



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

**Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022**

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro and Jason Fogue were present, Richard Holzman participated virtually. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, and Town Clerk Terry Donovan. Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro was present with Finance Committee members Andy Myers and Andy Sutton along with Library Trustee Jane Sutton and Water Commissioner Bob Daley.

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

- **Bid opening for Vocational transportation:**

John stated that we only received one bid for transportation which is from Lecrenski. Kathe stated that the bid was posted on the town website as well as COMMBUYS, so it was available. The total bid for the year was \$310,815.00 with Chester's portion being \$41,307.50. There was an additional fee of \$4,725.00 for a performance bond which John explained was there if throughout the year we were unsatisfied with their performance would assist in covering costs to put this back out to bid. Kathe stated this was part of the package, John stated yes it was there last year and they chose to waive this as the risk is minimal and suggested waiving it again this year.

Jason made the motion to approve the bid as written, John seconded, all voted Aye.

Rich asked how the bid compared to last year, John answered that it was a two and a half percent increase, Andy commenting that the Finance Committee had budgeted for five percent.

Jason made the motion not to require the performance bond as stated in the contract, John seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Continued discussion of FY23 Budget:**

John opened the discussion stating that the Board had discussed the budget last week with the Finance Committee and there were a few issues that they wanted worked out this week. Andy Myers stated that the Finance Committee had prepared a cost-of-living increase sheet comparing the two and a half percent they had originally recommended vs. three and five percent increases which he provided to the Select Board. He stated that CMELD has decided to go with a three percent increase and thought that the town could do the same. John stated that

his concern was that this year has been extraordinary with inflation, Jason agreed, and his suggestion was five percent for everyone other than the Highway Department which he had different recommendations. Jason commented that if we were to in fact call this a cost of living increase it should reflect average inflation, mentioning that Social Security was going up five point nine percent this year.

John asked Jason what his suggestions were for the Highway Department. Jason answered that he believed that we needed to pursue filling the Superintendent position and to successfully fill the position the salary needed to be competitive. The total salary excluding the Administrative Assistant was at \$221,760.00 vs. \$210,650.00 this year. Jason suggested the Superintendent be paid at \$29.00 per hour, a Foreman at \$25.00 per hour, and two laborers at \$23.00 per hour all fully licensed. John stated that the current starting rate is \$21.42 per hour, and Jason's suggestions bring us much closer to market rate. Jason stated that although we can not do it all in one year, it was time to start improving the salary to make the positions more attractive. John stated that as Carl is his brother, he would abstain from this vote but agreed with Jason's views that it was time to make these positions more attractive. Rich stated that he agreed but wanted it to be clear that it was his belief that the Highway Superintendent position should be a salaried position. Jason asked Rich if that would be included with snow removal or without, Rich answered that it was including. Jason stated that may deter a Superintendent and why would they plow outside of the normal 9:00 – 3:00 workday. Rich stated that it is the same as with the Town Administrator there are things that fall outside the normal workday that are required to be done for the functions of the town. Jason stated that did not need to be decided on today and that the total number could be allocated to the budget if all were ok with the numbers, Rich, and John both agreed that they were.

Before moving on Bob commented that he had a suggestion to have a hard look at the second largest budget for the town and look at different business models of using more contract services to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the town. John stated that he was not opposed to the idea however the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting needs to be prepared in the next few weeks. Jason agreed and stated that this has been talked about repetitively, but we need actual numbers. Rich stated that he has asked for this information repeatedly from Carl. John stated that to organize this you would need to work with several different entities to prepare the information and did not think Carl nor anyone else within the Town had the capability or time to do this. Bob suggested using PVPC to do a study, John stated that may be a possibility and was open to that if PVPC could dedicate someone to looking at the cost of local laborers. Rich stated that he could reach out to PVPC to see what they could do for us. Jason asked if everyone was comfortable with the proposed numbers with the total salary including the Administrative Assistant to be \$225,760.00, John and Rich both stated that they were.

The next position to be discussed was the Administrative Assistant, John stated that he would like to fund the position as requested as working with Jill not only are the minutes done in a timely manner, but she has stepped into the Emergency Management Director position going to several trainings and believed she was a critical asset to the town. Jason agreed stating that he had the same suggestion. Andy commented that everyone in Town Hall is doing a great job and wanted to be fair to other departments and not play favorites. He stated that taking on the Emergency Management position carries its own budget perhaps some of which could be used toward a stipend. Kathe commented that the increase also included an increase in hours

from fifteen to eighteen hours per week. Rich stated that he was comfortable with the increase as it included the increase of time, John and Jason agreed they had no problem with this.

John went on to discuss the Assessor's Clerk Assistant position which had been funded at \$8,000.00 rather than the \$4,000.00 requested. John stated that as the position has yet to be advertised, he was unsure if it was necessary to add more money, Jason agreed stating that the position has been discussed for three years and is necessary and should be posted. Rich stated that his concern outside of compensation is to have the number of hours necessary available to the office to meet the challenges. Jason stated that there was a twenty five percent increase to the department and should demonstrate that they are willing to invest in the department.

The next thing discussed was the audit expense which Jason asked if this was a bid price or just estimated that it would go up. Kathe answered that it was just estimated, although this year they explained that things went much smoother and as discussed at the previous meeting CMELD should be contributing to the cost. Jason agreed and stated that his suggestion is that the town's cost be budgeted at \$15,000.00 with the remainder to be taken care of by CMELD as the auditors explained that twenty percent of their time is spent on them. Jason stated that his thoughts were that since we just came out of a clean audit, and everything is balanced the cost would go down not up. John stated that we may need to put together an article for the Annual Town Meeting to be discussed on town floor CMELD contributing to the costs and agreed that \$15,000.00 for the town budget was appropriate.

Moving on John stated that his thought was that the Town Clerk salary should also be raised the five percent cost of living increase, Rich and Jason agreed. The next account John addressed was the Highway Department gas, oil, and diesel account. The account for this year was budgeted at \$23,000.00, for the coming year was requested at \$35,000.00, and the Finance Committee suggested the increase be lowered to only a five percent increase at \$24,150.00. John stated that the cost of diesel alone has gone up tremendously and has been increasing again this week. Rich asked if we had any rate guarantee though state contracts, John answered no the pumps are taken care of by CMELD and as of now they are not put out to bid. He explained that the heating oil is through contracts that Kathe puts together but the fuel pumps have always been CMELD but felt that this is something we need to get some control over. Staying with the Highway Department we moved on to the tree removal account, the account this year was budgeted at \$16,500.00, the coming year was requested at \$61,200.00, Finance Committee suggested that it be level funded and keep the budget at \$16,500.00. As tree removal has been a topic of discussion at several meetings the Select Board all suggested to increase the budget to \$20,000.00. Andy asked if some of the storm relief money or ARPA could be used to catch us up. John stated that that was not the purpose and there is no catch up the list of things to take care of every year changes and did not think an amount should be earmarked to catch up and that this should be a new normal of what is spent yearly. Rich stated that he had spoken with some of the tree trimmers who have already done work in the town and that they explained it would take six months and approximately \$350,000.00 to \$400,000.00 to get us to a satisfactory position. He commented that we need to be concerned with safety, security, and the quality of the roads. Jason asked Rich if he was comfortable with allocating \$20,000.00 to the budget, Rich answered yes.

The next to be discussed was the library salary, Jason explained that to his understanding most of the increase was due to the request for additional hours and that two

people would be on site at all times. This was not only for the safety of employees but to improve efficiency as well. Jason stated that the new librarian had agreed to a time of nine months, maximum of one year and to ensure this remained a position that is fillable by an appropriate person he would like to fund this. John and Rich agreed to fund as requested.

We moved on to the Police Department budget, John stated that this was important to fund as an increase in patrol hours, number of officers as well as a salary increase for the Chief. The increase in hours provided more coverage in each of the towns and by this time next year John explained that all of the officers would be full time academy trained. John was in favor of funding as requested. Jason stated that his suggestion was to split the coverage increase over two years, commenting that he spoke with the Select Board Chair in Blandford, and they were meeting with their Finance Committee this week to go over things. Rich stated that we needed to have our discussion with Blandford as this is a shared service. John agreed but stated that we should decide what we are comfortable with first so that we go into the meeting prepared. Jason stated that as far as he was aware Blandford had done an increase of two and a quarter percent across the board for everyone. Rich asked what the requested was vs. the suggestion from the Finance Committee, Jason answered that the Chief salary was requested at a \$10,500.00 increase with a suggestion of \$3,000.00, and the Department salaries were requested at a \$10,158.00 increase with a suggestion of \$1,605.00 increase from the Finance Committee. Jason suggested the Chief salary to be increased to \$35,000.00 and officers to \$21,775.00, Rich stated that he was ok with that. John stated that when the departments were combined the discussion and expectations were that the towns would have sixteen hours of coverage all seven days a week. This is a step toward that and is what the citizens who voted for this are expecting and this should be presented to the town to vote. Jason stated that he was hopeful that adding the Administrative Assistant would allow for the Chief to have more time outside of the office and have more patrol hours.

The next to be discussed was the Building Inspector salary, John asked Jason what the other towns he works for had as a range. Jason answered that the range was from Blandford at \$11,500.00 to \$21,000.00 in Blandford, Cumington and Chesterfield were in the middle. John asked how many requests for permits and inspections he has per year. Jason answered that he did not have the exact figures on hand, they were all in the permit eyes system, but explained that in Chester he spent more time doing code enforcement than in any of the other towns. John asked what the amount of fines that were collected had reached, Jason answered collected was at \$38,500.00 and there were over \$100,000.00 outstanding. John stated that this was significant and that he does a great job and has helped to bring many problem properties into compliance. Rich agreed and that it is important to support this work as we are getting results and wanted to fund as requested, John agreed. Bob asked if part of the raise could be funded through the revolving account, Jason stated that the short answer is no it was a conflict.

We moved on to Town Hall expenses which John commented that he believed should be funded as requested. The past few years we have needed a reserve fund transfer to pay the remaining bills and he believed that the \$18,000.00 that was requested was a true statement to what it takes. Rich asked what was covered under those expenses, Kathe answered it paid heat, electric, basic supplies, as well as any expenses for the elevator. Jason and Rich both agreed stating that it should be funded as requested. Jason asked what account the mowing on town property is taken from, Kathe answered all mowing is taken from the cemetery account. Jason

explained that he was in the process of getting a quote from Sam Mazzaferro for doing landscaping at Emery field but was interested in including the maintenance of all town properties. The preliminary quote for Emery field was \$200.00 for every mow and \$2,700.00 to aerate and seed however Jason thought he could buy the seed and fertilizer which may lower the cost. Kathe suggested creating a schedule for all mowing as part of the proposal so that there is a rotation of all the properties. Jason agreed that was a good idea and suggested making a new line item for property maintenance. Kathe agreed stating that he should get a price for all the properties including the Hamden Street Park which is not currently taken care of.

Moving on Jason suggested that for the Vocational student account a buffer student should be factored in so that the budget allows if someone moves throughout the year, John and Rich agreed. The Select Board then discussed the Capital Requests that they all agreed were legitimate and had no opposition mentioning that the \$7,500.00 for the Fire Department heating upgrade would be taken from ARPA. They went on to discuss the quote that they received per the discussion at the last meeting that while we are looking at other heating options to get a quote to transition from oil to propane. John stated that the quote received was for \$15,590.00 and they were unsure if this included the purchase of two tanks. Rich commented that he understood that there were unused tanks at the Highway Department that could possibly be used. Kathe stated that she was unsure if that was the case and if so, there would be a cost to move the tanks which would need to be looked at. The Highway Department capital requests were then discussed which totaled \$700,000.00, John stated that since we will be having PVPC look into contract services that this should be put on hold and not factored into this year's budget. Jason and Rich agreed Jason stated that it may be worth creating an equipment fund similar to what we have for the Fire Truck, Rich agreed.

- **Discussion for MVP application of Rural Dirt Roads Resilience Project:**

Kathe discussed the MVP application which is a combined project with Middlefield and Blandford. We are currently certified as an MVP town and Middlefield is working on their certification. This project will rate all the dirt roads and culverts as well as work with the Hitchcock school focusing on beavers. There is a match of ten percent total out of the budget divided by the three towns which would be three and a half to four percent for Chester and can be an in-kind match, Kathe stated that the total applied for was \$250,000.00. As of now all she needed was the support of the Select Board as this is a two-year grant and nothing will kick in until FY23. Kathe explained that this will help with applying for other grants especially hazard mitigation down the road.

Jason made the motion to support the MVP application and committed to a three and a half to four percent match, John seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Continued discussion about Chester Theatre renting 10 Middlefield Rd. and updating women's room in Town Hall.**

The Theatre is finishing the renovations on the bathroom in the lower level and wanted to move forward on the renovations to the bathroom on the main floor. They are now willing to split the cost in half with us for replacing the linoleum as well as painting which they estimated to be between \$2,200.00 - \$2,400.00. Kathe explained that we have extra money in the Veteran's account that can be used as a reserve fund transfer to cover this. To move forward on the rental of 10 Middlefield Rd. Kathe is waiting on a proper insurance quote. She has received a new quote from MIIA that will not require the removal of the playground equipment but still

needs to get further information. John stated that if she was having trouble to pass along the contact information to him and he would be happy to reach out.

- **Town Administrator:**

Kathe had nothing further for us.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

John wanted to discuss an idea that he had, due to an increase in complaints against the town as well as other residents he wanted to look into starting a program that would charge a fee for the use of town services if these complaints were repetitive and found unwarranted. The continued use and abuse of the time of the Building Inspector, Board of Health, as well as the Police Department is being used as an agenda to negatively impact neighbors. Jason commented that a few years ago when the building code enforcement first started, he warned that this would be a by product as many are an ongoing neighborly dispute that he has now gotten in the middle of. John stated that if these are founded it is fine to go forward but when a situation has been found upon investigation after multiple times to be unwarranted this is when this should come into play. Rich stated that we should get the opinion of Town Counsel about what can be done if we feel this is harassment, John agreed that was the next step.

Kathe stated that during the meeting she received a message from Chief Weidhaas that Blandford let her know that they did not get the grant for the new cruiser entered in time so were not going to be eligible for the grant. She went on to discuss a One Stop Project for a feasibility study that opened today but was due by June 3<sup>rd</sup> and she was concerned about getting it done in time. She also discussed that last Thursday DOT released winter recovery assistance which we will be receiving \$192,225.00. She explained that this money needs to be used by June 2023 and had very specific guidelines but as of now she only needed to send out an email that lists the authorized signature for the account. John stated that it was ok with him to have him listed, Kathe said that she would take care of this in the morning. John said that this was great news to have this along with the storm relief and hoped that we could fix Abbott Hill once and for all.

Rich stated that he has listened and has been apart of the discussions of the ongoing solar issue at the town garage and lots of hard work has been done but we need to figure out a way to get this hooked up once and for all for the best interest of the town. John and Jason both agreed that they would like this hooked up as well, but John stated he would not sign off on the proposal from Elm that was only for them hooking up the meter.

Andy stated that this Sunday May 8<sup>th</sup> is the pancake breakfast at the Littleville Fairgrounds. He stated that they need help with trying to get a cell and internet connection on the property and thought because we have a contract with Comcast, we may be able to negotiate something better for them. John suggested reaching out to Eileen our contact with Comcast to see what they can do for us. Kathe also mentioned using MEMA, Jill commented that at their training last week they were discussing the fair and a concert that has been in discussions and the concern from MEMA that there is not service once you are on your way to the property. Kathe explained that to her understanding MEMA has temporary towers that could be used free of charge while the fair is running and that they could reach out to MEMA to find out how they needed to apply for this. Jason also suggested contacting the school as they had received through the pandemic relief hot spots for students that did not have internet access at home, and we could see if they could be borrowed.

Andy also discussed that he had heard that Huntington is facing some challenges with their budget, they will be putting the ambulance as well as their Library as an override. John thanked him for this information stating that he knew there were factors against the ambulance.

Bob wanted everyone to know that next Monday the 9<sup>th</sup> there would be a senior picnic hosted at the Train station. Terry asked regarding the mowing that Jason had brought up would this be going out to bid. Jason stated that if it was under a certain amount, it would not be required however they were happy to reach out to others once a schedule had been created. Terry also reminded everyone to come out to vote on Saturday.

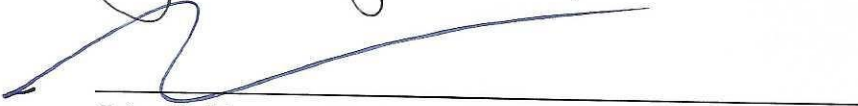
Jason made the motion to adjourn, John seconded, all voted Aye.

**Meeting Adjourned 8:40 PM**

Respectfully Submitted

  
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Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

5/5/22  
Date Signed

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

5/9/22  
Date Signed

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

9/9/22  
Date Signed

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

5/9/22  
Date Signed

