



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

**Monday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022**

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

Select Board members John Baldasaro, Richard Holzman, and Jason Forgue present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, and Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease. Water Commissioner Bob Daly was present with Andy Myers and a few residents. Elizabeth, Liz, Massa from the Board of Health participated remotely as well as a few residents.

John opened the meeting at 6:00 PM warrants, minutes, and any correspondence was signed.

- **Continued discussion of using Code Red robo calls.**

As last week Jason was absent John gave a quick recap of this discussion, explaining that Rich felt that this should be used as notification for any official town functions. John disagreed stating that he felt this would lead to overuse, the discussion was tabled until this week when they would have the third Select Board member to assist with making the decision. Rich commented that his view was this was a fundamental use for official notice of town business and used to ensure security and safety of our residents. Bob commented that he did not feel any resident thought that this service was not a great value and that we should collect data to make the decision. John stated that he had no problem with a notification system but thought there should be another option so residents could opt to only receive the emergency calls rather than various notifications that meetings and the foot clinic has been cancelled. Jason stated that he agreed with John this service should be used for emergency information only stating that there is no reason if the foot clinic is cancelled those few people scheduled for appointments can be called individually. John suggested a new sign up so that residents can differentiate the notification system and what messages they would like to receive. Rich stated that he was fine with that, John commented they they would reach out to Chief Weidhaas to discuss the options for changing this service and create dedicated users.

- **Review of STM Warrant for February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Special Town Meeting.**

Kathe had drafted the warrant for the Special Town Meeting which she had provided a copy to the Select Board to review, the warrant consists of ten articles. Kathe stated that she

had one correction to make to Article Five regarding the Hilltown Ambulance Fund. John asked Kathe if there was anything that was not expected. Kathe answered no, the main reason for this meeting would be to allocate Free Cash which had not been certified at the Annual Town Meeting in June of last year. Andy had a few questions, he asked if Articles Two and Three which is allocating funds for the Permit Eyes program is a new expense. Kathe stated that this was being done in lieu of the Clerk position that was created for the Board of Health. They had decided that if they were to have access to this program, they would not need this position as this would take care of the additional paperwork for the various permits that are filed with them. The expense consists of the yearly maintenance fee as well as additional costs to set up the program with new users. Andy asked if this was cost justified, Kathe answered yes that we could not hire a person to fill the position for the cost of using the program. John asked Jason if this was common for everyone to use as he is currently using it for building permits. Jason answered yes Blandford, Chesterfield, Cummington, and Huntington all have started to use this. Liz stated that using this program allows the Board of Health to accept credit card payments as well.

Andy commented that when speaking with our accountant Erik Kinshurf Erik suggested using ARPA funds rather than free cash and that this should be considered with moving funds and make a decision that is best for the town. Jason stated that this was suggested to take care of the balance that the town has been carrying in taxes that can not be collected which was discussed at a previous meeting. The balance is \$80,000.00 and Jason did not see the difference of which account it was being used from as an end result it is the same money. John stated that it would be nice to get that off of the balance sheet, but he was not in favor of deciding to use ARPA funds for this without input from residents, the Select Board has been transparent about what the ARPA funds can and will be used for. Jason agreed and commented that it would be difficult to explain when there is money to be spent on water as well as our roads. Rich stated that this balance is negatively impacting the finances of the community and did not see the problem with doing this. There are many grants that look promising in the way of infrastructure, bridges, and roads. John stated that although things did look promising it is different than having the \$400,000.00 in our account from ARPA that we can decide how it is used. Andy suggested having a meeting with the Select Board, the Finance Committee, as well as Erik to discuss options.

Andy discussed Articles Six through Eight stating that he believed earmarking these funds is unnecessary and restricting funds when they could be taken from Stabilization. He also commented that on the Warrant it is marked that these require a majority vote and he thought it would require a two thirds vote. Kathe stated that she would check with Town Council Tom Mullen about the required vote. Kathe went on to explain that these would be to create a rainy-day fund and a lot of communities do this specifically building maintenance and road repairs so that the money can not be taken for other purposes. Kathe asked if the Select Board would like to keep these in the Warrant, John answered yes and that it could be discussed on the floor. Rich made the motion to accept the articles as written, Jason seconded, all voted Aye.

Andy went on to discuss Free Cash which has been certified and had an information sheet for the Select Board. The Free Cash calculation is \$161,741.00 and was certified on January 28<sup>th</sup>. John stated that he was happy to have this completed and that the Finance Team

had done a great job. There were many roadblocks, but they were able to balance everything and next year this should be a much quicker process.

- **Mary Ann Pease update on Ambulance Organization.**

Mary Ann discussed the Hilltown Community Ambulance Association which had a meeting last week. Mary Ann had a copy of the presentation slides from the meeting that she provided to the Select Board, she thanked Jason for representing Chester and attending the meeting. She stated that currently in their contract they guarantee 66% paramedic coverage and with their current staff after losing two full time people they can not do that. For FY23 they are proposing that in the contract they will remove the clause guaranteeing 66% paramedic coverage and provide no increase in the costs to the towns. To guarantee this they would need to increase costs by 37% and needs to be agreed upon by all towns which they did not believe would happen, stating most communities they did not believe would be able to absorb the increase, they will revisit this again in January of 2023.

Mary Ann explained that they did a survey and the biggest issues they had amongst employees were pay and benefits. The Ambulance is located in an old Eversource garage, and they have no overnight facilities to accommodate certain shifts. They did give raises in January to be competitive, but they are still having trouble filling positions which is a common problem in the medical field currently. They have had good luck with donations, and they also received \$20,000.00 from the subscription program. Mary Ann stated that including them there are only four non-profit ambulances in the state, and they serve six towns. The next meeting is February 6<sup>th</sup>, and the Select Board should discuss this and let them know by then.

- **Town Administrator Update:**

Kathe let us know that budgets are due this week by Friday the 4<sup>th</sup>. So far she has only received two and will be letting everyone know that if she does not receive them the department's will be level funded. Erik asked if we would be accepting the mileage rate established by the IRS or if we would be voting our own. John stated that it made sense to accept what was established by the IRS rather than vote for this each year.

The LRRP grant that we have applied for we have heard that the town did not receive. Kathe reached out to other towns and only seven communities were chosen. Jason asked if we had heard anything regarding the "big check," and what we would receive from the press conference with Senator Hinds. Kathe stated that unfortunately when she reached out to Senator Hinds' staff, she was told that this has been moved to a committee and they are now deciding how the towns would need to apply for this money. She told them that with the amount of paperwork that we have filled out for the FEMA and MEMA requests that were denied she felt this was extremely unfair we would once again need to apply for this money and was disappointed. She suggested after reaching out to Representative Blais and Jose Delgado the Representative for the Western Mass office for Governor Baker that this be distributed and added to Chapter 90 money to ensure a specific use.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

Kathy Engwer asked if tax work off was on the Warrant. Mary Ann stated that there needed to be a meeting with the Assessors to sign off on this. Kathe stated that it would not be present on this Warrant but would be added for the Annual Town Meeting in June.

Bob stated that he has taken on the task for the Water Commissioners the budget and would have this to Kathe by Friday. He stated that their budget currently only has three line

items and suggested adding a fourth. They are still waiting on the quote for replacing the calibration equipment as well as the SCADA system. He stated that they are also looking into a private provider to take care of the hydrant flushing. John and Jason both agreed that he should have in their budget all items that they deem necessary and are asking for. Once they have the budget the Select Board can discuss it with them if they have any questions. Mary Ann asked if Tom Bean was a Water Commissioner as she has heard his name discussed with many things that they are currently working on. Bob answered not yet, they were informed that Kathy Engwer would be moving out of Chester and would then resign, and Tom would be hopefully replacing her when this happens.

Jason stated that they have an approved Regional Agreement for the school. He commented that it was mostly generic language discussing the alternative method. The next budget hearing is next week but it seems at the next Annual Meeting that the Regional Agreement will be completed. Jason went on to discuss a few of the problem properties that were discussed at the last meeting. He stated that he has received \$19,000.00 in fines from Prospect Street and the property in question on Emery Street has been listed for sale.

Jason stated that he had a good conversation with Gary from CMELD about connecting the solar at the town garage. Gary stated that they do not need to connect the buildings just a meter which they were ok with as long as the rate we receive is what is being put in. John stated that CMELD has a preliminary purchase power agreement that is open for discussion and that CMELD would like to have a meeting with the Select Board to discuss and finalize. Jason stated that we can come up with the agreement and move forward. Gary is able to make the connection and stated that going overhead was fine and not necessary to go underground. Rich asked if Elm Electric was out of the picture. Jason stated that he believed so, but it would be whoever Gary wanted to bring in for assistance. Bob asked if a connection could be made to provide heat to the water shed, Jason stated that this had not been discussed but he could look into it.

Andy asked if Article Four regarding the purchase of firearms and pay for training for the Police Department is shared with Blandford. Kathe answered yes that the amount was to cover our portion of the bill.

Before closing Bob thanked Liz for the vaccine clinic last week and asked if she had the number of people who attended. Liz replied that the total count was one hundred.

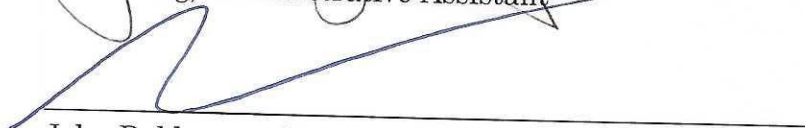
Jason made the motion to adjourn into an Executive Session to discuss the reputation character, physical condition or mental health of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of or complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee staff member or individual, Rich seconded, all voted Aye. Because the meeting involves an individual who is a family member to John, he has recused himself and was instructed by Tom Mullen that he should not be in the room.

**Meeting Adjourned 7:15 PM**

Respectfully Submitted

  
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Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

2/3/22  
Date Signed

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
John Baldasaro, Chairman

2/28/22  
Date Signed

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jason Fogue, Clerk

2/28/22  
Date Signed

