



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

Monday, January 9th, 2023

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

Selectmen John Baldassaro, Jason Forgue, and Andy Sutton were present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Don Humason, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, and CMELD Admin. Assistant Rosanne McClafin. Water Commissioners Bob Daley and Lyle Snide were present along with Finance Committee member Andy Myers, Planning Board member Richard Holzman, Rec. Committee member Jessica Sakaske, and Library Trustee Jane Sutton. Elizabeth, Liz, Massa, and Nick Chiusano from the Board of Health participated remotely as well as a few residents present and remote.

John opened the meeting at 5:03 PM, warrants, minutes, and any correspondence was signed.

- **Town Clerk:**

Terry shared the proposal from King Information System for the clean up of our records. She explained that included with the price is the breakdown of the current racking system that is in the vault and replacing it with a new one as well as all the organization of the documents into new OSHA approved stackable boxes. The total cost to do this from King Information is \$19,537.00, Terry commented that she knew the cost was high but had been given information about a grant to apply for the entire cost however the grant if we receive it is not paid out until the fall. Terry explained that King Information told her that if we decide to move forward with them it takes about ninety days to schedule the start of the clean up and typically about fourteen days' time to get the job completed. She commented that this would bring us close to the time that the theatre starts again and would be necessary as they need the space where everything is now in the hall on the basement level. At the meeting with King Information systems various departments discussed contributing to costs dependent on the number of things that are stored in the vault for each department. A resident asked if this would include any duplication of records in the event of an emergency such as a fire. Terry explained that this is the first step, and all the records need to be organized first and figure out what needs to be kept vs. destroyed and after we can focus on digitizing any records that we choose. Jason asked if we had determined what needs to be kept, Terry answered not yet that is included in the cost however the destroying of any records is not included, and they have a shredding company that they recommended to us. John asked if she had a sense of how much we would be able to get rid of, Terry answered that

they told her the vault is sufficient size to keep all the things that we need. Don asked if she was given an idea of a price for the next step, digitizing any of the records, Terry answered that she did not.

Terry let the Board know that the election calendar for next year has been approved and over the next few weeks she will be putting together a list of everyone who will be up for election this year. She commented that we are heading into budget season and will be getting started on the Annual Report for the town, last year the Board did not provide a report to put in the Annual Report and is something she recommended that they do for this year.

We then moved onto a discussion regarding the senior work off program as Terry suggested that there be some clarification from the Board. Don read aloud a bylaw of ours which states, participants cannot receive senior work off hours for a position or department where they are currently on the payroll. Terry explained that there have been issues as some employees are saying they are eligible because they are not in a "paid" position they simply receive a "stipend," which Terry stated should be treated as the same thing. Mary Ann commented that most communities have an income cap for this program, and we do not. Mary Ann, Terry, and Laurie Lafreniere would like to put together a group or committee to help regulate this program. The Board agreed that was a good idea, John stated that things need to get tightened up.

- **Water Department:**

Bob led a discussion about the Prospect Street project which he stated is planned and hopes will start in May of this year. He stated that Bill Murphy who is the project manager for Baltazar who was awarded the contract for the project brought to their attention that not knowing the size of water pipes could cause some problems. He stated that they will need to do test pits to determine the piping and if we wait until May to do this and they were wrong about sizing it could hold up the project even further. They spoke with Moe Boisseau who helped them at the train station with a water leak and he stated that he has a job that will be held up for eighteen months due to availability of materials. Bob suggested that Moe is hired to do the test pits ahead of time and stated that he is available and willing to do the work at any time. John stated that although he appreciated the concern and help from Moe because we are under contract with Baltazar we cannot do anything with another contractor on that project. He explained that Baltazar has control of the project at this point and they should be contacted regarding any work done on the site. He explained when they initially sat down to discuss the project, we informed PVPC that we were unsure of the water pipes location and sizes on that street and that they should be prepared for this within the contract and bid information. Bob asked if he could put Bill Murphy in touch with John as it seemed to be a concern of Bill's and thought he and John could work out a solution, John agreed he would be in touch with Bill.

- **Highway Department:**

Don stated that he had been contacted by the state Inspector General about closing seasonal roads. John said this is something that he was aware of and asked if Don had spoken with our attorney Tom Mullen regarding language to use for the hearing. Don answered no Tom did not recommend anything when they spoke. John stated that he knew of the issue as it involves an individual who lives on a seasonal road and has sued the town for various reasons regarding his road closure. John did not want to discuss the language at the meeting and wanted guidance from Tom.

Andy ordered a hot patch trailer for the Highway Department which has been in discussion for several months. The total cost of the trailer will be covered by the WRAP money at \$47,000.00. John stated that this will be a good investment for us and will not have to be scrambling to find one to use. Don asked if we needed to pick it up, if it would be delivered, and if there would be training on using it.

John stated typically it would be delivered and although he thought the guys would know how to use it thought there would be a run down on using it when it is delivered.

The Administrative Assistant position for the Highway Department has been posted and Don stated there have already been a few people who are interested in the position. Andy asked if anyone had received an official letter of resignation from Kathy Engwer, John stated that he believed the email from her is all anyone had received. Andy asked about getting the warrant and payroll submitted for Highway and when they were due, Jill answered payroll and warrants are due this week. John commented that the position needs to be filled as soon as possible so things do not fall behind. Roseanne McClaflin presented the Board with her official application for the job.

Andy then went on to discuss the Highway Superintendent position commenting that we are not getting far with our search and was told by others in the Highway community that Chester is not a place that many people desire to work. Andy then discussed some options to move forward hiring a laborer and train them into the position, also looking into a shared Superintendent with one of the surrounding towns. John stated that we have discussed a shared Superintendent before and nothing materialized, the concern that always comes up with this as a shared position is that Chester would not be the main focus. A resident asked why we felt we were having problems filling the position and why people would not want to work for Chester. Andy answered that filling the position seems to be a problem in many communities but as for people not wanting to work for Chester, we have gone through multiple people in the position of Highway Superintendent and the high turnover rate does not reflect well on the town. John stated this is a difficult position to fill and commented that years ago municipal jobs were very desired but now with the necessary licenses for the position people have a chance to make more money in the private sector as well as working for the state. He stated that many of our local Highway Departments are hiring and most of the Superintendents are looking at retirement age and not looking to move to a new town.

Andy was concerned not having the position filled Chapter 90 money needs to have projects designated as well as the remaining WRAP funds need to be determined how they will be spent before the end of this fiscal year. John stated that should not be a concern as they can make decisions for things like that as a Board together and the biggest concern now is that we need to make it through the winter and hope that we do not lose any more bodies. Andy stated that there still was some concern amongst the guys about their pay rate, some were under the impression that \$23.33 would be the base rate and would make above that for the necessary licenses which is incorrect, \$23.33 is the rate for a fully licensed operator. A resident commented that when you pay more you typically get a better-quality employee, and it will give you more choices when hiring. John agreed however stated that keeping within budget constraints as well as being mindful of the other positions in town and what people are paid it is difficult. Jason commented that it is easy to say that we need to pay everyone market rate, but the money needs to come from somewhere. John stated that in a worst-case scenario if we were to lose our crew a contractor like White Wolf could be called and we would be taken care of. Rich stated that he shared the frustration of the Board and thought that they should look at the White Wolf option as more than an emergency plan and think of a better way to organize the department. He commented that a position should be created that the person could focus on the paperwork of the job and the other role of Superintendent or whatever title we chose to use could focus on the job itself and the accountability of the other laborers. John commented that has been in place now and years before having an Administrative Assistant along with the Superintendent but is difficult to expand the role of the positions again with the constraints of the budget.

A final issue Andy brought up regarding a Highway Department employee John stated would need to be addressed not in an open meeting. Bob asked who this was regarding, John answered because it is a personnel matter it can not be discussed further.

- **Shared Fire Chief Chester Blandford:**

Jason opened the discussion explaining that Blandford had reached out to us about creating a shared Fire Chief position as their Chief has reached the required retirement age of sixty-five for a Fire Department. Jason spoke with Richie Small our Fire Chief as he stated that he did not feel comfortable moving forward with the discussion without speaking with him first. Richie will also reach retirement age in October of this year. He asked if there was anyone interested among the Fire Department in the position of Chief and Richie did not have anyone that has already been through the academy who was interested. Jason told Blandford that as of right now we were not interested and thought that in July and August we could work with Richie on a succession plan. Mary Ann commented that there is special legislation that would grant a few additional years if Richie was interested in staying on. Jason thought that he was and stated that this is something we could look into. Don commented that he knew that there were some issues with this type of legislation moving quickly through and thought that may be a problem.

- **Technology needs:**

Don led the discussion explaining that our current IT provider Northeast IT has had many complaints by town employees and thought we should look at other options. The Board agreed and stated that we could reach out to PVPC to write an RFP for technology services and see what our options are.

Don stated that we spoke at a previous meeting about remaining money in an IT grant which could be used by Chief Dubiel to purchase new laptops "tough books," for the cruisers. For the Accountants office to release the money to be used for this the Board needed to make an official vote for the remaining funds of the IT grant to be used by the Police Department. Jason made the motion to have the last \$2,500.00 in the IT grant to be used to purchase new laptops for the cruisers, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

Before moving on Jason stated that it should be added to the agenda for an upcoming meeting to discuss the Accountants contract renewal.

- **Town Administrator:**

Don stated that next week he would be at an MMA conference Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. This week he will be working on getting budget workshop sheets that were provided to him by Andy Myers to all the departments.

- **Public Comments or Questions:**

Jason apologized for needing to move the meeting to 5:00 PM for him as in the end it was not necessary. He invited everyone to join in on the School Committee budget meeting which will be held on Wednesday this week. He stated that there has been a significant population increase for the school which is good news but will reflect in a bit of an increase in our costs, commenting Middlefield saw a large increase and will have an even bigger increase that we do in costs. He discussed that we will be facing a million-dollar roofing replacement project for the school this year and there are no contingency funds to help with this cost. He commented that every time we have attempted to do this it has been shut down. John asked if there could be a bond done for the project, Jason answered yes but all towns need to decide and agree. Mary Ann asked if Gateway had a stabilization fund, Jason answered no and the accounts that are set up for something similar are capped at five percent.

Bob discussed with the Board that they should continue to look at propane options and put everything out to bid. He also suggested to go out to bid for the five generators that are owned by the town for their maintenance contracts. He stated that the current generator that is in the town hall is very old and most likely should be replaced and thought they should look into an automatic generator replacement using ARPA funds. John stated that it is too late to go to bid for propane or other heat now but is something that we should be looking to do with all departments in the spring for the coming year. Andy asked if the oil in the tank at the Fire Station on Bromley had been moved, Nick answered not to his knowledge and to let him know when we wanted it done as he has everything necessary to take care of it. Andy stated that he believed that Richie wanted it brought to the tank at the Fire Station on Route 20, John and Jason both agreed that was correct.

Bob then went on to discuss the shared Water Operator position which the Commissioners are working on. He stated that they are meeting with Blandford on Thursday to discuss the position. The internship program that they have been working on with Gateway should be starting in March. He stated that Blandford and Huntington were already on board, and they were hoping that Russell would join as well.

Terry asked who owned the grill that is out front of the Town Hall on the steps. Jason answered that it was owned by Little League and had been brought there from the ballfield to use at a movie night. She wanted to have her ballot box mounted outside and the grill is in a spot she thought would be best. Jason stated that he would move the grill back to the ballfield.

Jessica asked if Tae Kwon Do could use the pull-down screen in the auditorium this week, the Board all agreed that was fine. She also brought to our attention that the Elementary school PTO was still looking for their check that was promised for the playground equipment. Mary Ann stated that she would reach out to Barbara from the Accountants office tomorrow and find out where the hold up is.

Jason stated that they have been working with housing court and our Board of Health agent about the problem properties in town, specifically Route 20 and Emery Street. We have quotes to move forward with clean up if the homeowners do not take care of it by the required date. Terry asked if the homeowners did not take care of it was it the responsibility of the town to cover the costs. Jason answered unfortunately yes, and the costs would be placed on a lien for the property to eventually get some of the money back.

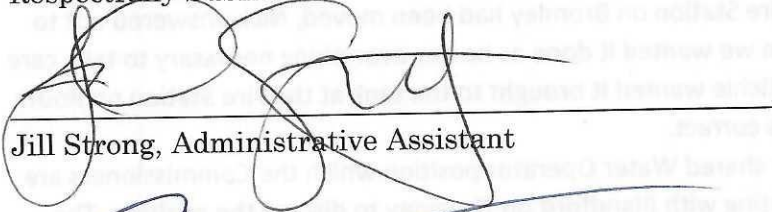
Andy Myers stated that the Finance Committee was starting on the budget process and the green grant coordinator would be coming next week the finalize closing the grant. Don asked if that would be the meeting on the 18th, Andy answered yes. He also let us know that the wire for the solar project at the town garage has been put up by CMELD and CMELD has also agreed to net metering for the town to be paid at the residential rate.

Liz stated that the transfer station will need to look into mowing for this coming year. Jason stated that he would reach out to Sam Mazzaferro as he is already doing work for the town. Liz also stated that there are problems with lighting at the transfer station and is very dark in the recycling area and until it is fixed did not want the workers there at night. Jeremy from CMELD came and fixed the light in the office and gave information to her about the light bulb they would need to purchase for the pole. John clarified that no one offered to install an additional streetlight, Liz answered no that was not offered as an option. Jason stated that as no one is using the ballfield now because of the winter if one of the lights there could work it was fine for CMELD to take a bulb from there to replace the one at the transfer station until the new one comes in.

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

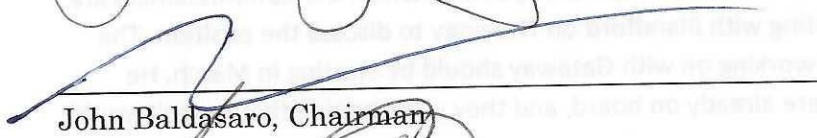
Meeting Adjourned 6:56 PM

Respectfully Submitted



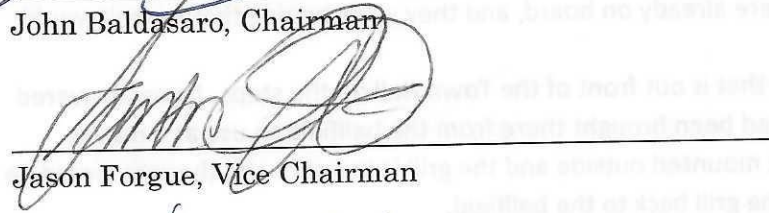
Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

1/31/23
Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

Date Signed



Jason Forgue, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Clerk

2/13/23
Date Signed