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**TOWN OF CHESTER  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
February 13, 2024 Minutes**

**Commission Members Present:** Cathy Hasbrouck, Hugh Quinn, Tim Roper, and Barre Pinske at Town Hall.

**Staff Present:** Julie Hance, Town Manager, and Preston Bristow, Zoning Administrator/Town Planner, at Town Hall in Julie’s office; Susan Bailey, Recording Secretary, via Zoom.

**Citizens Present:** Arne Jonynas and Steve Mancuso on Zoom.

**Call to Order**

Chair Hugh Quinn called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. and expected that Barre would join them soon.

**Agenda Item 1, Citizen Comments**

Steve jokingly asked them if they were going to wrestle, as the regular meeting room was being used by wrestlers.

**Agenda Item 2, Downtown Transportation Funding Grant Application.**

After encouragement, Julie had decided to apply for the Downtown Transportation Funds, a grant limited to towns designated as downtowns or village centers that have used Better Connection funds to receive a master plan for the village, and Chester had. The grant is \$200,000 with a 20% match or \$40,000. One of the things they had wanted to do was the electrification of the Green on the Information Booth side. The funds also are required to have a transportation component, so they need to do more than electrification. The Master Plan wanted to improve sidewalk crossings, curbing around the Green, and a pedestrian way in front of the shops on Common Street designating where pedestrians should walk. They would add access from Main Street to Brookside Trail directing people to the trail and connect Cobleigh Street parking to the Green. Julie added there was still necessary design work which would be Phase I and may include bringing the same group who worked with the Master Plan back or going out to bid and selecting a firm. V-Trans has programs that include pop-up demonstrations so they could do one in Chester to test the waters before things become permanent. The Selectboard had signed the resolution on Wednesday which also required the Planning Commission Chair to sign.

Hugh asked if there was another funding source Julie was considering for the work to be done at the Cobleigh Street lot. Julie said it was funded under a Park and Ride Grant they received so the paving would happen this summer. This grant would cover walking paths.

Barre mentioned the train service returning to town and possibly having a one-way street and parking near the Depot and wondered if the Green and Depot were too far away from each other to have the study include both. Barre said Smitty’s has a tough time with parking and the train

1 would also. He mentioned the lot next to his property was available and not expensive and thought  
2 it could provide parking and still leave land to enable him to add onto his building and thought  
3 they could partner up on that. Julie said it would need to be a consolidated project and would be  
4 hard to connect it to the Green, but when they did the Depot design work, there were 3 conceptual  
5 designs done and would just need to find funding. The Downtown Transportation Funds could be  
6 one they did next year but would be ideal to finish the design work and would be a bigger project.  
7 Barre thought it seemed like a lot of money and there wouldn't be much to gain where there was  
8 already parking and more to gain in the Depot. Julie said the Depot was not ready. Tim wondered  
9 with \$240,000, given the cost of things, if it would pay for everything. Julie said as she builds the  
10 budget, with everything they're thinking, it would cost \$270,000. If they needed to cut some things,  
11 Julie recommended the curbing along the Green. Julie said they were allowed to have two DTF  
12 grants open simultaneously, so if they started the project in 2024 and were short money, she could  
13 apply again in 2025 if construction started in 2026. Hugh said they needed a game plan for the  
14 obligation and Julie agreed. Tim said once they had a design, they could come back, and revisit  
15 and Julie agreed. Preston thought it was exciting.

16  
17 Tim moved to authorize the Chair of the Planning Commission to sign the grant resolution for  
18 application. Cathy seconded the motion, a vote was taken, and it carried unanimously.

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### 20 **Agenda Item 3, Non-binding discussion on relocation of Sunoco LED pricing sign**

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22 Preston had approved the LED sign as a replacement back in July. At the time, most people didn't  
23 say too much but Arne was a little disturbed about it. Since they now want to move the sign,  
24 Preston was asking what he should say to them. They hadn't applied but had sent Preston the  
25 sketch. Preston was asking the opinions of the Commission members.

26  
27 Barre said he should have paid more attention driving by but wasn't a fan of Sunoco and questioned  
28 if the digital sign was on a separate post that they now wanted to hang from a sign that already  
29 existed, and Preston agreed. Tim, as someone with a marketing background, thought it was because  
30 it would be more prominent. Hugh had driven by to look and thought it almost felt the proposed  
31 location was closer to the road and would suggest it was on the other side of the pole. Barre asked  
32 if the sign was between the diner, and it was. Preston said it was also a backlit sign. Hugh thought  
33 the diner may not be happy about it. Tim had three concerns but wanted to help the business. Tim  
34 was in favor of it if it didn't upset people but thought the sign was misleading with the advertised  
35 price because the numbers were so small. Tim also thought it was on the property line with the  
36 diner. Barre thought Sunoco may own the property just beyond the raised bed. Preston thought  
37 they did. Tim said as it was, it was a legacy sign that had been upgraded and understood the  
38 advantages, but his concern was if it got moved, would they set legal precedence that it was no  
39 longer legacy? Preston said for non-conforming signs, they follow the non-conformity section  
40 which says it can continue if it doesn't become more non-conforming. Hugh said treating it that  
41 way was different than considering it a legacy use. Preston said it was clearly a non-conforming  
42 sign and thought Tim was using the term legacy loosely. The bylaw says no backlit signs and  
43 conversion to LED wouldn't change it and it would be the same sign in a different location. Barre  
44 wondered at what point they drew the line in the sand or let things go. Barre saw Preston as a nice  
45 man who wanted to see the town move forward and get along with people and not create  
46 controversy if it wasn't necessary. Barre would rather see everything back on the corner of the

1 building and wondered if there was a way to get the letters to be black and white and look nicer  
2 for the town. Tim thought it was an interesting sign and was probably high resolution. Preston said  
3 the fact it was a dark blue background was a lot better than a lot of LED signs and the red was a  
4 tad brighter than he wanted. Preston said the original sign was red.

5  
6 Hugh didn't want to be in the position that he was micromanaging where the sign was and thought  
7 Preston should send a message to Sunoco that he had put it before the Planning Commission, and  
8 they weren't thrilled with the idea so they may want to let sleeping dogs lie and wait to see if they  
9 went away. Preston thought it looked odd to hang it on the post. Tim wondered if it would open a  
10 can of worms to speak with the neighboring property owners. Preston said he does sometimes but  
11 advised against it.

12  
13 Steve wanted to back Barre up on one of his points, by saying there are some localities that dwell  
14 on the type of lighting, such as neon lights, and thought that was within their power to do it. The  
15 gist was obnoxious signs coming into town such as neon lights. The number of lumens and LED  
16 versus neon has been a discussion among other commissions.

17  
18 Barre wanted to know if it was all an image or if it was solid stickers. Preston thought the white  
19 letters were vinyl. Barre wondered if their goal was to combine it and if it was worse with the  
20 telephone pole there. Preston said it wasn't laid out well and it was somewhat hazardous to park  
21 there. Tim thought Hugh's decision was a good one and diplomatic. Preston said they could go  
22 ahead with wrapping the pumps and they were going to paint. Tim asked if they were going to put  
23 a canopy there and Preston said they were not proposing it and had clearly stated it. They had  
24 proposed driving around the back, but the flood zone would not allow it. Preston thought it was  
25 too small for Dunkin Donuts.

26  
27 Barre almost thought it was better to have the two signs together. Hugh would generally agree but  
28 did not like it in that spot. Barre wondered if there was more room on the other side. Hugh thought  
29 moving the pole and putting in new footing was something they should resist. Tim said from a  
30 marketing perspective, it made sense to have the two signs together.

31  
32 There was no further discussion about it.

#### 33 34 **Agenda Item 4, Adjournment**

35  
36 Tim moved to adjourn, and Cathy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. The  
37 meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.