



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

Monday, September 26, 2022

In attendance: Selectboard members John Baldasaro, Jason Forgue, Andy Sutton; Administrator, Don Humason; Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease; Water Commissioners Bob Daley; Planning Board Member Richard Holzman; Finance Committee Chair Andy Myers; Police Chief Jennier Dubiel; Jonathan Gould from Senator Adam Hines' Office; Dave Christopolis and Paul Lischetti from Hilltown Community Development Corporation; Christopher Severy; Sherif Osman and Kevin Koszarek of Faded Flowers; Library Trustees; Members of the public

John called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Jason signed onto Virtual Meeting.

Minutes of 9/12/22 read and signed.

Agenda Issues

Reports from Town Departments

- 1. Appointment of New Chester Police Officers, Chief Dubiel:** The Chief presented candidate Lauren Nelson. Jason asked Lauren to provide some background and why she wants to work for Chester. Lauren responded she's been exploring the area and likes the town. She said she has been on the job for two years and loves the work and helping people. She is currently an officer in Monterey is going through the bridge academy and will be done by November. She has done some details in Chester and Blandford. John asked her goals, and Lauren said she is working toward being a better officer and looking to make a career as a police officer. She said she hopes to eventually be fulltime in Chester and when asked how long she would plan to stay here, she said "Infinite". Jason asked Chief Dubiel why she is recommending Lauren and she responded Lauren is upbeat, community oriented, and "will fit well". She will go through field training for 8-10 weeks, a probationary period, and train with other CBPD officers. Lauren will continue to work for Monterey as well as CBPD if hired. Jason made a motion to hire Lauren Nelson to the Chester Blandford Police Department; Andy seconded; all voted "aye".
- 2. Update on Hilltown Community Ambulance Association (HCAA), Mary Ann Pease:** Mary Ann handed out a sheet listing HCAA FY 2024 and beyond for Town

Assessment and Vehicle Replacement Assessments (attached). She stated "like everyone", HCAA is having staffing issues but has not missed any calls. She said they are fully staffed for basic EMTs but looking for paramedics. Looking to talk with Blandford RE: an RFP for a Service Director position – splitting the position into a Financial Manager and an Operations Manager. Mary Ann went on to explain while there is a significant increase in the FY 2025, it's necessary to keep staff, buy equipment, etc. She said there is a very small operations margin and shared services are not feasible at this time. She explained there are sometimes un-billable calls and refusals but they are unavoidable but cost money. HCAA has a new board and will continue with a three year plan. Andy Myers was recognized and suggested a study of other ambulance services. Mary Ann said HCAA is "doing all they can" to keep the service intact.

3. **Update on Senior and Veteran Tax Work-off Program, Laura Lefreniere:** (Don spoke in Laura's place.) Don shared the new Program list that outlined eligibility and guidelines for seniors and veterans to earn up to \$750 a year off their property tax bill. (See attachment.) Don said there are not a lot of people using the program right now and no income guidelines. The limit for the program is ten people. The Board signed the new Program.

Town Business

Discussion with Hilltown CDC regarding upcoming Chester Commons renovations: Paul Lischetti of Hilltown CDC said they have a final cost estimate for the project and are working with the State to fill in the gap in funding. He said he is optimistic construction will start in the spring and it will affect the library. The project is to include addition of an elevator/stair tower on the building, bringing the building up to code, renovating the current two public restrooms into two unisex restrooms (this will affect the library while they are being renovated), adding sprinklers to the entire building, and installing a new heating system. The current two boilers will be replaced with propane units. John asked whether the designers had considered mini-splits for the building and Paul responded based upon the engineer's input they would negatively impact the historical aspect of the building. Paul explained there are accessibility issues on the exterior and entry that need to be addressed, specifically re-grading the library lawn, installing a new sidewalk, and installing an automatic door opener. John asked if the exterior doors themselves would be changed and Paul said he believed they would be refurbished due to historical value. The same issue exists with windows - historic value. Paul shared more specific details about the project and John asked what the estimated cost would be. Paul responded \$4.5 million for construction but with other components the total is expected to be approximately \$6 million. ETA for completion is about a year. Most Chester Commons residents will be able to remain in the building during construction, but if needed, they will be moved to vacant apartments or outside rentals. Paul doesn't believe there will be an extended closing for the library and the intention is to keep library closing to a minimum. Discussion followed RE: mold in the library. A mold specialist determined as long as previous mold was remediated, it should not be an issue. John brought up concerns about cracks in the library walls and the fact that repair of them was temporary, so he asked if

any further issues came up during construction will the CDC fix those? Paul responded they would. Discussion followed about potential issue given the exterior bricks have not been re-pointed. Christopher Severy, Construction Project Manager said once the bricks are re-pointed, the situation will be assessed and addressed, including removal of the temporary fix if necessary. CDC will "do what they need to do". At this point John asked if elevator info for Commons could be shared with Town Hall since elevator there has never worked properly. Paul suggested Town speak with elevator contractors when they come to install the one in the Commons. The Board then thanked Paul and Christopher for the update.

Jonathan Gould: Jon has served as District Aide to Sen. Adam Hinds and informed the Board Sen. Hines has resigned to take a position in the private sector. Jon said Sen. Hinds staff will continue in his place until January 2023. Jon pointed out Senator Hinds has secured \$8 million for rural school aid and made 36 recommendations for mostly Western Mass schools that he is hoping will be considered by the next legislative session. Discussion moved to ways surrounding towns have dealt with closed schools. Jon stated in his town, Williamsburg, the building was torn down and the space is being used to construction a Public Safety Complex. He said by referencing Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) the town was able to get a "huge" grant for the project. Dave Christopolis said Cummington's school was not torn down and has been closed as a school for six years, but with CDC help will be mixed use - town offices, rentals for classes, training. Plan for that project is \$1-\$1.5 million and the Community One Stop for Growth grant is very helpful. He said CDC looks for vacant buildings around the state to rehab. He acknowledged it's difficult for a small town to come up with the funding needed for planning and redevelopment. He did suggest Chester involve the public in the planning stage for uses for the town's old elementary school. Planning is Phase One; Phase Two is Design with Phase Three being construction. John asked what percentage of funding would One Stop cover, Dave said he wasn't sure but the town could apply for more than one grant through One Stop. Paul interjected the Chester Commons project got \$600K+ from One Stop. Jon Gould also mentioned Heath Elementary School was built in the 1990s and closed but is being used by the police and fire departments, EMS, senior center and COA office, library, and a long-term lease for a company that provides summer programs for at-risk teens. Jason reiterated he had not been in favor of Chester regaining ownership of the old elementary school but asked for ideas for feasibility of using school. Dave said, "Not a lot". Jon said Williamsburg looked at the cost and the town came up with "all sorts of ideas". Dave said planning and design can be covered with grant money but it will take time. Jason asked Jon Gould if he could help with the process. Jon said he can put the Board in touch with people who can. Dave reiterated One Stop is a good resource for guidance and funding. This discussion concluded, Rich Holzman was recognized and asked Jon for an update on West-East Rail. Jon did not have one, and Rich said "we need to keep the issue in the fore front".

Faded Flowers - Sherif Osman and Kevin Koszarek: (Jason Forgue recused himself from this discussion.) Sherif, manager of Faded Flowers, a cannabis company looking to operate a growth facility in Chester, stated Faded Flowers has signed a Letter of Intent with Revive Chester, LLC, owners of 1 and 18 Baystate Drive. The property is zoned commercial/industrial and with the existing warehouse fits the needs of Faded Flowers.

Sherif stated they will coordinate with Don for the Community Outreach Meeting, which they plan to hold on October 14, 2022. They will publicize the meeting throughout town. Kevin and Sherif informed the Selectboard of their plans which include a small operation growing cannabis in the former Cortland warehouse. They will put a new roof on the building, repair any brick, and renovate the interior for their needs. They will eventually repair the boiler room and smokestack. John asked when they plan to have the Host Community Agreement draft ready, and Sherif said October 17, 2022. He went on to state Faded Flowers has a plan for "assisting the town" and want to improve the area around the warehouse. Both men said they want to be "part of the community" and the operation will be small. John said "this is exactly what the town is looking for". Sherif and Kevin presented the Letter Of Intent signed by Faded Flowers and Revive Chester for 1 and 18 Baystate Drive to the Board. Don asked if Faded Flowers is purchasing the property and Sherif said yes, and the want to be operational by January 2023. John asked where they stand with the Cannabis Control Commission and will they invest in the property before they have their license from the CCC. Kevin said, yes, they will be investing as soon as possible and as a disabled veteran owned company, they will get a special license from the CCC. They said they will need employees at about the six month point once operational and John asked if they would hire local. They said definitely. They also stated Faded Flowers wants to do a contribution directly to the town instead of a remediation fee which has to be verified by the state. John said the town is looking forward to working with them. John and Andy thanked them for coming.

Andy Myers: Andy discussed the finalization of the solar project - need aggregation to sell energy credits. Energy New England will handle that and their fee is \$1000 to start, which Andy said should be paid by a grant. After that their fee will be \$250 a year. This will put energy credits on the market and will complete the Green Energy Grant. John asked if this was approved by Green Energy and Andy said not yet. He is trying to come up with projects to fulfill the grant. He said there are two energy companies looking at the Fire Department and Town Hall and coming up with proposals based upon the energy audits of those buildings. Andy suggest the new boiler in Town Hall be serviced; the Selectboard agreed and Jason will check for a technician and call for service. John asked Andy if CMELD has agreed to reimburse billing errors and Andy said yes but not for energy created. Discussed pole bard being connected to the town garage for solar and Andy said first estimate is too high so looking for others. Andy also said he is working with CMELD on a net-metering formula for residential, business, and municipal solar and they are "still in discussion."

Other Business:

- **Highway Superintendent:** John stated this discussion could be done as an executive session, but that meeting would need to be posted which would cause delay in discussion. The Selectboard agreed not necessary. Jason stated the position was offered to Charles "Chipper" Dazelle who rejected it based upon overall compensation and benefits. Jason said this was not unexpected. The offer was based upon current compensation by the town. Jason had a discussion with Chipper if the only issue was compensation and based on that discussion said "it sounds like a \$6K-8K" difference. Discussed other differences, e.g. Huntington's employee

contribution to health insurance is 25% and Chester's is 40%, Chipper currently gets five weeks vacation, etc. Jason looked through the summary of accounts from 9/19/22 and factoring in the current two highway employees, not re-hiring for a third, there is just under \$100K left for this fiscal year. He said we could do \$33/hr. which would leave \$43K for outside contractors and there is a bit of wiggle-room to the current budget to handle the higher pay rate. Concern expressed about next year and mention made that depends on contract services. Don said qualified candidates for the position can bring in a lot of grant money. John expressed concern about timing with winter coming and the rest of the Selectboard agreed. John asked about the time off issue and Jason said that seemed like a "non-starter". John said, "Deal breaker?" and Jason said he didn't think so. John said overtime could be huge and Andy Sutton said he is in favor of hiring Chipper, but still unsure if "that gets us there." Jason made a motion to keep all aspects of the offer in place with the exception of raising the rate of pay to \$33 per hour. Andy seconded, and all voted "aye". Jason asked Don to look into how much the insurance actually cost.

Town Administrator:

- Met with Chris Dunn RE: joint agreement for Police and Water Operator. Need to pick a date for Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness kick-off involving Chester, Blandford, and Middlefield.
- This coming Thursday (9/29) there is Mass Municipal Association new administrator training in Sharon. Planning to go.
- John asked Don if he had any questions and Don said some invoice questions. They will discuss later.
- Administrative Assistant Jill Strong will be back from maternity leave in October. John will touch base to find out when.
- Jason said he's heard from scholarship recipients who are looking for payment. He reached out to the bank in charge and they said no one told them who the recipients were, paperwork was sent and signed by the Selectboard. Jason said he has the recipient list and minutes that noted the award. He'll send it to Don who will send it to the bank.
 - New Police Chief insurance - signup was missed so to correct the issue, suggestion was made to do a new contract for the chief so she can sign up for benefits. The Selectboard agreed.
 - Mention of possibility of joint Human Resources person since Chester does not currently have an HR person.

Citizens Comments:

- Andy Myers - Critical time for Finance Committee. Accounting is trying to reconcile by the end of the week. He suggested meeting with Treasurer and Accounting and said there are concerns with timelines/payments taking too long. He suggested "work sessions". The Selectboard agreed with John stating both should happen - meeting and work sessions.

- Tom Huntoon - Asked when the paving that was dug up from the repave of Bromley Road would be fixed as it's going into another winter with the road dug up. John said it will be on a list given to the new highway superintendent.
 - Richard Holzman - Time to focus on "messy properties", particularly Middlefield Road project. Jason - as Building Inspector - said the permit for that project has expired and the company will have to reapply. Jason went on to say he has met with the Board of Health and agent and they are actively pursuing fifteen properties. Board of Health is moving forward with condemnations/housing court. Fees against these properties are added to their tax bills.
- **Motion made to adjourn by John; seconded by Jason; all voted "aye".
Meeting adjourned at 8:15.**


Respectfully Submitted



Barbara P. Huntoon, Meeting Secretary pro tem

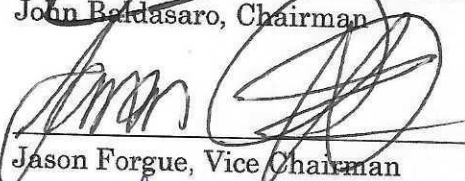
10/23/22

Date Signed


John Baldasaro, Chairman


10/24/22

Date Signed


Jason Forgue, Vice Chairman

10/24/22

Date Signed


Andy Sutton, Clerk

Date Signed