



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

Monday, September 20, 2022

Highway Superintendent Interviews

In attendance: Selectboard members John Baldasaro, Jason Forgue, Andy Sutton; Administrator, Don Humason; Temporary Selectmen's Secretary Barbara Huntoon, Water Commissioner, Bob Daley; members of the public

John called the meeting to order at 6:14 PM. Purpose of the meeting is to interview the three candidates for position of Highway Superintendent.

Candidate #1 – Charles “Chipper” Dazelle:

The Board thanked him for coming. John asked Chipper why he wanted to work for Chester. Chipper gave a history of his years at Highway Superintendent of Huntington and added he's also served on the Huntington Fire Department, water and sewer, and as constable. He offered the board a handout of the current and past records of his work underscoring the fact that he works actively with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and has done \$6-million-plus in grants. He stated he is a “mater road scholar”.

John pointed out Chester has 66 miles of road and 50% are dirt. Chipper stated he would not have an issue with that. He went on to say he “checking out what Chester is looking for” but he's “not sure” he's “decided to leave Huntington yet”. He said he would do part time to “help out”. John said the Board wants to hire a Highway Superintendent and have two laborers and contract out the dirt roads as they have been for the past three years. He stated the Board is considering doing the same for mowing and that highway has hired subcontractors in addition to regular highway staff for snow removal. John asked Chipper his opinion of this model and Chipper responded he does some of the same, particularly grading dirt roads. He also agrees on contracting out mowing.

Andy asked Chipper if he believes one highway superintendent could do both towns and Chipper responded he thinks “there are ways to look at if it could be done.:

Jason mentioned shared services as a potential future option, but said at this point he wants someone committed to Chester.

Discussion then turned to Chipper's requests for salary and benefits, but the Board said not sure the current budget would meet those. John said the salary has been increased since it is recognized that the position is underfunded, but also stated this year is set. John asked Chipper if he would accept the position if it were offered to him and Chipper responded he's "thinking about it". John then asked Chipper if he had any questions and Chipper asked about the vehicles and maintenance. John explained Highway's fleet and issues.

The Board then thanked Chipper for coming in and said they will conclude the interviews and discuss.

Candidate #2 – John Murray

John B. thanked him for coming in and asked why he wanted to work for Chester. John M. acknowledged he'd held the position before and "ants to straighten things out, get things right" and that he has all pertinent licenses and years of experience. He went on the say he "wants to keep the road safe" and work as team. He said there must be "a good crew and good equipment". John B. asked how he feels about contracting out some positions and John M. said it's "easier on highway department" though he "prefers the old way" when he was here but said the "Board is boss". John B. asked his thoughts on highway paperwork including Chapter 90 and grant applications. John M. said he didn't have to do it when he was here as he had an administrative assistant when he was last here and would "rather see someone else do it (paperwork)" because he believes being out working with the crew is "more important." Jason explained the position would require the superintendent to be able to both. John M. also stated he still has a side business but "the town would be first".

Andy asked John M. why he wasn't reappointed to the position when he was here and John responded he didn't "want to get into it" but stated he felt the Board "was not fair" to him then. He went on to say he "hears the (Chester) highway employees don't want to work" and John B. asked how that could be addressed. John M. said "keep after them and pay them more". Jason asked, "How do we do that when there's no budget?" and John M. replied, "Find it". He also stated he doesn't "want to be micromanaged". Don asked who he doesn't want to be micromanaged by and John M. said he wants to hear from residents. Jason said they Highway Superintendent has to communicate with the Board and Town Administrator.

Discussion followed regarding salary, responsibility, communication, and managing crew. John B. asked his availability to start if he were offered the position and John M. said a couple of weeks.

The Board thanked him for coming and said they would conclude interviews and discuss.

Candidate #3 – Corey Sparks

Corey was thanked for coming in and introductions were made including the fact that Corey had also served as Chester Highway Superintendent in the past. Corey

acknowledged he had “made mistakes” but has “learned from them” and would like another opportunity. He said he had a good working relationship with other highway department employees when he was previous Superintendent.

John asked Corey what he thought would be the toughest challenge regarding Highway. Corey replied “the International (truck)”, but also believed it should be kept on the road. John explained the hybrid of contracting out work and Corey agreed a hybrid would “free up time to do pot holes, etc.” in the spring. He further stated he thinks “it’s a great idea”. John asked Corey how he would handle the winter hybrid of contracting out plowing and Corey responded while it would be hard, he would have to think about how to handle it and would try to have two large trucks with wing plows out and subcontractors for dirt roads. Corey said he has formed relationships with other contractors to do dirt roads and it worked well. John praised Corey for “being the first guy to use wing plows.

Andy asked Corey why he left as Highway Super for Chester and Corey replied he “made some errors in judgement” but feels he’s learned. He believes he did well with communicating.

Jason asked how he feels about paperwork such as Chapter 90 and grants and said there is a 3-4 hour-a-week highway administrative assistant so how would he do with that. Corey said there were computer issues in the past, particularly with warrants, but he thinks a 3-4-hour assistant would work. He said he was “just getting the hang of Chapter 90” before and has contacts now.

John asked if he had any questions and Corey said no. He also said he would be able to start as soon as possible. John thanked him for coming and said the board would move on to discussion of the candidates.

Discussion:

Andy said Chipper’s record appears outstanding and that he’s had positive feedback on him. Jason pointed out a lack of firm commitment to taking the job on Chipper’s part and the rest of the Board agreed.

Jason said “We need someone who can nail paperwork and communicate with residents.”

The board then listed pros and cons regarding Chipper with pros being effective communication, paperwork done on time, and experience both on the road and with necessary paperwork. Don also pointed out the ability for a highway superintendent to grants “is huge”. On the downside, the Board acknowledged Chipper’s request for certain benefits is more than the town can pay. John said the real question is what does Chipper want to do. The Board agreed the way to know is to make an offer. The Board expressed concerns about the other candidate’s ability to handle the position and John said, “The worst case is we don’t need to hire now.” and Jason said, “We could make it through, but much better to have the position filled with an effective person”. He went on to state Corey would be an effective laborer and equipment operator and it would give him a chance to learn more.

Don pointed out Gateway Regional School District is starting to add programs including water operator. He wondered if there is a way to discuss town positions and "grow our own candidates" from Chester residents. He suggested a hiring fair. The Board had a brief discussion of "buttoning up HR" followed by further discussion of Chipper's benefit request. Point was made the Superintendent's position is not salary so the option of overtime is on the table.

Jason made a motion to offer Charles Dazelle the position of Chester Highway Superintendent at \$29/hour. Andy seconded and all voted "aye".

John motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:50; Jason seconded and all voted "aye". Meeting adjourned at 7:50.


Respectfully Submitted



Barbara P. Huntoon, Meeting Secretary pro tem

4/8/23

Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

Date Signed

Jason Forgue, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Clerk

4/24/23

Date Signed