



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

Monday, November 21st, 2022

Open Meeting – This meeting is held in the Chester Town Hall auditorium.

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, Assessor's Clerk Laura Lafreniere, and Chief Jen Dubiel. Andy Myers from the Finance Committee was present with Water Commissioner Bob Daley, Library Trustee Jane Sutton, and Highway Admin. Assistant Kathy Engwer. Per the agenda Tom and Kendall Bennett were present for the Zoning Board meeting along with some residents.

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

- **Zoning Board of Appeals meeting:**

Jason as the Building Inspector gave a quick explanation of the requested variance. Tom and Kendall Bennet are building a new porch on their home on Maple Street. He discussed that when they initially applied for the permit for construction it was denied due to set back requirements. Our zoning bylaws state that any structure needs to be set off the street a minimum of fifteen feet, the addition on their home would only be nine feet. John asked for Jason's recommendations, Jason stated that the addition falls into conformity with the neighboring properties and thought it was fine to move forward with their project. John then asked if there was anyone in the meeting with us that wished to comment or had a complaint about the project, there were no responses.

John made the motion to approve the variance as requested by Tom and Kendall Bennett of 19 Maple Street for their front porch, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Tax Classification hearing:**

Laura had James, Duane, and Lisa from Mayflower our Assessing Firm to assist in explaining their work. James opened the discussion thanking the town for the opportunity to work with us. They have conducted the evaluation of properties in town and explained that residential evaluations have gone up thirteen percent which they stated was consistent with other towns of our size in the area. They discussed that commercial properties have gone down approximately three percent since the Covid pandemic which is also consistent with the area. Tonight, the Board will need to vote to keep a single tax rate or a split rate for residential and commercial. John stated that they would be sticking with the single tax rate as we have done in the past as a split creates an unfair burden on the few local businesses that

we have. He asked if the town was now at a one hundred percent valuation, James answered yes. John commented that over the past few years we have been undervalued and asked how we looked now compared to similar towns in the area. Duane answered that things looked good now and we were on par with other communities. Once the Board as well as the Finance Chair looked at the tax recap projection information that was presented, they found a few errors that needed to be corrected before the tax rate could be set. John stated that they would look further at the numbers but would vote on the single vs. split rate.

Jason made the motion to continue with the single tax rate for residential and commercial properties, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

- **Vote to increase Building Inspector Revolving Fund:**

Jason as the Building Inspector stated that he would be abstaining from the vote. Don explained that after speaking with Town Counsel Tom Mullen he was told that increasing the Building Inspector revolving fund did not need to go to a Special Town Meeting for a vote, simply needed to be voted on by the Selectboard and recorded in the minutes.

John made the motion to increase the Building Inspector Revolving Fund to thirty thousand dollars, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

- **ACO Vehicle:**

At a previous meeting Terry brought to the attention of the Board that her ACO vehicle is in need of repairs. She got a quote from Ford in Northampton as well as BTA in Huntington, BTA was the better price at \$4,081.62 which would repair the leak in the fuel system as well as replace the exhaust. The Board thought it was more advantageous for us to look for a new vehicle as the cost outweighs the vehicles worth at age and mileage. Terry asked the Board if they would reconsider, to replace her vehicle she would need to wait for the Police Department to get a new vehicle and retire one of the older cruisers which is how she got the vehicle she has now. Chief Dubiel explained that currently the wait for a new cruiser from Ford is at least a year before they can get one and would still need to outfit the vehicle with everything for the Police Department. Terry explained that using her personal vehicle not only adds additional wear and tear but if she needs to take a dog with her it adds additional wear to the inside of her vehicle. In addition, the cruiser adds some protection if the animal is dangerous as they are placed in the back seat behind the barrier. John asked where each of the Police Department vehicles were at with replacement, Jen stated that her vehicle is a 2013, the newest cruiser is the Hybrid which was purchased through a Green Grant. The Board suggested checking with the surrounding towns as well as MEMA to see if they have any vehicle that are surplus and are looking to get rid of. John stated that he understood using her personal vehicle was not ideal and was a concern of personal safety.

Terry asked if any member of the Board has been in touch with the residents who had the beaver issue on Lyman Road or spoke with Mike Callahan who works with the beaver deceiver equipment. They had not and John asked Terry if she would reach out to Mike, she answered that she would.

- **Finance Team Meetings:**

Andy stated that the meetings held last week with the Finance Team and departments went very well. Our Treasurer Sarah Hunter was with us as well as Barbara Newton from our Accountant Eric Kinsherf's office. He commented that it was good to see everyone face to face and a few of the issues he believed were solved. He stated that they agreed this was beneficial and would do this again in the spring. There were some accounts that Andy has been looking over that need to be addressed mostly to

do with grants. He explained that we need more attention paid to grants so that they are up to date and accurate on reports.

Andy had a request for ARPA funds for Jason that would finalize the solar hookup that has been ongoing at the Town Garage. This would hook up the Pole Barn to the Town Garage, Andy had a quote from Northeast Solar and stated that CMELD said that they would run the wire. Jason asked if this quote from Northeast would have everything connected, Andy answered yes. Don asked if it was possible to wait for the next round of green energy grants and try to have this covered, Jason stated that this project would no longer be funded through a grant. Jason asked if the energy reports that have been available are showing that there will be a reduction in usage by connecting the two, Andy stated that he believed so.

John made the motion to connect the solar at Pole Barn to the Town Garage to be paid using ARPA funds, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

Andy then went on to discuss a few projects that will be started to finalize the Green Energy Grant. There are a few invoices that need to be paid that will be taken care of at the Special Town Meeting on the 28th. The Town Hall will have some weatherization done adding insulation in the attic as well as doing a treatment on the windows. It is scheduled to start next week after Thanksgiving, estimated to take about four days and Andy thought that it should not be too intrusive. The initial idea was to do work on the Town Hall and the Fire Station but due to prevailing wage there was only enough funds to do one location. Jason asked if it would be a problem for us applying next year for Green Energy Grants that we are just spending this now, Andy did not think that it would.

- **Inclement Weather guidelines:**

Don stated that he found an Inclement Weather policy which was approved in January of 1997 and last revised in 2016 that he thought should be reviewed and asked the Board what they thought about the policy. John stated that he thought we should follow the school's lead and if or when they are closed that we could be as well. Don stated that he needed a phone number to be alerted when there are school closures. John told him that if he contacted the school, he believed that he could be placed on their call notification list.

- **Town Administrator:**

Don reminded everyone that this Friday the 25th is the annual Christmas tree lighting at 6:30 pm. Kathy commented that she heard Don was trying to get in touch with her about advertising it on the board at the Fire Station. She suggested reaching out to Flo Bolduc as she would typically be the person to contact for anything like that. John asked if we had the caroling music, Terry answered that she had it.

Don told the Board that he had written a letter of congratulations to all the election winners with an offer to come visit Chester for all the Board members to sign. He then discussed with the Board that last week he met with Wendy Berman who takes care of our website. She told Don that she would get log in information to Jason so that we always had access even if she was unavailable. She went over the website report with Don and explained that is something we could have on a regular basis and tells us how many visitors we have each month, new and repeats as well as what they are looking at. She is putting together a proposal for us that would include updates to the website and explain other things she can do for us.

Don met with PVPC about the Prospect Street project and had a contractor proposal for the Board to sign. The contractor proposed in Baltazar Contractors out of Ludlow, John commented that

they have done multiple projects in Chester, and they are a good contractor. Don stated that it was a good meeting, and everyone is ready to get started.

Before moving to public comments John stated that we needed to discuss Highway Department salaries. The number that was used when creating the budget was \$22.50 per hour for laborers but when eliminating the Foreman position could started laborers at \$23.33 per hour. John stated that in the past there was an additional fifty cents for each hoisters license and another dollar for the CDL. The Board discussed that this rate would be for a fully licensed laborer.

Jason made the motion to increase the Highway Department laborer position to be paid at the rate of \$23.33 per hour if they are fully licensed, Andy seconded, all voted Aye.

Kathy had copies of all the employee's current licenses however Jason stated that for all the employees to be changed to the new rate they should provide a copy of their license to Don that has a clear and valid expiration date. Before closing Kathy had a question regarding payroll with the Highway Department, when they are working on water issues or handling a cemetery burial should this come out of the Highway salary budget. Andy answered no that they need to keep track of those hours so that the prospective accounts can be billed accordingly.

• **Public Comments or Questions:**

There were no additional questions or comments.

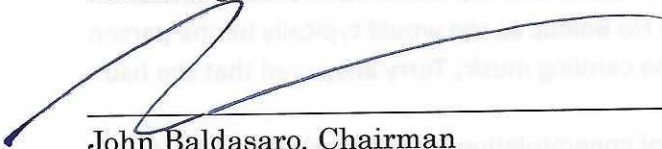
Jason made the motion to adjourn, John seconded, all voted Aye.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:37 PM

Respectfully Submitted

Jill Strong, Administrative Assistant

Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

Date Signed

Jason Forgue, Vice Chairman

Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Clerk

Date Signed