



CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
and ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS  
15 MIDDLEFIELD ROAD  
CHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01011

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TownofChester.net

**Monday, March 27, 2023**

Open meeting---This meeting is held in the Chester Town Hall Auditorium with a virtual option.

Selectboard members present John Baldasaro, Chair, Jason Forgue, Vice Chair, and Andy Sutton, Clerk. Town Hall staff included Town Administrator Don Humason who is taking the minutes tonight in the absence of an Administrative Assistant, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, Tax Collector Mary Ann Pease, Chester/Blandford Police Chief Jennifer Dubiel, Finance Committee Chair Andy Myers, and Water Commissioners Lyle Snide, Bob Daley, and Tom Bean. Ann Daley from the Council on Aging was there as well, along with members of the community.

John called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. Warrants, minutes, correspondence were signed.

**Water Commission Report:**

Water Commission Chair Lyle Snide spoke about the Shared Water Operator Memorandum of Understanding with Blandford. It will mean having full coverage here in Chester at our Water Treatment Facility. This agreement has been worked on for months with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission assisting the process between Chester and Blandford Water Commissioners and Town Administrators. The Chester Board of Water Commissioners agreed to the language of the MOU and are awaiting Blandford's BOWC to do the same.

Once both towns agree, money can be released from an Efficiency and Regionalization Grant that can cover shared equipment costs and shared labor costs.

John asked if the grant would cover only the first year of the 3 year MOU agreement. Lyle said that was so. He said the Board's consent was required to proceed. He said full time help will allow them to get ahead of the curve.

Jason asked if we are doing the hiring jointly with Blandford. Lyle indicated Blandford is the lead community but would be taking input from Chester and that the agreement would be reviewed on an ongoing basis. John thanked the Chester Water Commission for their good work to upgrade and professionalize the water operation and services in town.

**Jason made the motion to approve the MOU between Chester and Blandford.**

**John seconded it.**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

Lyle continued his report with information about a lead line survey that is required and that the state has a grant to cover 100% of the assessment costs. The Water Commission is working with Tighe & Bond about available grant opportunities. Lyle said we must do it anyway so it is nice if we can get a grant to pay for it. It is a competitive grant, but we are hopeful.

Jason asked if lead is found in any of the water lines how long do we have to fix it? Lyle said it would be based on where lead was found and who owned the line, the town or a resident.

Lyle said the Water Commission is also interested in pursuing solar power to run the 3 pumps running at the treatment plant.

#### **Hilltown Ambulance Update:**

Mary Ann Pease reported that the state has mandated a surcharge to cover health care costs that cities and towns must now pay. It was a surprise to everyone and the total for 2 quarters is being evenly divided among the 6 towns. It must be paid quarterly and is based on previous years' revenue. There was agreement among the Board.

Don will work with Mary Ann and Andy to transfer money from the Reserve Fund to pay for this Ambulance Assessment on the next warrant.

Mary Ann said the 3-year projection of ambulance costs was low. They will go before the Finance Committee to ask for more revenue to cover the costs of ambulance services for residents of the Hilltowns. MassHealth isn't covering the costs.

Don indicated Michael Morrissey was on the agenda to speak about a property issue but was unable to come tonight.

**Town Administrator's Report:**

**Robocall System Usage Policy:**

Don said there was a question about the town Robocall Policy and whether it was for emergency purposes or a notification system that could be used by any departments to inform residents who signed up to receive calls about things happening in town.

John said the Robocall System was originally set up for emergencies and was run out of the Police Chief's office.

Chef Dubiel said she believed it should remain an emergency notification system. She said it is time consuming to operate, not set up to target specific neighborhoods, and paid for out of her budget. She said she lacked the support staff to answer all the calls from people who got a robocall or missed it and then called the police department to see what the message was about.

The Chief said she would investigate the system and report back.

**New Asphalt Recycler and Hot Box Trailer:**

Don reported the Highway Department had picked up the new hot patch trailer and it was now insured and registered and being used to patch potholes in Town. The Certificate of Title will be mailed to the Town.

**Town Website:**

Don said that Wendy Berman from Iron Blender in Blandford who is the town's webpage administrator would be coming to the April 10 meeting to speak to the Board about updating the Town's website.

**Notice at the end of town emails:**

Don told the Board that there was some concern about the message that the Town email system automatically added at the end of certain official Town emails about them being public documents but also privileged and confidential. Pioneer Valley Planning Commission had called it to his attention and he asked the Town Counsel to review and advise. Attorney Tom Mullin advised eliminating it completely stating it was unnecessary and confusing.

The Board agreed and instructed Don to get rid of it.

Don said he would ask New England IT to eliminate it from the email system.

**Rural Meetings with Senator Paul Mark and the Mass Municipal Association:**

Don reported that Selectman Jason Fogue, Jason's son Brian, and he had attended a day-long Rural Town session hosted by State Senator Paul Mark in Lenox. He also said that he and Selectman Andy Sutton had attended the MMA Legislative Breakfast meeting with legislators in Westfield and that he, Selectman Fogue and Selectman Sutton were attending a MMA Conference on Saturday in Holyoke. Topics include the state budget, legislation pertaining to small towns, and other matters pertinent to rural town government.

**Chester Cultural Council:**

Don said that the CCC with its new Chair, Jessica Skaske, had a meeting scheduled for Thursday evening in his office and that the MA Cultural Council staffperson Timothea Pham would be coming to Chester to train the committee members and assist them in selecting grant recipients for the coming season. He thanked Jessica for agreeing to step up and lead the committee. Her role on the Rec Committee dovetails nicely with her position on the Chester Cultural Council.

**Tree down on Maynard Hill Road:**

Ron Ouimette spoke up and said there was a tree down on Maynard Hill Road he offered to cut it up for the town for a reasonable price.

*John recessed the regular Board of Selectmen meeting at 6:31PM so they could proceed with the scheduled Special Town Meeting. See separate minutes for that meeting.*

*At 7:02PM John resumed the regular Board of Selectmen meeting.*

Jason said he thought the PTO was still looking for the check for the playground.

Mary Ann said she believes the check has already been cashed. She has emails between the parties. She remembers driving the check to the Gateway School office to leave for the PTO.

**Interviews set for Administrative Assistant to the Town Administrator/Board of Selectmen:**

John asked if the Town had any applicants for the Administrative Assistant to the Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen. Don said we had 3 applicants. The Board agreed to schedule interviews for Tuesday, April 4, 2023, at 6:00PM.

John raised the issue of concerns from the Highway Department laborers about payrates and working conditions. There was discussion about licensing issues and competitiveness for jobs.

Some highway departments and the MA DOT are paying attractive rates that make it harder for small towns like Chester to attract and retain workers.

**New Highway Department Superintendent:**

Jason and Andy both indicated that Chip Dazelle would be starting as the new Highway Department Superintendent on Monday, April 3, 2023. They suggested the laborers get all their licenses and certifications. Andy said the MA DOT required employees to get their licenses within 6 months.

**Tree down on Maynard Hill Road, once again:**

Ron Ouimette asked about the downed tree again and Jason said they would speak with the Highway Department about it.

Selectmen said they would give Chip Dazelle a chance to get settled in and then discuss a number of issues about highway operations with him.

**Is Chester Theatre Company Interested in Buying Old School or Town Hall?:**

Andy said he had spoken with James Barry from Chester Theatre Company one day at Town Hall and asked him if the theatre wanted to purchase the old school or the Town Hall building. James said he would talk to the theatre about it and get back to us.

Andy said he always hears people saying that was an option so he wanted to come right out and ask about it once and for all.

**Finance Committee:**

Andy raised a question about why the Board of Selectmen doesn't meet with the Finance Committee. John said they traditionally only meet when the budget is being reviewed with the BOS. Andy Myers said their meetings were always posted and open to the public and that the Selectmen were always welcome. Don said that he understood the Town Administrator usually attended to represent the BOS so he has been going to all the FinComm meetings he could.

**Town Vehicle Auction with Auctions International:**

Andy Sutton reported he has a list of surplus Town vehicles and old equipment that will be put out to public auction with Auctions International including an old grader, a truck, two sander boxes, an old compressor, and a few more items.

Ann Daley said not to forget the old COA van but Andy said the Highway Department wanted to use the van as a tool truck.

**Jason made the motion to allow Andy to sign the contract with Auctions International to auction the list of excess items for the Town.**

**Andy seconded it.**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

**Public Comments or Questions:**

**One Stop Grant for Old School:**

Bob Daley asked about the status of the One Stop grant for the old school. Andy Sutton said he was working on that with Dave Christopolis from Hilltown CDC. He is working to file the grant application in May.

Bob said he wanted to publicly thank Andy for taking on the role of Highway Department Liaison during this time without a Superintendent. Andy said he appreciated that but he was really looking forward to Chipper starting.

**Highway Garage Sign:**

Mike Stapleton asked to address the BOS. He said he had seen on the Chester Facebook forum a post and pictures of a sign at the Highway Department that he thought should not be posted. The Board agreed and said it would be removed. Andy indicated there would be cameras installed at the garage for security and theft/vandalism prevention.

**Missing Minutes:**

Sister Judith asked about the minutes from past Board meetings that were missing. Don said they would be posted shortly and would all be caught up.

**Weather Policy:**

Sister Judith asked where the Town Hall weather policy had come from. John indicated the Board had voted on it some years ago. He clarified Town Hall was only closed for inclement weather if Gateway was closed, not for school or summer vacations.

Bob Daley asked for clarification about the Robocall Policy since the Water Commission has been using it to notify residents of water infrastructure work. The Board reiterated the Chief will be looking into the policy.

Bob also suggested perhaps using Gateway students to maintain the Town website.

**West-East Rail:**

Rich Holzman said he attended the recent West-East Rail meeting at Scibelli Hall at Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield and Chester was well-represented. The Committee has heard from us. The project is "On Track!"

There being no further comments from anyone in the room or attending on Zoom,

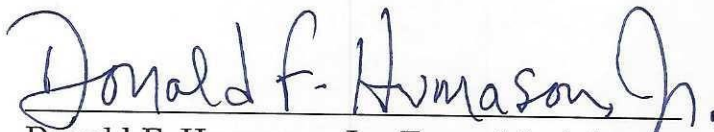
**John made the motion to adjourn.**

**Andy seconded it.**

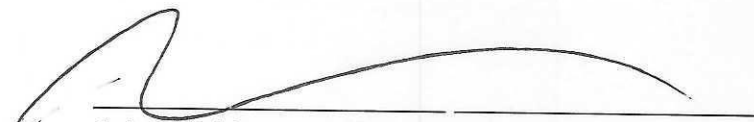
**The motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
Donald F. Humason, Jr., Town Administrator

4/24/23  
Date Signed

  
John Baldasaro, Chairman

4/24/23  
Date Signed

Jason Fogue, Vice Chairman

Date Signed

  
Andy Sutton, Clerk

4/24/23  
Date Signed