



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

Monday, January 30th, 2023

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

Selectmen John Baldasaro, Jason Fogue, 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, COA Director Ann Daley, Assessors Clerk Assistant Kendall Bennett, and CMELD Manager Diane Hall. Electric Light Commissioner Deryck Savoy was present with Water Commissioners Bob Daley, and Lyle Snide, Library Trustee Jane Sutton, Finance Committee member Andy Myers, Planning Board member Rich Holzman, and Rec. Committee member Jessica Sakaske. Per the agenda Representative Nick Boldyga joined us as well as Bill Murphy representing the Prospect St. project, as well as a few residents present and participating remotely.

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

- **Representative Nick Boldyga presentation of new state and US flags:**

John introduced Representative Nick Boldyga who was joining us this evening. Representative Boldyga stated that it was good to meet everyone and discussed that this will be his thirteenth year in office. He stated that he has a full time district office in Southwick at the Town Hall with hours Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. He discussed the ceremony in Boston where everyone was sworn in for their upcoming terms, stating that it was a great ceremony. He presented to Ann Daley two new flags for the town a Mass state flag as well as the US flag. Ann thanked him commenting that our current US flag in the Town Hall is extremely old and worn.

Representative Boldyga went on to discuss that he was working to help with the Cobble Mountain Road issues. Although the property is owned by the Springfield water shed the actual road going in is a state-owned road and they are working to have it open to foot and bicycle traffic, he hoped to have an update within a few months. Don stated that he had also been speaking with him regarding the possible waiver for our Fire Chief to extend his time if he chooses as he would age out as of the end of this year. Representative Boldyga stated that this would get approved in session but they are always trying to encourage towns to pursue new people to join.

Jason asked where representative Boldyga stood in regards to the rural schools commission, stating that ninety percent of his district is rural and regional schools. Representative Boldyga stated that he had not read the report as of yet but that if Jason had any specific questions or concerns in mind

to let him know. Jason commented that he wanted our Rep. to have our back in these situations so that we had someone working to get the additional help that we need. Representative Boldyga stated that it was not just us all communities are in a similar position and need additional funding, he stated that he would continue to fight for this and advocate on our behalf. He stated that he was not happy with the formula for schools or for how Chapter 90 funds are distributed and is advocating for reworking these formulas. The Board thanked him for his visit stating that they appreciated the support.

John stated that because we had Bill Murphy here now he wanted to adjust the agenda slightly and discuss the Prospect Street project before continuing with the agenda. Bill introduced himself stating that he represented the engineering firm that is overseeing the Prospect Street project. Bill explained that this was a multi-phase project first started in 2018 and that the first phase is planned to start in May. They will be working to improve drainage as well as the erosion problem. He stated that this was a complicated model with possible resizing of the twenty-six culverts on the road. They will be starting in front of the railroad museum to work on minimizing flooding and a better collection system for storm water. This portion is expected to start on May 1st and be completed by June 20th. He explained that there should be no water interruption for the residents that live on Prospect Street and Soisalo Road during the project. We went on to discuss that due to supply issues there is a longer wait if we were to need materials such as new water pipe, typically around six to eight months. Bill's suggestion was to check if we had any stock at the Town Garage as well as to reach out to PVPC and ask them to consider making this purchase now making the assumption that we will need it and if we do not we have extra that can be used by the town in case of an emergency such as the leak last year that needed to be dealt with. John commented that this was the best solution and was cheap insurance to ensure the project was not held up any further.

Bill went on to discuss that the contractor will be doing some exploratory drilling to determine rock quality and if they will need to do any blasting, he stated that a pre-blast survey would be completed by May 1st. They would be working with the town and dig safe to determine the location of all utilities. Bob Daley commented that they were working with a survey that was done in 2006 which was accurate in some areas and not as much in others and hoped to not run into any problems. Bill commented that they did not need to drill exactly on the spot just in the vicinity. All of this would eliminate having to do test pits to determine pipe size and location, Bill commented doing that in the middle of winter can be difficult and at this point the if the town were to hit something doing a test pit they would be responsible and need to do the repairs before moving forward. Jason commented that if there indeed was a six month wait time for pipe even ordering it now would not get it to us by May 1st. Bill stated that was correct but ordering now we had a better chance and possibly the contractors could help speed things along. John thought it would be worth reaching out to Mass Rural Water to see if they had any stock. Lyle asked if Baltazar would be doing the test drills, Bill answered yes, Lyle asked who decides where that is done. Bill answered that they would be working with the town but ultimately it is the contractor's decision where and if they are done. Ann asked if there was a time frame when this would be happening, Bill answered that it would be at the contractor's discretion. The Board thanked Bill for joining us and the clarification on this project.

- **Town Clerk update:**

Terry discussed with the Board the records project that she has been working to coordinate with King Information Systems. She stated that she has been looking for ways to save on the costs and discussed some things that she has come up with. CMELD was asked to contribute to the costs as a quarter of the records currently in the vault belong to them which would be approximately five

thousand dollars. Another option is that we completely clean out the vault ourselves and remove the current racking system. Deryck asked in regards to CMELD if they could determine from their records what needs to be kept and the required time to keep certain records and then they could make a decision then how much space they would need. John stated that was fine as we need to determine of the town records what needs to be kept as well, he thought that the task of us emptying the vault could absolutely been done. Terry asked with that in mind if she was ok to move forward so that things could be completed before the theatre will need the space downstairs. The Board agreed yes, she could move forward with getting everything set up with King Information Systems. Ann asked Terry if King Information System had given her any information if there were still issues with the vault, there had previously been issues with mold. Terry answered no, when remediation was done a few years ago everything was taken care of and when they were here to do their inspection of the vault, they found no issues. Diane asked as we had spoken before about using the old Chester Elementary school for storage what was available for CMELD to use for their records if they choose to do that instead of keeping things in the vault. Jill answered that in her opinion because there had been issues with a water leak in the basement thought it best to use any of the classrooms upstairs on the second floor as the theatre when they rented the space last year used the main floor and this would ensure their information is not being kept in a place where the theatre would be using the same space. John asked if we knew what the theatre would be using this year, Don answered that he had not heard anything as of yet.

The next item Terry needed addressed was that the Board needed to vote to either allow or reject mail in ballots for the town election this year. Because of new regulations this needs to be done at least forty-five days before each election which we discussed in greater detail at a previous meeting. John asked if this needed to be a special meeting or could it be done at a regular Selectboard meeting, Terry answered that it could be done at any meeting. John asked for Don to add that to the agenda for next time, Don answered that he would.

- **CMELD HR concerns:**

Diane opened the discussion stating that in November when she was hired along with a new linesman there was not anyone who was available to set up insurance for them. They were able to get enrolled in health insurance however could not get enrolled in life insurance and now they are not eligible until open enrollment. John stated that he knew this had been an issue and that we have been discussing a shared HR service with PVPC and looking into our options. He commented that previously the Treasurer had done the HR work but things had not been working as smoothly over the past few people who had been in the position and when we went to an outside firm they did not include any HR in their contract. He stated that we are looking at some software options and Jill would be reaching out to get some information on pricing. Andy Sutton commented that with HR laws difficult and ever changing there are not many people who are interested in this type of work. Jason agreed this was a problem and that we needed representation commenting that the school does not have an HR coordinator as of now and has been extremely difficult with a current situation that has come up. Andy stated that he identified a couple of agencies that quoted approximately three thousand dollars to do an audit of our system and the cost after that would depend on our needs. John stated part of the problem is that we have such a small number of employees total and even fewer that are full time benefit eligible.

Andy Myers had a handout that he provided to the Board with some information about HR responsibilities that typically would fall under the Treasurer. These included maintaining payroll and personnel records, as well as administering unemployment and benefit programs. Since hiring the

outside Treasurer firm these things have not been done as it was not something agreed to in their contract. Andy suggested that we take a look at what we would like to do, Blandford uses the same Accountant and Treasurer firm that we do and are having similar problems. After speaking with their Town Administrator Andy was told that they plan on posting the positions in hopes to get people in house again by the end of the fiscal year. Andy Sutton commented that this is something that Chester has already tried and did not have luck with the people filling those positions which is why it was decided to go to an outside firm. Jason stated that although that was correct, we did not have in the budget a salary that he felt was attracting qualified people to the position, since raising that amount to be able to afford both firms we are more in line with finding someone who can fit all our needs and work in house. Andy Myers commented that Blandford is optimistic about being able to fill the positions and would not be opposed to a shared service with Chester, the thought is that we will regain some services and communication between all departments would be improved. John was hesitant about a shared service as when this has been done in the past we did not feel that Chester was getting the attention needed. He stated that he was not opposed to looking but did not want our service to drop or to lose the improvements that have been made.

Deryck commented that he did not want the Board to lose sight of the main concern here, that two employees are without life insurance. The board suggested that the employees pursue their own coverage for the time being to be reimbursed by the town as they had to do for Chief Dubiel with health insurance.

- **MA Cultural Council:**

Don opened the conversation stating that when he was at the recent MMA conference he was able to speak with people from the state Cultural Council for some assistance. We have a current list of people who are on the Chester Cultural Council however no one that is the Chair, previously Kathe Warden had done the job of Chair. Don stated that because there has not been anyone to do the paperwork, we were a little behind the eight ball. John suggested posting something to the website, Jason stated that he could put something together for Wendy to post as well as something that could be posted to the Community Forum. Jessica asked what the time commitment was for the position, Don answered that he was not sure but did not think more than a few meetings per year, specific to the time that they are distributing money and collecting paperwork.

- **Water Commission report:**

Bob opened the conversation first discussing Middlefield Road and the possibility of Chapter 90 funds being used to pave, he commented that he has read posts from Governor Healy about increasing Chapter 90 funds. Andy Sutton stated that they are working on applying for STRAP grants for approximately one million dollars to repave Middlefield Road, there is a little over four hundred thousand available in Chapter funds over the past couple years to still be used and holding out for that would take us several years of saving before we could have any work done.

Bob asked about the underutilized property grant that the town was looking into for 10 Middlefield Road, the old school. Andy stated that they have written the expression of interest, but the application is quite extensive being forty-seven pages and they will be accepting applications in May. Bob then asked about the grant for a drain on Abbott Hill that had been discussed a while ago. Andy answered that they had missed the time period for the expression of interest, but he was looking into options.

- **Tax work off program committee update:**

Kendall stated that Laura had met with Mary Ann and Terry to discuss the program. She told us that things will not change for this year but would for the fall of this coming year. Don asked how many people were currently in the program, Kendall answered that there were five to six applicants that they had budgeted hours for.

- **Highway Department:**

Don stated that we need to schedule the hearing for vote to seasonally abandon road maintenance on the roads that are closed during the winter. This is something that should be done every year as we go into winter. John asked that it be added to the next agenda, Jill asked if that was enough time for the posting, John answered yes.

The Board had not yet reviewed the applicants for the Highway Department Admin. Assistant and John asked if Don could scan the resumes and send it to them so they could move along with interviews. Don answered that he would do that, and that there were four applicants three internal and one outside. John thought that they could narrow it down to three candidates for interviews.

One driveway permit was presented to Jason as he is currently handling these in the absence of a Highway Superintendent. He explained that as Building Inspector he can not provide any building permits until someone receives a driveway permit and thought it best to have him handle this in the interim. Don stated that he had spoken with someone today as well that also needed one, and he would get Jason their information.

- **Roof Repairs:**

Andy Sutton has been working to get quotes for roof repair and a possible replacement for the roof at the Town Hall, when we had the energy audit we were alerted to some water damage. He was able to get a quote for the repair for only five hundred dollars using someone from Chester. The Board agreed that we should go ahead with the repair at that cost and have him get started whenever possible. Andy asked if we had a fund for a replacement if needed, John answered no that we did not. Jason stated for a replacement we would need to pursue three quotes because of the cost. Don stated that when speaking with the theatre about the upcoming season they suggested having the plaster on the ceiling in the auditorium taken care of as well.

- **Town Administrator report:**

Don opened stating that he was asked by Barbara Newton in the Accountant office for the Board to approve the new mileage reimbursement rate of sixty-five and a half cents per mile. Jason made the motion to set the mileage reimbursement rate to sixty-five and a half cents per mile, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

Don discussed that while at the MMA conference everyone was discussing that across the state there are problems with a lack of people to fill both paid and volunteer positions. Much of this people attributed to problems with social media.

He reached out to PVPC about an IT audit and was told by Eric Weiss that they would be happy to help us with that. He updated everyone about Faded Flowers the Cannabis Company looking to move in on Baystate Drive. The Planning Board voted to accept their special permit on Friday last week and it is now in the hands of the Cannabis Control Commission. John asked Jason if everything was still moving smoothly with the property on Baystate Drive as he is a part owner, Jason answered yes there were some small hangups when one of the owners of Faded Flowers was detained in another country after participating in some protests while visiting family.

- **Public Comments or Questions:**

Andy Sutton stated that the Board needed to make some decisions on how to spend the remaining WRAP funds available to the Highway Department, these need to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. Jason stated that they should get some input from the Highway Department, the Board discussed using it to purchase guard rails in a few locations such as East River Road.

Andy let us know as well that he sat in on an informational session regarding our health insurance, he stated that health insurance will be going up by six percent this year and the dental insurance would change to Delta Dental. John commented that this is the first increase we have had in a few years.

Andy stated that in the Finance Team meeting last week it was suggested to change the Selectboard meeting frequency to every week as well as the possibility to moving it to Tuesdays to avoid disruption from Monday holidays. John stated that doing this for many years it has been done both ways and he believed that we accomplish just as much bi-weekly as they ever have with doing meetings weekly. If there is a concern about the holidays he would rather keep regular meetings scheduled Mondays and if there is a holiday on a meeting week we could always hold that particular meeting on a Tuesday but not change the regular schedule. Another issue that has come up is when Town Hall is going to be closed due to weather people were not notified of the closure. Don stated that he sent out a text or email to everyone he had a contact for soon after hearing that school would be closed. John stated that he should check with everyone in Town Hall to verify he had the correct contact information for them.

Jason reminded everyone that this week on Wednesday is the school budget meeting and invited everyone to attend. It is difficult to have a quorum at times because people do not attend.

Andy Myers stated that the Green Grant had been signed off and we will be receiving the report as well as the last payment will be released to the town. This will make us eligible to apply for the next round of Green Grants in March or the fall. Some of the projects that they are looking at are weatherization as well as heat pumps and charging stations to place at the Town Hall. Jason commented that we need to redo the master plan to include 10 Middlefield Road so that it can be included in any of the Green Grant applications, also any of the buildings will require a level two energy audit to apply for grants. This was already done at each of the Fire Stations and the Town Hall.

Resident Eileen Duane was joining us and was interested in safer wireless technology as many towns are now being converted to 5G. She stated that there is a wave of health and environmental concerns that are now being recognized. She wanted to know our current wireless zoning laws pertaining to cell towers, who decides how many the town can have, where they are placed etc. Jason stated that the current zoning bylaws for cell towers is listed on the town website under the Docs and Forms tab, and the Planning Board is who makes these bylaws and any revisions. Eileen suggested that we put this information on a ballot to be voted on for an election. The Board suggested that this be placed as a Citizen's Petition for a vote at the Annual Town Meeting, and if she chose she could hold a Public Information Hearing at the Town Hall.

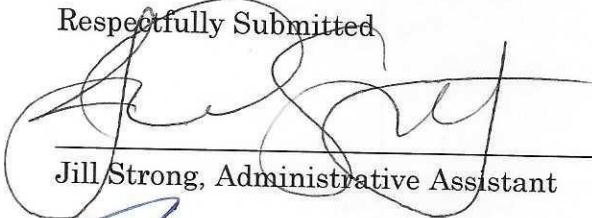
Jessica asked in regards to the Prospect Street project Bill had mentioned that what is starting in May is Phase one and that the other phases are not financed. John clarified that the funding is there for the other phases of the project, but they were not part of this bid package that went to contractors. The bridge height listed on the rail bridge going over Emery Street was discussed as the height listed is incorrect for what the actual height is. Andy Sutton commented that apparently this is common practice for DOT and it is to ensure that no one gets stuck, the listing is off by a few inches.

Ann let everyone know that the COA would be hosting a pot luck on Valentine's Day and invited the Board to attend. Rich asked if there was an update on the mill on Middlefield Road, Jason answered that their permit was voided as it had been over one hundred eighty days, and he has had no response since this happened. Rich asked if there is anything we can do to get things cleaned up, Jason answered not at the moment. Rich commented that he saw some progress being made at the Route 20 property, Jason stated that they have until February 6th to have it completed and Liz and Nick are working on quotes to take care of it if it is not completed. Liz asked the Board to not forget about the hard pack needed at the Transfer Station, John answered that they had a meeting next week.

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

Meeting Adjourned: 8:03 PM

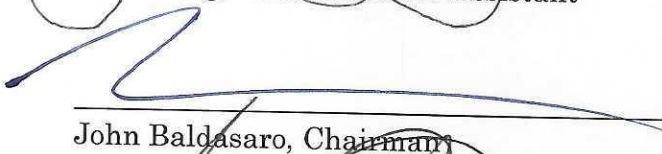
Respectfully Submitted



Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

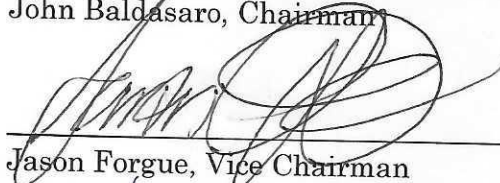
5/22/23
Date Signed

John Baldasaro, Chairman



Date Signed

Jason Fogue, Vice Chairman



3/27/23
Date Signed

Andy Sutton, Clerk



Date Signed