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**TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECTBOARD MEETING
December 20, 2023, Minutes**

Board Members Present: Arianna Knapp, Arne Jonynas, Lee Gustafson, and Peter Hudkins at Town Hall; and Heather Chase via Zoom.

Staff Present: Julie Hance, Town Manager; and Jeff Holden, Water and Wastewater Superintendent, at Town Hall; and Preston Bristow, Zoning Administrator and Town Planner; and Susan Bailey, Recording Secretary, via Zoom.

Visitors Present: Matthew Gorsky, Bill Lindsay, Gail Zachariah, and Donna Hudkins at Town Hall; and Hugh Quinn, Joy Slaughter, Jerene Slovinsky, Cheryl Joy Lipton, Cathy Hasbrouck, SAPA TV, and Chester Telegraph via Zoom.

Call to Order

Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance.

WATER COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Agenda Item 1, Citizens Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 2, Water Department Budget

Julie noted several items were up in the budget, which wasn't a surprise. The grant line expense was for grant-related work being done for the secondary well location and the sewer line and would balance themselves out, just not in the same year. Water/wastewater is an enterprise fund, so it rolls. It appeared they were budgeting a deficit but as they gradually increase billing over a two-year period, it should balance by next year.

Jeff Holden said employee salaries are now split equally between the Water and Wastewater Departments. They lost an employee recently and had just hired their replacement. He felt encouraged by the new employee because he was smart, had a good work ethic, and could be trained. He is a Chester resident and from Chester and Jeff is looking for people who will stay when he retires. Lee noticed labor costs were identical for both departments. Julie explained they take the total salaries for both departments and split them evenly between the two departments. Jeff said they require all employees to be certified in both departments. Julie said the benefits were allocated the same way.

Jeff said chemicals had increased significantly in price. They have one spare motor for each pump station and only have one new backup motor. The rest have been rebuilt. Usage in water production is continually increasing mostly due to residential. The daily average was 145,000 gallons a day and was now over 200,000 gallons a day. The water being treated had also increased a similar

1 amount. Arne asked if the amount of water coming in and going out of the system was similar. Jeff
2 said they are permitted for 175,000 gallons per day and flood stage is 500,000 gallons a day and
3 the other day they recorded 650,000 gallons. There was 3 ¾ inches of rain in 18 hours in this last
4 flood event and some of the water that came through was not recorded. Jeff is convinced that
5 because they were able to clean the river out north of the plant earlier this year, it saved them from
6 having a major flood go through the plant. More of that needs to be done to help. The outflow pipe
7 is still having issues because the riverbed has risen, and the pipe is equal to or below the bottom
8 of the river and he can't pump out as much as necessary. Arne asked if they would let them move
9 the pipe or if they would need to dredge the river. Jeff said they dredged the river earlier in the
10 year, but the last two rain events filled it in and plugged it up again. Jeff is working on correcting
11 the issue. Arne asked where the water infiltrates from during storm events and Jeff said manholes
12 but there were also a lot of sump pumps in town pumping directly into the system. Jeff has seen
13 people try to comply by pumping it out of the house, but it goes back into their basement because
14 there's no good storm drain system where they are to eliminate the problem. Until that is fixed,
15 the problem will persist. Jeff remembered years ago when they fixed a manhole and found an
16 underground spring around the manhole which stopped 80,000 gallons a day going into that one
17 manhole. They have been working with engineers about what they can do about a secondary well.
18 Jeff hoped to accomplish that this year. Jeff said he was concerned about the -\$43,000 in the budget
19 until Julie explained the grant expense and how they must spend the money before getting
20 reimbursed from the grant. Arne pointed out that both departments have a pretty good fund balance
21 so it wasn't like they were in the hole, and with the increases coming, they should be able to recoup
22 that. Jeff said he has tried very hard to make sure any money spent will help them in the future by
23 reducing costs long-term. Arne commended Jeff for being proactive by having spare parts
24 available given supply chain issues. Jeff said for one pump, he had to wait a year and a half for a
25 part which convinced him to have something on hand. They try to stay ahead, and suppliers are
26 getting better and now the wait is 6 weeks to 3 months, which was better. Jeff had spoken with
27 Julie about having a spare pump at the wastewater plant. He wanted to replace the 20-year-old
28 lawn tractor that had served him well and wanted to replace it with the same one. It enables him
29 to do the banks which are too steep for other mowers. In about 3 years, he anticipates needing to
30 purchase a wastewater truck.

31
32 Peter asked how they were doing with lead pipes. Jeff said good and they had just finished the
33 inventory. There were only 12 that were questionable, not because they were lead but because they
34 were galvanized. Jeff said because there may have been lead in them, they are required to change
35 them too, but first they will change the lead goosenecks. Jeff said in the last 25 years he's been
36 involved in 14 different water main replacement projects in Chester, and they were likely farther
37 ahead than most towns in Vermont. Peter asked if digging up the 12 was included in the budget.
38 Julie said no because the lead inventory service line was entirely grant funded, including the
39 projects to replace them. Jeff said the inventory had to be finished by October and then they have
40 two years. Arne said if issues came up, they replaced them at the time which contributed to being
41 ahead. Jeff said they had just completed an asset management thing where they cameraed all the
42 lines and identified a couple of spots that had infiltration and were in some of the newer sections
43 which surprised him. As soon as they receive the report and review the camera work to learn where
44 the problems are, they can address them. Removing the infiltration will reduce the amount they
45 have to process. Lee asked if it was coming in the joints, and it was. Jeff said there was one area
46 where there were sump pumps that he wasn't aware of and thought some were more recent. He

1 was happy with the condition of the system. Jeff and Peter had discussed the pump station taking
2 in more volume in the future and needed a way to get rid of it. Jeff thought all they had was a 4”
3 cast iron from back in the early ‘70s that comes to Depot Street from First Avenue. Because it was
4 cast iron, it built up a lot of barnacles. Jeff fixed 4 different points in the line where it had broken
5 from movement. The barnacles that build up inside the pipe reduce the flow. Peter asked if they
6 were able to run the camera in the pipe and Jeff said no. Jeff said there is limited access in the
7 force main as there are no clean outs, which is something he wanted done. Arne said they would
8 lose a big section of town as far as sewer output. Peter thought it should be coordinated with the
9 Depot Street project, so it wasn’t dug up twice. Julie said the first step was the Wastewater Asset
10 Management Plan, the second was preliminary engineering work, and then the actual construction,
11 which unfortunately, all takes time. Since the cost was \$900,000, they needed to wait for the
12 funding. Jeff said he never used to put degreasers in the system, but grease is continually getting
13 worse, so they started using a degreaser weekly and have seen an improvement in flows. Arne
14 asked if the chemical affected the rest of the system and Jeff said it was more of a grain product
15 that smelled like pine and not hazardous to the environment. It isn’t cheap but works. Peter asked
16 if they cameraed the siphon by Jiffy Mart. Jeff didn’t think so, but it was one of the newer ones
17 put in after Irene and all encased in concrete. Arne noted the sewer system was mostly mapped
18 out. Jeff agreed and said there was only one spot near the railroad where the railroad used to dump
19 their scrap and finding a manhole was difficult. Best Septic was able to camera it, but he hasn’t
20 found the manhole yet.

21
22 Arne thanked Jeff for keeping the system going and that the water system was one of the best in
23 the state as far as quality and everything associated with it. The sewer upgrade will be coming in
24 the next few years. Arne asked if they were close to reaching sewer capacity and Jeff said they
25 were getting close. Rain events have been over flood stage and left Jeff unable to do anything
26 except watch it go out the door. Arne thanked Jeff for the work he has done for the town.

27

28 **Agenda Item 3, Sewer Department Budget**

29
30 Covered under Agenda Item 2.

31 **Agenda Item 4, Adjourn**

32
33 Peter moved and Arianna seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion was approved unanimously.

34
35 (6:55 p.m.)

36
37 **SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING**

38
39 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:55 p.m. and noted it was only a special
40 selectboard meeting because of the starting time being later than usual.

41
42 **Agenda Item 1, Additions or Deletions to the Agenda**

43
44 There were none.

45
46

1 **Agenda Item 2, Approve Minutes from the November 15, 2023 and December 6, 2023**
2 **Selectboard Meetings**

3
4 Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to approve the November 15th minutes. There were no
5 changes. The motion carried unanimously, and the minutes were approved, as written.
6

7 Peter moved and Arianna seconded a motion to approve December 6th minutes. Lee noted he did
8 not attend that meeting. The motion carried and the minutes were approved, as written.
9

10 **Agenda Item 3, Citizens Comments/Answers from Previous Meeting**

11
12 Bill Lindsay asked for permission to speak when they got to Agenda Item 8. It was granted.
13

14 **Agenda Item 4, Old Business**

15
16 Report given by the Town Manager, Julie Hance:
17

18 Personnel Policy

19 Julie found someone who is a relative of someone from NEMRC and was excited to learn about
20 her company. She does personnel policies for many municipalities in the state and works directly
21 with VLCT. She will charge about \$2,300 from start to finish to rewrite the personnel policy,
22 which was last adopted in 2012. Given Julie's hourly rate and that this person is a professional in
23 her field and familiar with the laws and rules, it would be more cost effective to use her.
24

25 Flooding

26 There was some flooding on Monday, but nowhere near the damage from the July storm. They
27 lost some roads, including Popple Dungeon. Kirby contacted Julie this evening to say Popple
28 Dungeon is officially open and should be completed tomorrow morning. There is a section of
29 Smokeshire out that they are working on. There is a section of both Dean Brook and Lovers Lane
30 that are out. They are keeping track of costs as if it is a FEMA event because the State is
31 considering whether it will be one. For now, they will put the flood expenses under the flood fund,
32 part 2 and will reconcile at year-end. The auditor suggested the expenses be put in the flood account
33 and reconciled in 2024. A lot of the bills won't be received until 2024. Arne asked what the
34 numbers looked like. Julie said Popple Dungeon would be expensive. The July flood was \$1.9
35 million, and they certainly weren't at that level, but it would be well into the six figures.
36

37 Lee asked Julie if she knew what the law was regarding trees that fall into rivers from previous
38 floods. There was concern that part of the damage was due to trees across the river causing
39 damming and affecting water flow. Julie said there was a tree that was down and another that came
40 down during the flood that diverted the water and took out that section of Popple Dungeon. The
41 guys were going to try during the flooding event to remove the trees, but it was too dangerous, and
42 Julie wasn't risking their lives to save the road. One tree down didn't seem severe enough with
43 everything they were dealing with removing debris and gravel debris from the river which was a
44 priority. Lee asked if there were state regulations that prevented them, and Julie said permission
45 was needed. Lee asked if private citizens could remove trees and if he had a tree going from his
46 property across the river, could he remove it and Julie said no, that he needed permission and

1 would need to contact Scott Jensen, the Rivers Engineer. Lee pointed out that there were hundreds
2 of trees across the river driving down Popple Dungeon Road and Mr. Jenson would get a thousand
3 calls about removing trees. Julie could have Kirby speak with him but noted their priority had been
4 getting roads back, not removing trees since the July flood. They are back now but only just back
5 following the July flood. She would speak with Kirby to learn what the conversations have been
6 with Jensen. Peter said if they declared it an event like July, they could remove the trees but would
7 not be reimbursed. Julie said they still need permission. There is never freedom to remove what
8 you want, whether it's debris, gravel, or trees and still requires a permit. Julie said there were areas
9 following July where they were denied permission. Lee asked if they gave a reason and Julie said
10 they were site specific attributed to river science. Lee thanked her for helping him understand.
11 Julie said they have a highway crew of 10 and are limited. She added there was a lot of Facebook
12 garbage that was highly offensive to her highway crew that she would not address, only to say they
13 have a phenomenal and amazing crew and will defend them to her death. She added there
14 occasionally are trees they cannot get to and it's a consequence of living on a dirt road, and she
15 lives on one herself. Lee said he owns property along a river and would like to take trees out and
16 will contact the State. Julie would provide him with Jensen's contact information.

17
18 Jeff said he and Kirby had to deal with Scott Jensen from ANR and Scott Pickering from the
19 highways following the last flood events and both told him that if they ask for something, they
20 trust them and work well with them and give them as much leeway as possible. Jeff thought the
21 higher ups should rethink things if they are going to save the infrastructure near the river. Ludlow
22 just had a \$6 million upgrade, and their plant was destroyed, and Jeff didn't know how Chester
23 would survive that. He hoped they could work with ANR and Julie said they work well with them.
24 Arne said there was a lot going on in the background between the state and local agencies that
25 people weren't aware of and sometimes people react to a specific item when they don't realize
26 that. Jeff appreciated working with them. Lee thanked Jeff. Arne noted there wasn't a shortage of
27 rivers in town.

28
29 Municipal Planning Grant
30 They were awarded the grant to have an evaluation of the town property and once they receive the
31 grant agreement, which usually takes 30 to 60 days, Julie will be working with the Housing
32 Commission who will be heavily involved in RFP and selecting a consultant to begin that work.

33
34 Julie said things were going well with the Commission and it was their third meeting, and they are
35 an efficient group. When Julie was at a VLCT board meeting recently, Josh Hanford who was on
36 a commission having to do with housing for the State is now on staff for VLCT. She spoke with
37 him about housing and he and Katie Buckley from VLCT will come talk to the Housing
38 Commission about funding sources and getting started. Josh said the next step was a housing trust
39 and not fund development, but the commission will need funds and there is always a place where
40 they're needed. Julie will notify the Selectboard when it happens so they can participate.

41
42 **Agenda Item 5, Short Term Rental**
43
44 Arne noted that Preston Bristow and Hugh Quinn were present by Zoom. Arne was open to
45 comments or suggestions with how the board wanted to proceed. Lee told Cathy, Preston, Hugh,
46 and the Planning Commission that he appreciated all their work in helping them identify the

1 number of short-term rentals in Chester and the impact on the community. He apologized for
2 missing the presentation at the last meeting. Lee thought they didn't have a lot to do but wanted to
3 pick up on something Peter had said at a recent meeting relative to implementing a timeframe to
4 new property purchases and applying to have a short-term rental. Lee was thinking mostly about
5 the Stone Village and there could be other neighborhoods that could be gutted but from the last
6 meeting, it seemed like most short-term rentals were in the hinterlands where neighbors aren't so
7 physically close. Lee didn't know that they needed to do much about regulating STRs except
8 possibly something along the lines of creating a 1-to-2-year hiatus before someone could turn their
9 home into a short-term rental. Arne asked Lee if there was a difference between hosted and
10 unhosted for what he was suggesting. Lee would love to see more hosted STRs than non-hosted
11 but the reality was a lot of people who buy property in Chester are looking to help pay taxes so
12 they can afford it and are renting it out periodically to help cover expenses. If someone was turning
13 it into a business, it had a different flavor to Lee than someone who had a house and wanted to
14 rent it out a couple weekends in the wintertime. Lee thought a hosted rental was a better asset to
15 the community, because someone was here who had a vested interest in protecting their property,
16 but it didn't mean unhosted ones would be totally irresponsible. Arne wanted to bring up the
17 difference between the two because in all the conversations they had, he thought hosted ones were
18 a totally different situation than unhosted. The others seemed to agree. Lee thought Peter's idea
19 would be for unhosted and would discourage that use of the property.

20
21 Peter thought an unhosted STR must be owned for a minimum of 2 years and should be included
22 in the ordinance. He suggested an unhosted rental cannot abut or be across from another unhosted
23 rental strictly in the village and outside the village districts in the rural districts, unhosted STRs
24 should be 500 feet apart, which would stop clustering. Peter thought there should be a hotline on
25 the web service for complaints and said his suggestions could be included in an ordinance. Peter
26 didn't think conditional use worked because they couldn't say no to it since it was a conditional
27 use, meaning it was a use with conditions. Lee wondered how a STR that couldn't abut would look
28 like in Stone Village. Peter said it would only affect future STRs. Lee wondered if they could have
29 10 STRs in North Village if there were 20 houses. Peter said they couldn't because it would also
30 apply to houses abutting across the street. Peter said he tried it, and it worked well and had tried
31 allowing only 4% of the housing stock in Chester to be STRs, but the problem he had was he didn't
32 have good data to support it and noted according to Cathy, the only good data they have are sinks.
33 They have so many kitchens so only 4% of kitchens could be STRs.

34
35 Arianna liked the conversation they were having because she had a lot of concerns about zoning.
36 She is against bringing STR into zoning and thought an ordinance was the way to regulate. She
37 asked Peter if it could be accomplished by modifying the existing ordinance and Peter agreed.

38
39 Heather had no issue with changing the ordinance but wanted feedback from Preston and others
40 who knew zoning to reflect on the Board's suggestions and provide feedback so there weren't
41 unintended consequences or issues with governing and enforcement of the ordinance. Arne agreed
42 that getting input from Preston and anyone else involved would help them with the ordinance.
43 Arne could see a lot of gray areas with enforcement with respect to property lines. Arianna
44 understood how Arne saw gray areas but thought the registration process would involve name and
45 address and if the ordinance was well written, it was only a matter of checking the property map
46 to see if it fit and not an opinion. Arne wondered if it would apply to all areas in town or only

1 specific ones. Peter said there were two specific areas. They had just approved village ordinances,
2 so they were pretty much called out. In the hinterlands, they should be 500 feet apart. Peter said
3 there are parts where one residence is surrounded by vacation homes but if they already were there,
4 it wouldn't apply. Peter said if it was zoning, it could be a legacy use. Peter thought the rural
5 neighborhoods should also be protected and thought by implementing this, spacing wouldn't be
6 an issue. Arianna asked if the ordinance would be specific to neighborhoods or one ordinance to
7 cover all zones and Peter said one that would cover all. Arianna said anything they discuss at this
8 point does not apply to the currently registered STRs. The members agreed. Heather said once they
9 had a firm plan of what they want to do, Jim or a legal mind should review it before implementation
10 as there were a lot of lawsuits related to the issue. Arne said that was a good point. Lee asked who
11 was responsible for updating the ordinance. Julie said the Planning Commission had come to the
12 Board with a draft or Preston with the assistance of the Commission. Arianna pointed out that the
13 draft comes from the Commission but it's ultimately up to the Board. Julie and Preston would
14 work on the wordsmithing. Given the ideas presented, Arne didn't think it was a bad idea to have
15 another set of eyes, so the document drafted would make sense. Lee thanked Preston for his input
16 and wanted to know if anything they had discussed was a good or bad idea. Preston said they
17 should look at the benefits they may secure versus the troubles. Currently, they have gotten
18 everyone to register without enforcement. Preston thought once they start telling people they are
19 advertising as an STR but haven't owned their house for two years, they will have some
20 enforcement and the cost to look at. Arne said he had always wanted it as a conditional use, but
21 most of the board did not agree and that was okay and how things work. Arne noted the bylaws
22 don't allow for lodging in certain districts and this was exactly what it was. Arne said in the State,
23 3.6% of the housing stock are STRs which isn't a lot but puts pressure on people to have STRs
24 instead of long-term rentals. Arne thought the laws favored renters in Vermont rather than
25 landlords and thought there should be a happy balance, but the scale was tipped. 16% of Vermont
26 homes are seasonal or vacation and back in 2014, there were only 1,000 STRs and now they were
27 12,000 and the increase in STRs from last year was over 16%. Arne thought it seemed to be
28 slowing and calming down, which made him less anxious to do something more drastic and
29 regulatory. Arne noted, as Preston had mentioned, that losing the support of second homeowners
30 isn't the outcome they wanted as they are a big part of Vermont and the community. Vermont is a
31 tourist state and that's how they generate a lot of their income. Arne had been surprised by some
32 of the statistics and thought things would calm down. Arne thought it was a good idea to do the
33 ordinance in conjunction with Preston and Hugh considering the ideas the Board brought forward
34 and see what they come up with. Lee said with respect to the crawl, walk, run approach, they were
35 beyond crawl but not quite to walk. Lee liked that they were able to collect data which helped him
36 understand what they were dealing with, which wasn't the dire issue they thought it was. Arianna
37 asked when the pause ended, and it is April 1, 2024.

38 39 **Agenda Item 6, Library Trustee Appointment**

40
41 Arne said they would appoint Lynn Smith to the Board of Trustees until March of 2024 when she
42 can run for the unexpired term of Jesse Bailey who Arne thought was moving away. Matt Gorsky
43 said Jesse had submitted a letter of resignation but didn't state a reason. It was submitted after
44 three consecutive months of not making the regular meeting. Lee moved and Peter seconded the
45 motion. Arne asked if Lynn would run in March. Matt did not know but assumed so and had not
46 been given any direct information. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 7, Library Budget

Matthew Gorsky, Chair, and Gail Zachariah, the new librarian, and Donna Hudkins were present. The members welcomed Gail.

Gail said she had been there 3 months and invited them to come to the library to say hello. She said the staff was friendly. They were asking for a little more than last year for the annual contribution. Gail said last year the contribution was \$32 per capita and they were able to provide a lot of good services, but people want more. The current request is \$35 per capita which they could do a lot with. The money they are asking for from Andover is a bigger percentage because they haven't been paying at the same rate. They are considering increasing the non-resident fee and would like everyone to contribute. \$35 is lower than many neighbors, such as Hartland. The biggest increase was because of the forward thinking of the board who worked hard to bring up personnel costs, which are 75% of the budget. \$10,000 is what was budgeted for books last year and they would like a little more this year. Even with their discount, each book costs \$15 and the discounted price for a large print book is \$48 and they have an aging population. One of the biggest costs is digital items. Digital books are one copy per user. If two people want to read the digital book at the same time, the State needs two copies of it. They only have digital books, due to licensing, for a certain period and they cost \$200 a book. Under last year's budget of \$142,000, they really provided \$300,000 of services to the community with all the books checked out and programs attended, so libraries are a good investment. Gail pointed out that although there may not be a lot of patrons in the library at one given time, it didn't mean that a lot of people don't visit. Some people never come into the library with digital material. 1,300 people use the library monthly, and they are only open 30 hours per week. They also deliver books to some. They are a beneficial part of the community. Some of the increased personnel costs are an on-call librarian so there are always 2 people in the library which helps in offering more programs. They are doing well doing a lot with less people. People want the kind of books they hear about on the radio and don't want to wait 50 weeks for a digital copy of a book. They want more programs. They are a welcoming library, but people want even more.

Matt said one of the reasons the personnel budget increased was they spent the last two years trying to bring their employees to the average salary for their positions using the Department of Labor statistics. Gail said they are comparing salaries with libraries for populations of 2,000 to 4,000.

Arianna noted donations, fundraising, and grants for '23 was \$26,000 but looked like they would land closer to \$15,000. For '24 and they had budgeted \$39,000 and she wondered who, if not the library staff, was working in development. Gail thought there was a decrease in what they called fundraising and an increase in donations and book sales. They were overambitious with fundraising but without even trying, the donations were more than anticipated. Fundraising is time consuming. Arianna noted that staff was busy providing services and fundraising was \$2,500 last year and was budgeted at \$21,000 for '24 and she wondered how that increase would happen. Gail thought it was an increase but was \$48,000 total. Matt said over the past year and a half, getting their feet under them and figuring out everything that needs to be done. So since two Junes ago, there has been very little fundraising activity from the board. They planned to do some this year. Gail said last year they anticipated making \$22,000, so to her, it was a decrease because they didn't make it. Arianna was trying to look at reality and was glad to hear that the library board would be

1 undertaking the fundraising rather than Gail. Arne noted fundraising was over \$16,000 in 2021.
2 Arianna wasn't questioning the goal but wanted to make sure the library employees weren't
3 shouldering it. Arne said that was a good point. Matt added that fundraising was their job. Arne
4 noted that usually Andover paid \$2,600 to \$2,700 and asked if they had talked with Andover about
5 \$45,000. Matt and Gail said they were there a couple weeks ago. Arne said they had similar
6 conversations with Andover about emergency services and wondered if the library had a formula.
7 Gail said she had a formula, but the amount was higher and didn't think they'd pay. Gail knew
8 from the strategic comments that some Andover residents may go to Londonderry or Ludlow, so
9 she didn't want to make the amount too much. She said it was a positive meeting and they had 183
10 cardholders, and a lot of homeschoolers, and a growing population. 30% of the power users were
11 from Andover. There are a lot of non-resident cardholders. Her goal is to have everyone pay the
12 same per capita rate, but they don't want to do it immediately. Gail said they are cheaper than
13 Rockingham. Arne found it interesting that digital books were so expensive and that someone was
14 trying to profit from it. Matt said people who purchase digital books from Amazon are leasing
15 them but when he buys one from Barnes & Noble, he owns the book. Arianna wondered if digital
16 books could be donated to a library. Gail said not really and for the library to loan the books, they
17 need to be on a controlled platform. Arianna asked if they participated in any digital download
18 library consortiums. They participate in the Green Mountain Library Consortium, which is digital.
19 They participate in the Libby app, which is also called Overdrive.

20
21 Lee asked why there weren't previous costs for copier and repairs and maintenance. 2023 is
22 significantly higher than 2022. Gail said cleaning in the past fell under cleaning and maintenance,
23 but Julie advised them to separate them. Gail said at some point last year, they changed cleaning
24 services, so it was a significant portion of the bill. It was almost the amount of money budgeted
25 for books. Gail didn't know when they got the copier, but they paid \$300 this year for copies. Matt
26 said Pamela was unhappy with the previous cleaning service. She was proactive and obtained
27 quotes and the board approved the additional cost. Lee was curious why there weren't previous
28 numbers. Gail said before this year, cleaning was included in maintenance and repairs, and they
29 decided to split them up. They are paying more for cleaning but now they're coming weekly, and
30 it was biweekly previously. Lee asked what repairs and maintenance included. Julie said any
31 maintenance to the building comes under the town's general fund budget. Donna Hudkins believed
32 maintenance was because the library was paying for snow shoveling and Julie agreed it was for
33 the sidewalk. Matt said they pay for trash. Gail said there was a door counter that had to be fixed
34 and could be included in maintenance. Lee thought it sounded reasonable. Matt said they updated
35 the technology in the library. Donna said the cleaning company also did a necessary high-end
36 cleaning first before the regular cleaning.

37
38 Lee asked what the library's fund balance was. Matt said the sustainability fund was \$150,000,
39 which was \$30,000 less than when most members came into office and was due to market
40 conditions. They will tap if needed but would rather keep it in reserve. Matt said if there was a
41 fire, they needed to replace the books. Lee asked if there was insurance. Gail hasn't seen any and
42 they will investigate it. Julie would check to see if the town was covering the contents. Matt said
43 as far as he knew, if there was a storm that fried the electrical system, even if it was covered by
44 insurance, they need to get things up and running as quickly as possible and could replace the
45 funds with insurance received. Lee said last year the Board increased their contribution by \$5,000
46 and now they're asking for a \$7,000 increase. Matt said they asked for \$7,000 last year. Lee

1 applauded them if there was money in an account for a rainy day, but also had to consider the
2 taxpayer who is saving for a rainy day. Lee said he wasn't saying he wouldn't approve it but
3 wanted to offer his opinion and be sure taxpayers are getting the best value for their money and do
4 his due diligence. Gail pointed out the money they were saving was taxpayer money and felt they
5 were also doing their due diligence. She said several people talked about once there was a library
6 in Andover, and their sense of loss was visible that there wasn't one anymore. Gail wanted to make
7 sure that didn't happen in Chester. Matt said given the market conditions over the past few years,
8 they were hesitant to touch the funds and by not, the fund increased by 15%. Dipping into it for an
9 operational cost is something they're hesitant to do. Lee agreed, but the caveat was the donations
10 from fundraising from 2021 to 2022 dropped significantly. Lee applauded them for fundraising.
11 Lee wasn't saying they shouldn't ask for the money from the town but was happy they were trying
12 to bring money in through fundraising. Matt said they weren't happy when they saw how short
13 they fell, and it caused them to focus on it more than they had in the last year and a half. Donna
14 said last year's fundraising letter went out a week before the flood in July, so that didn't help.

15
16 Arne thanked them for their presentation, and it would help them with their decision which he
17 expected would be in January. He thought the library was the heart and soul of the town and
18 couldn't imagine not having it, as it's used by so many for so many different reasons and is vital
19 to the town. He thought it was part of economic development and when people consider a town,
20 they look at schools, services, and the library. Chester always receives high marks for the
21 recreation department, the library, the town crew, and other reasons and it takes money, but it's
22 well spent. Matt said one of their more well received programs this year was the forging workshop
23 and sign up was full within a week and there was a waitlist. The children's library recently added
24 an electronic learning system that would be ready soon and would be educational. The Board
25 thanked the library for their work. Arne said it was extremely helpful to have a Selectboard that
26 supported the library.

27
28 (Heather Chase signed off – 8:11 p.m.)

29
30 **Agenda Item 8, 2024 General Fund Budget and Capital Expenses Review**

31
32 Julie said they were waiting for numbers they won't have until 2023 is closed out. At this point,
33 the budget is up \$500,000 and \$180,000 is the first principal payment for the Public Safety
34 Building. Bill Lindsay said in the previous plans, capital budgets and bond budgets had an
35 indication of what that cost would be per year, and it was a line item that he could track. Since
36 2022, the accounting system has changed and for some categories it didn't appear there were
37 transfers from line items, but he may have missed them. Bill asked where the funds were showing
38 and when the bond plan items, principal and interest, and the capital plan transfers occur, and what
39 account. Bill wondered if they were carried in the fund balance in the new accounting system. Bill
40 didn't see any allocation for the public safety building for the bond and interest and Julie said they
41 are always carried in the general fund by department and the Safety Building is carried, because
42 it's multiple departments, on page 10, under Transfer Accounts, Transfer Capital/Bond, line 01-
43 17-80-90-00. Julie would add Public Safety to it, to make it clearer. Highway Transfers are in
44 Highway. Julie said all transfers are in their budget and if there isn't a transfer in that department,
45 they have no expense for Capital/Bond. Bill said the transfers would show up in the fund balance
46 and the only place it would show is in the balance sheet. Julie said the Capital Fund has a separate

1 balance sheet, so the balance sheet for the General Fund would not include the fund balance for
2 the Capital Fund because it's a separate fund. Julie told Bill if he wanted a breakdown, the Capital
3 Bond Debt Repayment Plan sheet would provide details. Julie said there had not been a change in
4 the accounting system. Bill said they had changed from cash to accrual and Julie said it was 15
5 years ago and wanted to make it clear they hadn't changed the accounting system. Julie offered to
6 sit down with Bill and answer his questions. Arne explained it was in different places on the
7 balance sheet but shown in columns by departments on the other. Arne said it wasn't a capital plan
8 but more like a loan and Julie agreed and said they were not building capital.

9
10 Julie continued saying they were up \$500,000 and \$180,000 of it was the first principal payment
11 for the public safety bond. The remaining was around \$370,000 and if they pulled it out, it was
12 about 9%. The cost of inflation last week was at 8 ½%. She suggested they start thinking about
13 things they could be doing but not act until they see where they land. The budget had no fluff and
14 was truly operational costs. Julie said blades for the plows have tripled since January and it was
15 those kinds of expenses that had increased. Department heads are still thinking about where they
16 can save money. Again, there's not any fluff and at the point if they cut too much, they cut services.
17 To Bill's point, there is a fund balance in the capital plan of about \$286,000. \$200,000 of it is the
18 match for the sidewalk project they're carrying and leaves \$86,000. Julie said there are 2 payments
19 in 2024 where they are the last payment for a loan, and it could be used from capital and drop it a
20 little over \$50,000. That was also done in 2023. They could use it for a match for windows for
21 Yosemite or the clapper valve for the library, both were two large items and combined, would be
22 about \$42,000. One-time expenses could come out of ARPA which has around \$400,000 that they
23 were holding to use to purchase the solar field but could be used for other things. ARPA needs to
24 be obligated by the end of 2024. Arianna wanted to know what the chances were that in the first
25 quarter they could evaluate a purchase of the solar field if they needed to allocate it by the end of
26 '24. Julie said they only had to allocate and not spend by the end of '24 and have until the end of
27 '26 to spend it. They needed to have the discussions earlier in the year as there is federal paperwork
28 needed to commit it. Arne said whenever they looked at expenses like that, they had to be one-
29 time expenses. Julie said loans close to being paid off would lessen the amount of the transfer from
30 the general fund to the capital account and those are things she considers. Julie suggested they be
31 careful about falsely lowering the budget which would only hit them twice next year. Julie said
32 there is an element of the budget that it's the reality of running the town. She suggested they have
33 some serious conversations in 2024 and wondered if there were services they no longer needed to
34 provide. What they have, people want, but there is a breaking point, and she didn't know what that
35 was. Arne said salaries had increased \$160,000 because of inflation it cost to have that many people
36 working. Medical seemed stable but salary lines added up close to \$150,000. Julie said the budget
37 reflected a 2% cost of living and a potential 2% merit and averaged 4%. Nationwide it is 8% and
38 they are keeping it low because health insurance increased. Police, by union, are at 4% but don't
39 have a merit raise. Peter noted other towns' departments are down because they can't hire anyone,
40 and that Chester is able to fill these positions and they don't want to lose them because Chester's
41 crew would be incredibly difficult to replace. Julie said the roadcrew can go private sector and
42 make double but they like working for the town who takes care of its employees and health
43 insurance helps and they are thankful. Julie said the other cost that increased was property liability
44 insurance. Arne noted with inflation, everything had gone up. Julie said there would come a point
45 where it wasn't sustainable, and she hoped they could get to a point where they could level off
46 again. Arianna said it was a \$500,000 increase with \$180,000 of it for the one payment and the

1 remainder being incremental increases Julie had described and there were no surprises or Easter
2 eggs in it. Julie said they could pull out a few one-time expenses and drop it by \$100,000. Arianna
3 asked about the capital fund contribution of \$32,000 in 2024 and Julie explained it was the
4 purchase of the two cruisers and 2024 was the first year a payment was due for the cruisers
5 purchased in 2023. Arne didn't know what the answer was with the way they were headed and
6 suggested possibly changing the way property taxes were done.

7
8 Arianna questioned GMSU and Julie explained the town collected the school taxes but had nothing
9 to do with their budget. The school has no taxing authority. Julie explained they were simply the
10 passthrough for them and collected no fee for doing it. Lee wondered how to communicate this to
11 the voters.

12
13 Jerene Slovinsky suggested they advertise to let people know what is going on. She said very few
14 people know when the meetings are and wondered if they could advertise to let people know and
15 not just the tiny signs in front of the Town Hall. Julie said they advertised voting 5 weeks before
16 in the paper of record, the Telegraph, the a-frame signs in 3 locations but it may be a good idea to
17 have a banner at the entrance of town. The Selectboard meetings are posted and published as
18 required by law.

19
20 Matt Gorsky referenced the town website and said the first page lists all the regularly scheduled
21 meetings. Julie added they physically post agendas at the post-office, Town Hall, Smitty's, and
22 other places. Lee told Jerene that neighbor to neighbor communication is good and appreciated her
23 comments. Lee said communication is difficult in society so coming up with ideas helps. Jerene
24 said there are neighbors who gripe about taxes and don't use services but don't want to speak up.
25 Matt said that he's unable to read the town report and suggested something simple as to how much
26 taxpayers are paying for each service, so they know where their money is going.

27
28 Peter wanted to go back to the solar field and wondered if they purchased it, how much it would
29 lower their utility bills and Julie said they were working on figuring it out and needed to talk with
30 Mike Curtis. Arne said it came down to return on investment and should offset the electric cost.
31 Julie said the biggest challenge was finding a funding source to purchase it since the system was
32 already built. Lee said the solar field had generated almost 750 megawatt hours this year, so if they
33 figured out how much the town was using, Lee figured it would cover most of it. Lee laughed
34 because they have been talking about it for years and get nothing from the company who owns it,
35 and they don't want to sell. Julie said she was pushing it and Peter said she should. Peter said if
36 she looked at the budget, it would be a big help and the State would come down with a clean heat
37 bill and they will need to figure out how to comply. They want them to be carbon neutral but none
38 of the buildings are even close.

39
40 **Agenda Item 9, Local Cannabis Control Commission appointment; Tom Diak**

41
42 They needed to reappoint Tom for a 3-year term ending in May 2026. Arianna questioned it and
43 Julie said every term is now 3 years. Arianna had spoken with Tom, and he wanted to be appointed
44 and she wanted to appoint him to be Chair. Arianna anticipated meeting again in February and
45 there were no new applications in the town of any type. They wanted to remain in existence for
46 any applications that came up or for any issues or citizen questions, but they wanted to keep it a

1 quiet commission and meet to check-in and if something came up. Arianna moved to appoint Tom
2 Diak to the Cannabis Commission for a three-year term and Lee seconded the motion. Arne
3 thanked Tom for volunteering and being part of the Commission. The motion carried unanimously.
4

5 **Agenda Item 10, Sign Current Expense Note**

6

7 Julie said it was the Note, Resolution, and Tax Certificate. It was a current expense note and not a
8 tax anticipation note tied to the flood from July. They were at \$1.9 million, and this was getting
9 their cash flow back at an interest rate of 5.43%. Through the bond application, they will get as
10 much back as they're allowed, and they are limited on how much because every town is applying.
11 The bond program has an interest rate of 1.3% so they will pay off as much as they can, and the
12 rest will be paid off as FEMA reimburses them. Arianna confirmed that even the interest could be
13 covered by FEMA and Julie confirmed that. Lee moved to authorize the signing of the Current
14 Expense Note, the Resolution, and the Tax Certificate in the amount of \$1.9 million with an interest
15 rate of 5.43% with Arianna seconding the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Julie said they
16 have 3 years to repay it. The members signed the documents.
17

18 Peter said it was interesting that they said the replacement for it was a bond and usually a bond is
19 a fixed duration with fixed interest, but you could pay it back. Julie said the Vermont Bond Bank
20 passed a 10% program that allowed them to get a bond without going to the voters because the
21 money could only be used to pay off a short-term expense note, and they were expanding it because
22 of the flood. Peter said usually a bond is set up over a certain period. Julie said the bond didn't
23 need to be paid off immediately and could be paid off according to the terms, but wouldn't
24 recommend it. Arne thought they were doing well.
25

26 **Agenda Item 11, New Business/Next Agenda**

27

- 28 • Budget
- 29 • Traffic and Parking Ordinance
- 30 • Alarm Policy
- 31 • Lee asked about the STR ordinance and Julie would speak with Preston and thought they
32 may have a draft at the next meeting.
33

34 **Agenda Item 12, Adjourn**

35

36 Arianna moved to adjourn, and Lee seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed
37 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.