



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

Monday, March 13th, 2023

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

Selectboard members John Baldasaro, Jason Fogue, and Andy Sutton were present. Town Hall staff present included Town Administrator Don Humason, Administrative Assistant Jill Strong, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, and Police Chief Jen Dubiel. Andy Myers from the Finance Committee was present with Water Commissioner Bob Daley, Library Trustee Jane Sutton, Planning Board member Rich Holzman, and Nick Chiusano and Elizabeth, Liz, Massa from the Board of Health. Moe Boisseau and Irv Williams were also present to represent the Littleville Fair as well as some residents both present and participating remotely, Health Agent Charlie Kaniecki joined us by phone.

John opened the meeting at 6:02 PM, warrants, minutes, and any correspondence was signed.

- **Health Agent Charlie Kaniecki report:**

A list of properties to be discussed had been provided to the Selectboard by the Board of Health, Charlie asked if the Board all had a copy, John answered yes. Charlie asked if there was any specific property that the Board wanted to discuss, John answered no. Charlie went on to discuss 664 Route 20 which he stated they were waiting on a title search which is of no cost to the town. 1 Crane Rd. they are waiting on a receiver to be appointed and for the town attorney to file a motion and set a hearing date. 348 Skyline Trail is the same owner as Crane Rd. and are waiting to do the inspection until a receiver has been appointed to the other property. 6 Emery St. the house is ready to be taken down and just waiting for funds to be appointed at the Special Town Meeting, 80 Route 20 is the same just waiting for funds to be appointed. All the remaining properties on the list have been notified about the new code and are just waiting for response from the owners. John asked about a property on Middlefield Rd. that was discussed at the last meeting and the owner is confused as to why this letter applies to him, he asked Charlie why these letters went out without their knowledge. Charlie answered that they were authorized by the town attorney and the Board of Health to send these, the list was generated by the Assessors office and given to the Board of Health. Jason responded that in emails that had corresponded he had indicated his concerns and did not understand why this was done. He stated we have been diligent about these types of properties not being allowed and with this letter we are providing the owners with information on how they can make their property legitimate with no guarantee from him as building inspector that they could ever receive a Certificate of Occupancy. Charlie stated that it is required so the property owners understand their rights and what is proposed by the new code. Jason

reiterated that nothing was discussed with the Board of Selectmen before they were sent. Charlie asked how could this be made right in the Board's eyes, John asked about the property discussed last week and how this would apply to the owner. Charlie answered that the Board of Health was told upon inspection from the Electrical Inspector that it appeared someone was staying at the property however if upon inspection by them the owner can prove no one is staying there and that it is an actual shed they will explain it is not applicable, the property will be taken off the list and move on. Jason commented that 348 Skyline was a new addition to the list that he was unaware of, Liz stated that the Board of Health has received many complaints about the property from neighbors. Jason stated that he is the Building Inspector for a number of other towns and that he is disturbed that Chester is the only town he works for that is creating these lists and sending these letters. Liz and Nick explained that this was a new Mass law given to them by the state and that it would be difficult for most of these properties to comply to the new code this gives the town the ability to go after these properties because they have been properly notified. Nick stated that the properties to receive these letter were only properties that they have received complaints about, some of the people are living in these even though they say they are not because they have found toilet paper in the woods all surrounding the property. John stated that in the future the Board of Selectmen should be given a heads up when things like this happen, so they know what to expect from resident phone calls, Charlie apologized stating that he appreciated where they were coming from.

They discussed two more of the properties on the list 69 Smith Rd. which Liz explained they were given a passing Title V report with a well also 217 Route 20 has a new owner and they received a septic plan. Don asked what the time permit was to have the septic installed once the permit was pulled. Charlie answered two years, however Nick commented that in this properties situation there is currently a bad septic system that was leaking into the road, and they can enforce that it needs to be addressed sooner.

- **Water Commissioner shared Water Operator MOU approval:**

Don opened the discussion stating that they had met last week to discuss the shared Water operator with Blandford and were hoping to have final approval by the end of the month. The Water Commissioners have approved the MOU and now need to have the Selectboards from each town do the same. Jason asked if this position would be funded through the grant, Bob answered yes but only for the first year. Jason asked what the additional cost to the budget would be once the grant runs out, Bob answered that was a work in progress and were working on the details with Blandford. As of now they believed it would be a four-hour employee in each town and estimated a cost of twenty-five thousand. Jason asked if this would be a benefited position as that would also play into the budget, Bob answered the person they have in mind is currently in a benefited position for Blandford. Don explained that included in the MOU is a list of equipment that is needed, and the Board needs to vote for the approval. Jason stated that he had not read the document and if they are required to vote would like to do that before making a formal decision, the other Board members agreed and tabled the decision until they all had a chance to read the document.

- **Highway Superintendent position:**

John stated that we will have a new Highway Superintendent starting on April 10th, Chipper Dazelle from Huntington and hoped this would help move us forward.

- **Licensing Board liquor license renewals:**

Don stated this was voted on at the previous meeting however had still been waiting for the paperwork from Carms and the Chester Common Table which he received. All of the businesses were up

to date with their taxes as far as the Tax Collector informed us and moved to vote on the remaining businesses. Jason stated that he still had not been contacted by any of the businesses for a new inspection. John asked Don where the businesses stood with the ABCC as this should have been completed a couple months prior. Don stated that he had been in contact with ABCC and was told because there were no new businesses and were just waiting on paperwork this was a formality and everyone's licenses were still in good standing. John stated that as far as he understood everyone's license expired December 31st and asked Don to get a letter from the ABCC confirming that all the businesses in town with a liquor license were ok, he asked the other board members if they were ok with this, all agreed yes. John asked if once this was completed if everything was ready to go to ABCC, Don said yes he had everything ready upstairs.

- **Town Administrator report:**

Don went on to discuss that he received the valuation from Mayflower our Assessing group and as far as Laura Lafreniere the Assessors Clerk was concerned the price was good for the work they have been doing and has been pleased with their service. Don stated that this will be a whole town re-eval year. The cost is forty-three thousand which would be for the upcoming fiscal year. Jason asked what is different about the re-eval this year from what is done with DOR, Andy Myers answered that all properties would be evaluated this year. Jason asked what oversight would be done to ensure this happens as we have had trouble with the previous group used saying they were doing things that did not happen. Andy stated there was a lot of oversight from the Assessors and they can tell when a property had been edited in the system. Andy suggested that Jason and Liz follow up with the Assessors about the problem properties that they had been discussing, Jason asked if they could send them the list Andy thought they could and suggested to get a progress report in August.

Don stated that he has received a number of phone calls about the Highway Department praising a job well done and the quality of the roads. However, has received a few complaints in regard to the sidewalks being cleaned. He stated that a resident had fallen and wondered what if any were the responsibility of the town. John answered there were a few but most would be the responsibility of the homeowner, Jason commented that it is a town bylaw, and a citation could be issued by the Police Department if there continued to be a problem. Andy Sutton stated that he was informed by the Highway Department that we used to hire someone to do them, but this had not been done in the past few winters, Mary Ann commented that Huntington usually puts theirs out to bid at the beginning of the season and we should look into doing this.

Don stated that there are some fire extinguishers in the building that he was informed are expired. He made a call and the company who does this will be coming to Town Hall on Thursday to replace any that are necessary. Mary Ann asked that they come to the library as well and reminded Don that each department is billed separately for these. Bob asked to also add the Water Treatment plant to the list, Don stated that he would.

Don commented that there would be the Finance Team meeting via Zoom tomorrow at 1:00 PM and that Town Hall would be closed per the weather policy due to the incoming storm.

Before moving to public comment John stated that they would be conducting a performance review of Don since he has taken over as Town Administrator. As stated in the agenda this was intended to be an Executive Session however after reviewing the reasons to do this it was decided it was inappropriate to break from the open meeting. They would do public comments first then move forward with the performance review.

- **Public Comments or Questions:**

Moe Boisseau stated that they had been in contact with Jill about getting a communication tower for the fair and the concert they are planning to host over the summer which was helpful but was looking for something more permanent. John agreed that was discussed the last time the Board met with him about reaching out to Comcast about what they could do. Don stated that he spoke with Eileen from Comcast who told him that there currently was no contract. John stated that was incorrect we were in negotiations for contract renewal. He would like to see the Littleville Fair added to the towns contract if necessary to ensure they had reliable cell service in the area. He asked if the Board agreed to this, all agreed. Andy Myers commented that the fair was planning to host a craft fair in April and without service some vendors were hesitant to participate because they would be unable to accept mobile/card payments. Jill stated that as she felt MEMA would be busy with the coming storm, she would reach out to them at the end of the week to see if she could secure the communication tower for that event as well.

Andy Myers discussed the Finance Team budget meeting that took place Saturday. He commented that the new Highway Superintendent should be involved in the Highway Department budget and would schedule a time once he has started to go over things. He noted that the Special Town Meeting warrant had been put together by him and Don however it was missing an Article to move funds to the Building Inspector revolving fund. They discussed how much money would need to be moved and from which accounts. Mary Ann stated that at the meeting the cap could be raised, Jason commented that they were informed by Town Counsel that the Board could raise the cap at a regular Selectboard meeting but could not move money around without a town vote. They discussed once this was completed what properties would be taken care of first from their list, it was decided that the property on Emery St. would be taken care of first. Mary Ann asked if the owner of 80 Route 20 had signed the property over to the town, Jason answered not to his knowledge. Andy went on to discuss that they would also like to clean up inactive accounts which would amount to approximately ninety thousand dollars in free cash at the end of the year.

Liz discussed that Dave Pierce and herself had worked on a new walking map for the season and added any new businesses that have come in since the last map was done. This was paid for by the Healthy Hampshire grant and commented that Chester has been the most successful of any of the walking maps.

Bob commented that there was a great success at the meet and greet with Senator Paul Mark at the train station last weekend. They hoped to do another with Representative Nick Boldyga before May when the Prospect St. project would be under way.

Resident Joe Hepworth and his wife joined us for the meeting and had a few words. They live on Birch Circle an extension of Western View off Skyline Trail. Joe stated that lately the road has not been getting plowed and understands that there is only five homes on the street but that it still needs to be taken care of. When he spoke with the school bus driver to ask if they had complained to the Highway Department he was told no that they commonly have problems in Chester. He also stated that the road itself is in poor condition and has not been paved for many years. He was happy to hear that we would soon have a new Highway Superintendent but wanted everyone aware of the problem, his wife commented that she called a few times and spoke with the Town Administrator and left messages with the Highway Department. Jason stated that this was the first time the Board was made aware of the problem, John reiterated and stated that with the upcoming storm they would ensure that the road was taken care of.

Terry stated that the Annual Report was ready to go but still had not had anything from the Selectboard. She let everyone know that King Information Systems was scheduled to come on Monday next week and thanked the Highway Department for their help emptying the vault of the boxes and racking.

Chief Dubiel stated that she was working on a grant that would pay us back for the cost of the bridge academy which was approximately three thousand dollars per officer. She asked the Board if they would like to be part of the process of promoting one of the officers to Sargeant or if they were comfortable with her making the decision. The Board all agreed that she could go ahead with her decision.

Elaine Gilmore who was participating remotely asked who the shared Water Operator they planned to have was, Bob answered his name was Steve Grandlin.

- **Town Administrator performance review:**

Don opened the discussion stating that there were still things that he did not know and was constantly learning. He stated it was difficult to do things without being able to meet with everyone other than in an open meeting, he asked Tom Mullen if they could all meet as a "casual meeting," and was told no that would be a violation of open meeting law. Don stated that everyone in Town Hall has been great and very helpful to him. He was amazed at the number of things that there is to do. He has been working on the IT issues and the problems with benefits and payroll and hoped to be close to a solution. He has created a data file with information that would be useful to his successor. He commented that he has a list of things that he would like to do and visions he has for Chester but is focusing on getting on top of all the things that need to be done. So far he enjoys the job and commented that in his thirty years working for the Commonwealth as well as his time as Mayor of Westfield he has been asked by many if it is less work than what he was used to. He said it was the opposite and although Chester is a small town there is a lot to do. He stated that it is lonely sometimes as he is used to there being more people around. Some things he would like to see for the town is to work on economic development, the train station, a program called Night Sky, and submitting Chester as a possible film location. Don stated that sometimes it only takes one small thing to make a difference and has visions for the possibilities of Main Street.

John went on stating that it seems it is a bigger job than he may have thought and as of now he should be focusing on the day to day administration duties and tighten up tasks at hand. He suggested that Don take a look at his hours and that Don should be at Town Hall during normal business hours Monday to Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, commenting that people want to see him there. Another idea was to schedule time with individuals and departments to discuss their needs commenting that we were due for an all department meeting.

Don stated that the problems with Human resources that have come up he thought were about to break through with the program he has been looking into. The site would be a one stop for all employees and benefit information. He also has been working with Wendy who coordinates the town website about bringing it to the next level. Jason commented that he was unsure if it was a problem with the site itself or a maintenance issue and has asked her for passwords in the past so we could do more updates on our own. Don stated that he spoke with Wendy about that and her apprehension comes from the fact that as she is responsible for the website if something is posted inaccurately she would be responsible for the problem. Jason also reiterated what John said about the hours, commenting that if it is posted that he is there during a specific time it looks bad when he is not there during those times. Andy Sutton agreed, when people are in Town Hall looking for him it gives them a

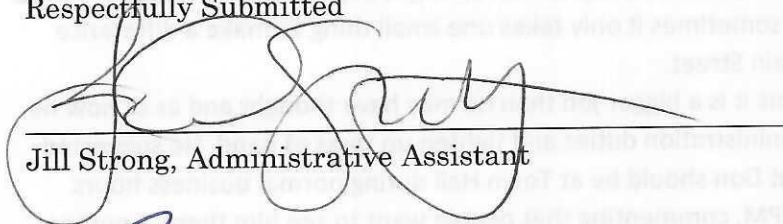
bad feeling when he is not there. Don stated that he has come from a world where he is always accessible and encourages people to reach out to him if they are looking for and he is not in the office. He stated that he is keeping track of his hours and assured the Board that the town is not being short changed. He also is keeping a database of phone calls and the questions that come up. He usually tries to learn the answer to the questions so he can be helpful the next time something comes around. Jason commented that if a call comes in that is a specific zoning question he used as an example that it was not necessary for him to know all of that information, he should simply be directing the call to himself or another that knows that answer off hand. Jason explained that if Don had to learn everything he would be buried in work and never actually get to the things that need to be done. John agreed that was good advice and unfortunately learning it all takes too much time. Don said it was hard to say I don't know, the Board agreed that he would need to get over that and focus on the tasks at hand and reach out for help on the things he did not know how to do.

Don commented that he was sad to have Jill leaving because there were things that she does specifically the warrant that he will need to pick up. He worked with Ivan from the Treasurer's office last week for a few hours. John stated that the warrant was something he specifically needed to stay on top of because bills can get behind. He stated it should not take long to replace Jill and appreciated the work he has done so far and his good attitude. Jason stated that it is not always easy for them to stop into the office and the best way to get in touch with him if Don needed anything was by text as he has multiple emails to monitor, John agreed and stated that was the best way to reach him as well.

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

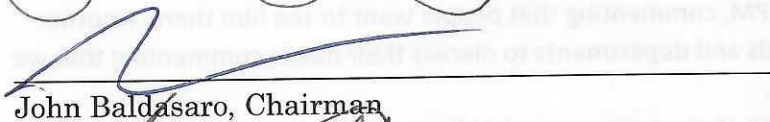
Meeting Adjourned: 7:57 PM

Respectfully Submitted



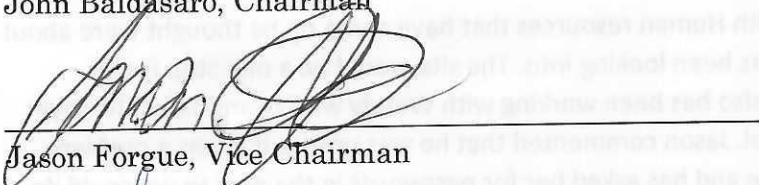
Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

3/22/23
Date Signed



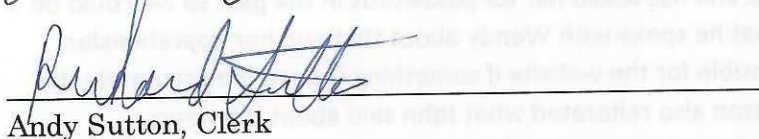
John Baldasaro, Chairman

3/22/23
Date Signed



Jason Forgue, Vice Chairman

3/22/23
Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Clerk

Date Signed