

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

(413) 354-7760

TownofChester.net

Monday, December 16, 2024

MEETING MINUTES

Open meeting – This meeting was held in the Chester Town Hall Auditorium with a virtual option.

Selectboard members present were John Baldasaro, Andy Sutton and Craig Gauthier. Also present were Town Administrator Don Humason, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, Finance Committee member Andy Meyers and Brian Forgue, Water Commissioner Bob Daley, Assessor's Clerk Kendall Bennett, Police Chief Jen Dubiel and members of the public.

John Baldasaro opened the meeting at 6:00pm. Warrants, minutes and all correspondence were signed.

Town Business

- Tax Classification Hearing

Kendall Bennett presented options for setting the town's tax rate.

Kendall presented the following tax options to the selectboard:

- Establish a single tax rate at \$18.06
- Establish a split tax rate for residential properties and a higher rate for commercial/industrial/personal property
- Grant an open space discount
- Grant a residential exemption
- Grant a small commercial exemption

Kendall recommended a single tax rate. If adopted, the current tax rate of \$17.08 will go up \$18.06, meaning quarterly tax bills will increase by an average of \$58 per taxpayer per quarter.

John Baldasaro made a motion to adopt a single tax rate at a rate of \$18.06. Andy Sutton seconded. All voted in favor.

Andy Meyers presented a recap projection. The town went over the budget and the assessed property values were low. John Baldasaro said there were town expenses that were needed, yet unexpected and, based on all of that, it isn't surprising to see this increase.

- Legislative Update with State Representative Nicholas Boldyga

Rep. Boldyga represents 10 municipalities and is passionate about getting more local aid to rural communities in Massachusetts. He said that Massachusetts is spending one billion dollars a year on the migrant crisis which will have an impact on local aid. There isn't a clear idea how the money is being spent but Rep. Boldyga said there is an average cost of \$92,000 a year being spent on one family's food, plus they're discussing giving them housing free for a year. John Baldasaro asked about what they are going to do about the migrant crisis. Nick said he feels they should address the crisis but there is an uncooperative stance throughout the state about deporting.

Rep. Boldyga said that New Balance, a large Massachusetts retailer, is building a new facility in New Hampshire, just over the Massachusetts line. He said Massachusetts has the highest cost of living and businesses will continue to leave the state unless it becomes more affordable. There needs to be a push to be more competitive with other states. Rep. Boldyga said he thinks the state needs to lower taxes and the cost of living for residents to encourage people and businesses to stay in Massachusetts.

John Baldasaro said the town of Chester has had water quality issues largely caused by a 30-year-old water filter plant that was designed for a much higher population yield than the town needs because of state regulations. The town wants to be on a well-shared system but that would also cost a lot of money the town doesn't have.

John Baldasaro asked about state gun regulation. Rep. Boldyga said he is against new gun regulations.

Brian Fogue asked about rural aid. Rep. Boldyga said he believes there needs to be more local aid. Brian asked what steps are being taken to raise rural aid. Rep. Boldyga

said that he talks with colleagues every day and discusses it. He wants to prioritize local aid, dirt roads and schools.

Don Humason brought up the option of holding public office hours in the Town Hall for Rep. Boldyga.

Bob Daley brought up the idea of funding railway travel throughout the state. He mentioned the train could be a great travel alternative and could bring people into town from the city or vice versa. Rep. Boldyga agreed that train travel throughout the state is a great idea. He does not know what steps are needed to make that happen but he is in favor.

- HERO Act Update
 - Was not discussed and will be moved to a future meeting.

Old Business

- Police Cruiser

Chief Jen Dubiel said the estimate for the new truck is \$70,000. Since September 2022, the police department has billed out \$86,000 in cruiser fees and \$46,000 in admin fees. There are two grants for \$6,000 and an annual grant for the med box in the police office. The chief said there isn't anything they need to buy with those grant funds, and municipal police trainers have said they are able to be used by the police department in any way they choose. However, the town accountant will not let the police department use those funds without a vote of Town Meeting. Chief Dubiel said they are afraid to lose the truck because the dealership has already been holding the vehicle for 3 weeks. John Baldasaro said the town will have a Special Town Meeting on 1/6/25 to move forward with getting the police cruiser.

- Emery field damage

The group of kids that vandalized items at Emery Park have been identified and their parents are working with the police department on a restitution plan.

- Adopt Hazard Mitigation Plan

Chester's updated Hazard Mitigation Plan met all of FEMA requirements and now needs to be voted for approval by the selectmen.

John Baldasaro made a motion to approve the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Andy Sutton seconded, and all voted in favor.

Town Admin

- Phone System Update / Zoom Presentation

Don Humason has been working with Acada Communications on updating the town building's phone systems to include features like call transferring and e-voicemail. The upfront cost for installation and 22 phones between town departments would be \$7,000 and should yield \$300 savings per month compared to the town's current phone bills.

Brian English and Eric Shultz from Gamut joined the meeting via Zoom to discuss moving forward with the project. Their company has 9 employees, and they work with 11 other towns in Massachusetts. They explained the phones will run through the existing data systems and WIFI. Phone lines will still be active if the internet is down. Police and Fire services will always have phone lines available regardless of internet service. Voicemails will be emailed to departments instead of having a phone mailbox.

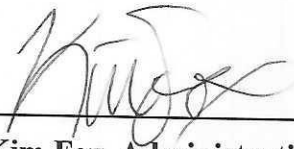
There is free cash and funds in the town counsel account and will be reviewed at the Special Town Meeting.

- Town warrants, turnovers and payroll are due Monday 12/23 by noon.
- The Comcast contract renewal meeting is Thursday 12/19.

Public Comments

- Brian Fogue provided the following update from the school committee: Gateway enrollment overall is down by 7.1% but Chester's enrollment was up 2.9%. Rural school aid just started coming in. The new contract with Lecrenski Brothers went up 12% but that was not as high as other surrounding towns. There is \$70,000 in school stabilization fund and now may be the time to use it.

Respectfully Submitted,



Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

1/6/25
Date Signed


John Baldasaro, Chairman

Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Vice Chairman

1-6-2025
Date Signed



Craig Gauthier, Clerk

1/6/2025
Date Signed