



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

Monday, April 25th, 2022

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Jason Fogue, and Richard Holzman were present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Kathe Warden, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, and Town Clerk Terry Donovan. Police Chief Tammy Weidhaas was present with Highway Foreman Carl Baldasaro, and Water Commissioners Bob Daley and Lyle Snide. Finance Committee members Andy Myers, Andy Sutton, and Library Trustee Jane Sutton were also present. Per the agenda Ron Ouimette and Auditors David Irwin and Joe Collins from Adelson & Company were present. Treasurer Sara Hunter, and Town Accountant Eric Kinsherf with Janice Boucher participated remotely, along with Lora Wade and a few other residents.

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

- **Discussion with Ron Ouimette about road issues:**

Ron was with us this evening to discuss an issue on his property that resulted from a storm in 2020. Ron explained that he believed the dates to be August 12th, 13th, and 14th of 2020 which resulted in an amount of debris while the road was being graded being pushed onto the stonewall that runs along the road and his property. He explained that this section had been maintained by himself and his wife and had planted grass and flowers along the stonewall. He had contacted Carl and Kathe the week after who came to view the damage and was told that the next time a piece of equipment that was capable of doing the work was on the road, they would do the repairs. John asked Carl if he indeed had seen the damage, Carl stated that Ron was accurate and that he and Kathe had viewed the property after it had happened. Carl explained that Ron Radwich who works for the Highway Department had been grading and that the Ouimette's was not the only property that was disturbed. He stated that a large part of the stonewall had been covered for some time prior to the problem and as Ron had mentioned it is in fact a wetland on both sides of the road and was hesitant to dig up anything beyond the small amount of debris that touched the stonewall directly in front of the Ouimette's property. John asked if the property was in fact Ouimette's or was it town property considering the width of the road, Carl answered that it was indeed town property. John stated that typically a dirt road

the width is whatever you can get, all agreed that it was a narrow section that was in discussion, and to John's knowledge the width of the road should be thirty-two feet. John asked if they had come to an agreement of what would be done, they both answered that it was made at the initial discussion in 2020. Kathe stated that the agreement had been as Mr. Ouimette had previously stated that the next time a piece of equipment was available the Highway Department would clean out the area, she commented that as they can not get close to the stone wall it would not be perfect. Rich stated that in his opinion it is the requirement and responsibility of the town and the Highway Department to maintain the historic stonewalls. The Highway Department over the years has dug up property for culverts and other road projects covering stonewalls on various roads throughout the town leaving them looking unsightly and devaluing property. Ron asked if it would be allowed for him to have a contractor fix the wall, he explained that he wanted to ask permission as he understood the machine would need to be on town property to access the wall and may be in the road at times while getting the work accomplished. John asked how deep he would be having them dig, which Ron replied it would be two feet max. Jason stated that we can not tell you what you can or can not do on your property however John did comment that he was unsure about digging on the roadside and creating a large ditch. Carl stated that he agreed that the stonewalls need to be maintained and has expressed to the other members of the Highway Department that they should not be disturbed. Ron stated that he was interested in having Myron Marcoulier there to do the work and had contacted the Conservation Commission to inform them of the work but has not heard back. John stated that he had no issue with Myron having a mini excavator there to do the work. Carl asked if Ron would keep in touch with him so he was aware of when this would take place, Ron agreed that he would and thanked the Select Board for their time.

- **Discussion with Police Chief Weidhaas about establishing a revolving account for cruiser expenses and maintenance that would be funded through detail charges and increasing the detail rate.**

Chief Weidhaas joined us and had a handout for the Select Board to view. The first discussion was the rate increase for details which she suggested go from \$50.00 to \$55.00 per hour. After speaking with other officers, it had been quite a few years since the last time this was increased in Chester. Another idea that she brought to the table was in addition to the officer detail, charge a separate fee of \$20.00 per hour for the use of a cruiser. She explained that many other towns are doing this, and Kathe had reached out to Granville which put this in place to learn about how they had done this. The funds for this would be placed in a police equipment account to be used for all cruiser maintenance and once the account reaches a certain amount can be used to fully or partially fund a new cruiser. The total billable detail hours from April last year until present has been 2,749 hours and estimated half of that was details requiring a cruiser which would equal 1,374.5 hours and if we had charged the fee for the cruiser the account would already hold \$27,490.00. John stated that this was a good idea and knew that many other towns did this already. Jason asked if this would need to go to town floor at the Annual Town Meeting, Kathe answered yes so that spending limits can be established. Rich asked if details varied in the amount of time billed, Chief Weidhaas answered that it is billed in four and eight hour increments and beyond. John commented that this was standard procedure not just Chester's policy. Jason asked if the Officer detail would also be paid through this account, Chief Weidhaas answered no they are paid through a separate detail account.

Chief Weidhaas stated that if this was approved that she would reach out to local contractors to inform them of this change. Kathe asked if the Select Board was ok with her adding this to the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting, the Select Board all agree yes.

- **Discussion and possible vote to appoint Lora Wade to the Conservation Committee:**

The Select Board all had a chance to review Lora's letter of interest to be appointed to the Conservation Committee. Lora was joining us remotely and stated that she had recently attended the Massachusetts Conservation Commission conference and was very interested in being apart of the team. John thanked her stating that he appreciated her interest. Jason made the motion to appoint Lora Wade to the Conservation Commission, Rich seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Meet with David Irwin, Adelson & Company to review the audit with Board, Sara Hunter Town Treasurer and Erik Kinshurf Town Accountant.**

David Irwin and Joe Collins from Adelson & Company joined us to present the audit, a copy of the report had been given to the Select Board to view and follow along. David gave a summary of the report and their findings. Something that he addressed was that the town was not recording long term assets or debts which he explained fixed assets are required to be recorded on balance sheets. John stated that in the twenty-five years he has been on the Select Board he was not aware of this happening and wondered if this was common for small towns. David answered yes it was common however it could be done. David discussed that when going through the balance sheets all accounts reconciled and there were no issues. He discussed some taxes that went back some time that John stated we were in the process of getting cleared up now. David stated that there had been a definite improvement since the last time they were with us and commended us on our choices for the Treasurer and Accountant that have been hired.

David went on to discuss our budget, what was passed vs. what was spent. He stated that there were no issues and so far, the only account that went into deficit spending which is authorized was the snow and ice budget. Moving on John asked how much time was spent on the audit specifically on CMELD, David answered between the auditing and converting the modified basis of accounting in total about twenty to twenty-five hours or ten to fifteen percent of the total hours. David stated overall the audit went well and gave us their recommendations, first the tax liens need to be resolved which as previously stated is in process. The next thing that was discussed is that they look over the minutes from the Board of Selectmen meetings which were available to them however they also like to view minutes from the Finance Committee meetings as well which they were unable to obtain and suggested that the Select Board remind them to transcribe their meetings in a timely manner. Other recommendations consisted of ensuring personnel files were up to date and accurate, and a policy being created for debit card use. John commented that this audit was unlike any that he had seen, and any recommendations were minor and nothing that the Select Board was not already aware of and working on. He commented that the outsourced Accounting and Treasurer services have not always been popular but was pleased to hear from them that things were going so well. David commented that many small towns can benefit from services like this because you are using someone with experience and education. John thanked the auditors, Janice, Eric, and Sara for all of their hard work. Eric commented that the auditors had done a great job, Janice agreed stating that she was glad to hear things went well.

- **Discussion with Water Commissioners about ARPA funds for the Water Treatment plant update.**

The Water Commissioners presented the Select Board with a handout listing what is on their plate and things that need to be done along with estimates of the costs.

1. Housatonic Sampling APR/NOV - \$18,000.00
 2. Elm Electric/complete SCADA upgrade - \$10,000.00
 3. Landscape plant exterior/clean interior - \$3,000.00
 4. Excavate/replace Hydrant River Front St. - \$3,500.00
 5. BIS, replace original instrumentation - \$60,000.00
 6. Clean Austin Brook Reservoir - \$9,500.00
 7. Restore Austin Brook Reservoir pumps/1 vacuum suction & 3 water lift pumps - \$10,000.00
 8. Estimate for anticipated issues exposed by hydrant flushing/valve exercising, fund Emergency responder/flushing - \$10,000.00
 9. Engineering consultant to modify dosing to DEP disinfection by product required ppb - \$15,000.00
 10. Engineering consultant to re-activate Austin Brook Reservoir - \$5,000.00
- Total \$144,000.00

Lyle explained each of the items listed and stated the number two for Elm Electric was an estimate and they were still waiting on the official quote. Number five BIS is for Berlin Instruments and is also an estimate they received in January. Number nine is something that is mandated by DEP but is also just an estimate, and they are hoping that number ten will not be necessary and once enough testing has been completed and data retrieved, they can request from DEP to have Austin Brook activated. John asked if our current Water Operator Bernie St. Martin was willing to go back to Austin Brook, Lyle answered that it was coming along. Rich made the motion to allocate up to \$144,000.00 from the ARPA funds as per the proposal by the Water Commissioners, Jason seconded. Before the final vote Jason had a few questions and concerns.

Jason asked if any portion of this would be paid for from the funding within the Water Department. Lyle answered that the sampling by Housatonic Labs has and will continue to be funded through the department budget. Jason stated he was hesitant to dedicate all of these funds right now when a decent portion of this would not be completed until a little way down the road. He suggested that they pay things from the ARPA funds as they go along rather than take forty-five percent of the available ARPA money and earmark it for the Water Department. John asked Jason what he would be comfortable with, Jason answered that before allocating this money a timeline would be helpful. Jason stated that the \$409,000.00 from ARPA funds will go fast and was happy that we received money from the state for the road damage of the storms last year and would help to not deplete the account so quickly. Rich commented that although he understood Jason's opinion given the momentum of the Water Commissioners this is a critical area and did not want these needs to slip through the cracks. John stated that the Board has all made a commitment that water is a priority however understood Jason's point and thought we could get a larger break down of what is anticipated to be needs of the next three months. Lyle answered that the two things needing to be taken care of was the SCADA system as well as replacing the other instruments. John asked if the Water Commissioners would be comfortable with \$50,000.00 to start with. Jason commented that they are not trying to stand in

their way. Bob stated that they presented all of this as Phase One and did not want to see the ARPA funds go away because of other valid requests. John stated that there is no question they have made a commitment to do the things necessary and there is an open line of communication. Bob stated that although he understood this was a large amount to request this was from years of maintenance that has not happened and all except for the landscaping at the plant these things are mandated by DEP and May 12th they have another sanitary survey happening. John commented that with that in mind some fluidity should be left and as of now it would be best for the Water Commissioners to come to the Board when they have invoices for these to be paid. He continued stating that the Select Board has to be presented any ARPA requests and that they will keep a running total of the requests with the balance as they are aware of the needs within the Water Department. The Select Board is committed to what the Water Commissioners are doing but the Board also needs to be accountable to the rest of the town and other requests.

Rich rescinded his initial motion.

The Board stated that no new motion needed to be made as they had made a commitment together at the meeting to support the Water Commissioners and their needs. John stated that they understood how critical these needs were and it should be full steam ahead.

- **Discussion for Fire Dept. about ARPA funds for heating upgrades at the fire station on Bromley Rd.:**

Kathe presented an estimate from the Fire Department for replacing the heating system at the station on Bromley Rd. as well as the purchase of two new tanks, the total for this is \$14,500.00. John asked if they needed other estimates or just the one, Kathe answered that because it is under \$15,000.00 it did not need to go out to bid. Andy Sutton commented that with the price of fuel currently is oil the best way to go or should they look into a gas option. Jason stated that was a valid point and since they are replacing everything now would be the time to look into this. John agreed stating that may help with the green community aspect. Kathe stated that she would scan this back to the Fire Department and suggest that they get estimates for switching to gas.

Before moving on Kathe brought up that at a previous meeting the Select Board had decided to allocate ARPA funds to the Hilltown Ambulance for their improvements but did not take a formal vote. The amount that was decided was \$3,000.00 from the ARPA funds to be given to the Hilltown Ambulance.

Jason made the motion for \$3,000.00 from the ARPA funds to be given to the Hilltown Ambulance, Rich seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Meet with Finance Committee to go over FY23 Budget:**

The Select Board all received a copy of the budget to view and follow along. Andy Myers opened the discussion stating that there were a few open items such as the Vocational student cost. Across the board they had used two and a half percent as a cost-of-living increase. He also explained that we were hit with a high Hampden County Retirement bill however found out that we were actually double hit with this for CMELD and Town employees.

Andy began reviewing the budget by each account discussing any line items that the Finance Committee chose to increase or decrease from the requested amount. John commented that he has been on the Select Board for a long time and in his opinion if we want

to encourage people to participate the position needs to be funded more than it is. Not a huge amount but stated it should be enough to attract people to the position and come close to offsetting property taxes. John also commented that they had not authorized the increase suggested for the Assistant Administrator, Andy commented that they kept the two and a half percent increase with the rest of the employees. John stated that although there is a significant increase within the Selectmen budget it comes with a major increase in hours for the Town Administrator.

Andy went on to discuss the Assessors budget, stating that they had decided as the Board is relatively inactive to only increase it to \$500.00 per member and improved the Assessor's Clerk salary more than requested as she has been completing multiple duties. They also increased the Assessor's Clerk Assistant position in hopes to attract someone to the position. Jason asked if the position for this had ever been posted, Andy answered that he did not believe so. Jason stated that he understood that Laura Lafreniere the Assessor's Clerk had asked that the Assistant salary be reallocated to her, and although her raise is warranted, he was hesitant to recommend more than what was being requested for a position that has never been posted.

We went on to discuss the Highway Department which Andy stated was presented as a major increase and was hoping that the money received in aide from the state would help to offset some of this such as the supplies and repairs as well as the stone and gravel accounts. Jason asked if they had taken any consideration into the salary increase bringing them to market wage. Andy stated that they did increase wages however it was down from the requested amount as the budget proposed included the addition of a few employees and they did not see this being the best solution at this time.

John moved to the Police Department budget stating that this would need to be discussed again. Andy stated that we would need to come to an agreement with Blandford on the budget and view the recommendations from them, he had a handout for the Select Board of Blandford's proposed budget. John stated that the proposed budget from Chief Weidhaas included a full-time officer as well as more patrol hours which he felt was needed. Andy stated that an Administrative Assistant was added which the Finance Committee felt would allow the Chief to have more patrol hours.

Town hall expenses were discussed as the Finance Committee did not approve the requested amount. John brought up that Town Hall expenses are covered almost every year by doing a reserve fund transfer. Kathe agreed that this was correct and this year we will be transferring approximately \$4,000.00 and stated that she would have an end of the year report run for the last few years to verify what typically was done. John stated that this needs to be looked at so that the account is funded properly, and we are not stealing from other accounts. John asked about unemployment which went up one hundred ninety-one percent, he did not feel this was correct. Kathe stated that she would contact the state and verify the number, Jason commented that he could talk with Steph at the school and get information for her contact at the state.

John went on to discuss the two and a half percent increase of salary once more, he stated that he did not agree that this should be across the board and that this has been an extraordinary year. He understood not doing the twelve and a half percent requested for the Assistant Administrator but thought they could look at the numbers and what five percent

looked like. John stated that Jill is doing an excellent job along with taking on the Emergency Management position and thought it was a justified salary. He commented that the Town Clerk position as well there have been a lot of improvements to consider. The Highway Department budget he felt needed to be looked at specifically the gas, oil, and diesel account and need to consider that the price of fuel is almost double what it was last year. He stated that the Police Department also needed to be looked at again and thought that we would see more regionalization and that we need to make the investment to the department. Jason stated that we need to organize a time to meet with Blandford to go over this. John agreed stating that with the Police Reform Act we will have full time academy trained officers and the budget should reflect this. John stated that they would discuss this again next week.

Jason asked Andy what the Finance Committee used as a basis for revenue, Andy answered that they used the traditional source of revenue which is taxes paid to the town. He stated that the Finance Committee would schedule another meeting to go over the responses from the Select Board. Rich asked if the various employees and positions were in line with what other communities were paying in salary. Andy stated that things are not always the same and used Blandford as an example that although they have a similar population their budget is a half a million dollars more than ours. Rich stated that pay should be made close to market rate and although we may not be able to do this in one year but should work to make a positive impact. Jason commented that his position as Building Inspector in the towns he does this work in Chester is the lowest paid and to consider that it would be difficult to replace the person in these positions for the salary proposed. John stated that the Select Board would make time next week to revisit this and discuss further, he thanked the Finance Committee commenting that this was a good starting point, and they were in agreement ninety-five percent.

- **Town Administrator:**

- *Continued discussion about Chester Theatre use of 10 Middlefield Rd. and Chester Town Hall:*

Kathe discussed the work that is being done by the Theatre to the bathrooms in the Town Hall. When she gave the proposal for the cost of renovating the bathrooms on the main floor, she was asked to get additional quotes but has not yet been given any names to contact. She received a policy update for 10 Middlefield Rd. with the theatre using the building of \$3,349.00 but there was an issue with the playground that is existing and was asked if this could be removed. When she spoke to our representative from MIIA he explained that he asked if they would look again as there have been no changes. John agreed stating that there is no difference to the property since it was deeded to them at the closure of the school. The theatre would also like to pay to have the parking lot lined as they thought it could improve the number of spots available. John agreed stating that when street sweeping was scheduled that they could sweep the parking lot as well to have it ready. Kathe stated that Ian had finished emptying and cleaning the building and everything looks great.

- **Public Comments and Questions:**

Jason discussed the ongoing solar project at the town garage, he stated that the quote from Elm had gone down to \$7,600.00 but there has been some unwillingness from CMELD to make the connections. Rich asked if a specialized electrician needed to do this work or if it needed to simply be a licensed electrician, Jason answered a licensed electrician was all that was needed as far as he understood. John asked if they were willing to run the overhead lines but

not willing to do the electrical work, Jason answered that was correct. John stated that he would be reaching out to Deryck.

Jason went on to discuss that there has been talk of him no longer maintaining the field on Emery Street which was correct as they have moved back to the school fields. He stated that he would be reaching out to Sam Mazzaferro for quotes on maintenance. Rich asked if there was any alternative vision or continued use that is being discussed. Jason answered that Chester on Track would be using the fields but unfortunately nothing else was being discussed. He also informed us that Little League enrollment is low and was unsure if they would be using the fields as well.

The last thing Jason had for us was to let us know that the Regional Agreement passed although not unanimously and will be given to Kathe to post on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting.

Andy stated that the property that has been discussed on Gobble Mountain to be purchased by Mass Fish and Wildlife has moved on to the next steps. There is a clear title, and an appraiser has been hired which we should have by May 1st. They will bring the appraisal to the Select Board then the land will be surveyed and most likely have a new appraisal after that.

Sara was participating virtually and stated that she was happy the audit went well. She stated that they are getting through reconciliations and expected to be completed earlier than the initial June 30th date. John thanked her and appreciated all the work the team was doing.

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

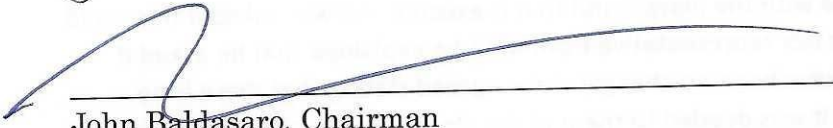
Meeting Adjourned 8:58 PM

Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

5/2/22
Date Signed

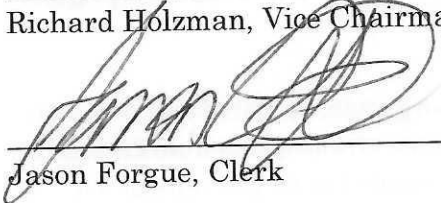


John Baldasaro, Chairman

4/29/22
Date Signed

Richard Holzman, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Jason Fergue, Clerk

5/2/22
Date Signed