

TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD
October 21, 2020
Select Board Meeting Minutes

PRESENT: Arne Jonynas; Lee Gustafson; Leigh Dakin; Julie Hance; Jeff Holden; Amie O'Brien

VISITORS: SapaTV; Shawn Cunningham; Arthur Smith; Ginger Roper; Ralf Falanga

Meeting was held via Zoom and at the Town Hall.

1. APPROVE MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 25, 2020 SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING AND OCTOBER 7, 2020 SELECT BOARD MEETING

A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to approve the Minutes of the September 25, 2020 Special Select Board meeting as written. Seconded by Jeff Holden. The motion passed.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to approve the Minutes of the October 7, 2020 Select Board meeting as written. Seconded by Leigh Dakin. The motion passed.

Lee Gustafson stated he appreciates the effort and detail going into the minutes and thanked Amie O'Brien.

2. CITIZEN COMMENTS/ANSWERS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Ralph Falanga asked for an update on the speed limit situation on Andover Road. This will be covered in Old Business.

3. OLD BUSINESS

Portable Sound Equipment for Town Hall: Some of the items were ordered and have not shipped yet holding this project up.

Public Safety Building: The concrete work has begun, and the back wall has been poured. The catch basins are in and all of this will allow for the steel frame to go up mid-November. The Building Committee will do a site visit to see the progress on the building after mid-November. The Town Garage is in the final design phase and is ready for permitting. The final cost for this portion of the project are being assembled.

Speed Study: The portable radar sign went up for three days then died. The department is unable to get it running again due to its age. The speed study on River Street and High Street have been completed. One speed tracking strip will be added to Andover Road and Julie Hance will check to see about adding a second one. The police are increasing the amount of time on each shift to running radar. This can be difficult for the officers due to interruptions from having to go on calls. Ralph Falanga would like an email sent to him in response to his email. The No Thru Trucks signs for Church Street have been ordered and the permanent speed sign are not in yet. There are weight limit signs already posted on both ends of Church Street.

Ginger Roper asked how it is determined where the speed strips will be placed to collect the data. Julie Hance explained there is no real process to it but there are things to consider. The strips should be placed on a straight away and not too close to an intersection. Also, the permanent signs need a line of sight to register data. Ginger Roper pointed out there are two trouble spots on Andover Road, and she would like the strips to be placed there. Jeff Holden indicated between the town of Andover and Chester there is a spot which is state highway with a speed limit of 50 MPH. When the road reaches Chester the speed limit turns to 40 MPH. Arne Jonynas would like to speak with Andover about doing a speed study of their own to lower the speed limit in the 50 MPH zone. He would like to ask Andover to drop it down to match Chester's limit on Andover Road. Leigh dakin asked if Andover hires a sheriff or if the state police monitor their roads? Jeff Holden said they had a sheriff at one time but not anymore.

Church Street Sidewalk: Leigh Dakin has heard comments from community members about the sidewalk scoping study for Church Street. Some people were disappointed about the decision to wait on constructing the sidewalk. Arne Jonynas said the study proves the project can be done and the town will apply for grants when they become available. A sidewalk on Church Street might help slow the speeding down as well.

4. VERMONT ELDER JUSTICE PROJECT

Arthur Smith, Elder Justice Grant Coordinator, explained to the Select Board Senior Solutions was awarded a Department of Justice grant to coordinate with other agencies to help individuals over the age of 50 suffering from abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Information about this program will be added to the town's website.

5. GRANTS-IN-AID APPROVAL

A Regional Planning grant for Hall Road funded through VTrans and the Clean Water Act will be applied for. The town has never applied for this grant due to the road standards required by the Clean Water Act. Hall Road is a good road to see if the grant is a fit for the town. The cost of the project is \$28,325 with a feasible in-kind match.

A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to authorize Julie Hance to sign the Letter of Intent to participate in the grant program for Hall Road. Seconded by Jeff Holden. The motion passed.

6. FINANCIAL REVIEW; 3RD QUARTER

The town is doing well financially with 65% of the budget expended. Department heads have been spending the bare minimum and some purchases are being held off. Items that have not been cut from spending are things that would increase next year's budget. The manner in which bills are being paid has been changed, improving the town's cash flow. Jeff Holden questioned the need for the TAN. The town has taken from the TAN already this year with as little being drawn as possible. The town cannot eliminate the TAN but could reduce the amount for next year.

Jeff Holden stated some items needed for his department have been put off. A few unexpected expenses came up this year and certain purchases will still be needed next year. He said his department is short on manpower. The department head meetings held on Tuesday mornings have been helpful in getting assistance from other departments when needed.

7. HEALTH INSURANCE PACKAGE

The employee health insurance package has been reviewed to get an idea of the options available to the town. Jeff Holden, being a town employee, recused himself from this discussion and sat in the audience.

A survey done by the VLCT regarding towns' employee benefit packages showed 51 out of the 128 surveyed Vermont towns offer 100% paid medical insurance to their employees. The reasons for this are longevity, attracting qualified employees, morality and more. Julie Hance pointed out the government and private sector cannot be compared in this matter. Ron Smith told her Chester's employee costs for labor and benefits, at 62% of the budget, are lower than that of other surrounding towns and states, which can run upwards of 80%. Chester does not offer dental, or vision as part of the employee package, which some other towns do. The town has several employees that have worked here for many years, yet the employee budget is still below average. Longevity matters within the town employees because turnover can be expensive.

Time was spent with Suzanne Swanson going over which health insurance package would fit the town best. The package the town currently has is showing a 3% increase for next year, which is a little over \$20,000. The packages that were considered that would require employees to pay a portion would save the town under \$10,000 a year. The only way to show a true savings to the town would be to have employees pay a much larger portion of their insurance which would require the town to switch from a high deductible plan, thereby raising premium costs. New to Vermont is a self-funded level fund plan connected to Signa. Premiums are based on the town's employee pool, not the large pool of employees from

around the state. This plan only works if there are no high-risk employees. The savings would have been about \$95,000, but medical assessments of the town's employees showed the risk was too high. When the older employees retire, this plan could be reconsidered.

The employees would take a pay cut if they were required to pay a portion of the health insurance premium. Arne Jonynas pointed out the school required their employees to pay a portion for their health insurance coverage. Then, the school had to give the employees an increase in pay, and this created bad relationships. The board agrees changing the current health insurance plan does not make sense at this time and it will stay the same.

8. 2021 GENERAL FUND BUDGET; GENERAL GOVERNMENT, TOWN HALL, REVITALIZATION

The 2021 budget process has been a zero-base process. The budget will be reviewed in sections by department over the next few meetings. In December, the budget will be consolidated for the Select Board to make the final decision.

The Select Board Budget is higher than normal due to the search for a new Town Manager. The Town Manager budget changed because SSI and retirement are now being shown in this department instead of in Administration. Expenses will be up a little allowing for more employee appreciation events. A training line has been added to the budget and will be used for Julie Hance to attend 3 online governmental accounting classes. These classes consist of an online financial class Ron Smith suggested at the University of Georgia costing \$1,500.

Revenue for Dog Licensing has dropped. A portion of the fee for a dog license goes to the state and the rest stays with the town. The money is spent on expenses for the Police Department and housing lost dogs at the Springfield Humane Society. The town holds a rabies and dog licensing clinic in March. Dog registrations are due April 1st and reminders will be sent to owners before then.

Payroll is down some with a 3% increase in pay per employee added. Every employee is eligible for up to a 3% increase with a guaranteed 1%. Workers comp insurance is now being broken down by department. COVID related items will be paid for through grant money received from the state. The Listers budget is up a little because of NEMRC. They are averaging 10 hours a month.

The Planning/Zoning salary is up because of increased hours added to the Zoning position. More money has been added to the Legal line item for Zoning. This will allow for more attorney work due to increased enforcement of the bylaws. Also, more will be spent on contractor services from Regional Planning for help with amending the Bylaws. The new Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, and Development Review Board will need training which will increase the budget in that area.

The Historic Revitalization budget has been upped a little because of the new marketing initiative. The repairs to the Academy building ceiling and roof are included here. Some

miscellaneous maintenance such as painting the gazebo on the green and repairing the ramp at the Academy building have been added. Money for landscaping has not been expended this year. The Canopy Management Plan money was used to remove dead trees on town property. Kirby attended some Ash Borer trainings this year. Inventory of Ash trees in the town right of way need to be collected. The town did not qualify for the acoustic panel and sound system grant for upstairs at the Town Hall. The acoustic panels are in the budget costing about \$12,000, which some of the surplus from 2020 could help pay for. Atomic Sound will be setting up a portable sound system soon. The acoustic panels are needed and could be added to a future Agenda for approval.

The Town Hall budget was over expended on repairs and maintenance because the septic backed up into the basement. A cleaning person has been hired to clean Town Hall once a week, and upstairs once a month. Lee Gustafson noted that the utility pole located outside the building has cracked conduit with wires exposed. Julie Hance will call Green Mountain Power to ask who is responsible for fixing it. Also, the light bulb coming up the stairs is out and needs to be replaced. Julie Hance will ask the town crew to change the bulb. This layout for the budget will be similar to what will be put in the 2020 town report.

9. SIGN PALMER BRIDGE LOAN DOCUMENTS

The Palmer Bridge loan is a 4-year loan, 2.3% interest with the first payment in 2021. The 2020 surplus might be used to pay this off.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to Authorize the Board Chair to sign the Capital Improvement Note for the Palmer Bridge with terms as indicated. Seconded by Jeff Holden. Motion passed.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to authorize the Board Chair to sign the Resolution for the Palmer Bridge Loan. Seconded by Jeff Holden. Motion passed.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to sign the Non-Arbitrage Agreement for the Palmer Bridge Loan. Seconded by Jeff Holden. Motion passed.

10. NEW BUSINESS/NEXT AGENDA

Leigh Dakin suggests adding the appeal to Act 250 for the gravel pit to the next Agenda. Julie Hance pointed out the attorney is working on it, and negotiations will start sometime next week when the court sets the first status conference.

The Reserve Fund Policy draft has been started and will need the board's approval. No money has been appropriated to the fund yet. The surplus from 2020 could be used for this.

The revisions to the Dog Ordinance are waiting on Jim Carroll.

ADJOURN

A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to adjourn. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Amie O'Brien
Secretary of the Select Board

Lee Gustafson
Clerk of the Select Board