he did not understand why this is information that we would not want to have, working in other towns if he does not supply the information, he is level funded for his budget. Kathe stated again that her suggestion was to integrate both, commenting that she would remove the section pertaining to staff and forward a new copy to Andy.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

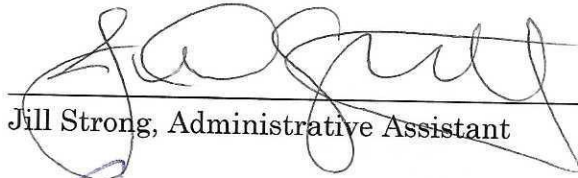
Andy discussed findings regarding the tax rate, our rate for this coming year should be \$19.18 which is down 6.4%. He stated that the average values are up 9.4% at an average of \$195,000.00. Compared to the surrounding towns Chester has the second highest tax rate and as of now Russell is the only town with the tax rate certified.

Andy also asked about free cash and the ARPA funds and wanted to know when we would be making decisions. Andy was in favor of saving our free cash and expending ARPA funds. Jason stated that as the representative for the ARPA funds he held meetings for suggestions, and they have been making decisions as suggestions come up. He stated that we have until 2025 to use the funds and thought that the date may even been extended. Jessica asked if we needed to prove where the ARPA funds were spent to ensure it followed the rules. Jason answered yes that he needs to turn in all the information to the U.S. Department of Treasury. John stated that after free cash was finalized that we could take a look at everything and make some decisions.


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

**Meeting Adjourned 7:52 PM**


Respectfully Submitted

  
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Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

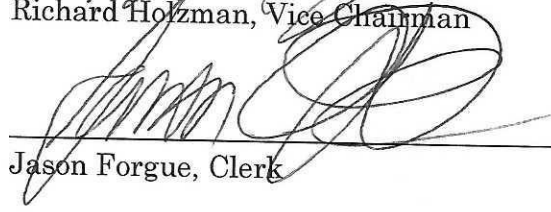
12/21/21  
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Date Signed

  
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John Baldasaro, Chairman

1/3/22  
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Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

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Jason Forgue, Clerk

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