

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **SELECTBOARD MEETING**
3 **January 18, 2023, Minutes**

4 **Board Members Present:** Arne Jonynas, Ben Whalen, Lee Gustafson, at Town Hall; and Leigh
5 Dakin, and Heather Chase via Zoom.

6 **Staff Present:** Julie Hance, Town Manager, at Town Hall; and Susan Bailey, Recording Secretary
7 via Zoom.

8 **Visitors Present:** Quincy George Ermerson, Arianna Knapp, Shawn Cunningham, Vincent
9 Buckholz, Clara Buckholz, Tom Williams, Donna McNeill Hudkins, Peter Hudkins, William
10 Lindsay, Scott Blair, Leslie Blair, Diane Bellis, George Bellis, Chris Becker, Ian Bard, Barre
11 Pinske, Andrea Goldman, Meredith Milliken, and Charles Baird at Town Hall; and SAPA TV,
12 David Lewis, Joy Slaughter, Robert Nied, Tom Diak, Carrie Roy King, Evan Parks, Pamela
13 Johnson-Spurlock, unidentified "iPhone" user via Zoom.

14
15 **Call to Order**
16

17 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He
18 welcomed everyone to the meeting. Arne noted the good crowd in attendance and asked them to
19 sign the attendance sheet.
20

21 **Agenda Item 1, Approve minutes from the January 4, 2023, Selectboard Meeting**

22 Lee moved and Leigh seconded a motion to approve the January 4, 2023, minutes. Leigh
23 questioned on page 4, line 3, the word at the end of the line should be intention rather than attention.
24 Lee noted on page 1, line 41 that Aaron Perry should be Erron Carey. Lee also asked about page
25 7, line 12, what the sentence meant about Julie resurfacing research. Julie said it meant she would
26 pull out all the research and Lee thought it made sense given the context. Ben asked about page 4,
27 line 16 about tail coverage and Lee explained it was a type of insurance. A vote was taken, and the
28 minutes were approved as amended. Heather and Ben abstained because they had not attended the
29 meeting.

30 **Agenda Item 2, Citizens Comments/Answers from Previous Meeting**

31 Arne asked for any comments and there were none.

32 **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

33 Report given by the Town Manager:

34 Trustee of Public Funds:

35 Julie met with the trustees who agreed to approve the 2023 expenses requested primarily for the
36 cemetery. The amount was a little over \$29,000. Julie agreed that since the town was ending 2022
37 with a minor surplus of \$5,000, they would not request funds for 2022 given there were further
38 projects coming up for the cemetery.

39 **Agenda Item 4, Update from Local Cannabis Control Commission**

40 Arianna Knapp, Chair of the Local Cannabis Control Commission presented the attached report

1 and asked that it be made part of the minutes. Following her report, she opened the floor to
2 questions. Arne thought the one thing that interested him was whether the commission was
3 necessary. Arianna spoke for herself and said the task didn't require 7 people. She saw the value
4 in the first year as businesses came in. She didn't think the panel had a specific purpose other than
5 being a resource to the community. She thought the Selectboard should consider, at another time,
6 reducing the size of the commission or considering looking ahead to how long it needed to be in
7 place. She again reminded them that she was speaking for herself and would need to confirm with
8 the other members.

9 Barre Pinske, a fellow commission member, said Arianna was amazing and they were lucky to
10 have her. He thought the value of the commission was apparent by her giving the report which was
11 a good example. He would advocate that they continue as a commission. Arne agreed.

12 Heather thanked Arianna for the report. She thought in the long-term there could be more
13 responsibility at the town level and the commission should be kept intact until they transition some
14 businesses, and the state became clearer on handling things would be very beneficial.

15 Lee noted he was also a member of the commission and had just handed his resignation letter to
16 Arianna but appreciated her leadership, the others on the commission, and that it had been a great
17 experience. He agreed with Arianna and didn't see the value of him being part of the commission
18 and would devote his energy and efforts elsewhere. Arne thanked him for the time he had spent on
19 the board and noted it was volunteer citizens that keep the community and government going. Arne
20 thanked everyone on the commission. Arne thought there was a lot of information in the report
21 and saw value in having another set of eyes on it, especially since they opted in. Arne thanked
22 Arianna for the great report.

23 **Agenda Item 5, Discuss Citizen Advisory Committee**

24 Arne announced that the new Chief Tom Williams has been in his position for about a month.

25 Chief Williams gave his view on the Citizen Advisory Board and thought Chester was prime
26 territory to begin this. It is a community with a different mix of culture and a great place to have
27 an advisory board with input on how to deal with policing. The citizens pay for a service, and they
28 are trying to provide the best service they can and if they become one group as far as their mindset,
29 nothing but good can come out of it. Chester Police has been under the same leadership for a long
30 time and things have changed and evolved over his past 33 years in law enforcement and Chester
31 needs to change with it. He thought citizen input was important.

32 Chief Williams used speeding as an example of how tough they could be but questioned if that is
33 what the community wanted. He's looking for community input on policy. His job, as Chief, is to
34 tweak the policy as to how it fits Chester. He noted that Chester Police are not the same as in
35 Burlington and Springfield as they have a lot of different issues than Chester. The advisory board
36 would be a direct link to the community.

37 Chief Williams said community policing is a philosophy of involving the public in policing their
38 own community. Community is a big part of community policing and policy is determined by the
39 community. People may not care about speed enforcement in a rural area, but they may on Church
40 Street.

41 Chief Williams noted the police department has no vision statement. He said it needs to come from
42 the community as they are a community police department. He questioned what their 5-year plan
43 was and said it was something the advisory board would have input on.

1 Chief Williams said people have questions and Facebook is a forum they have used. He said just
2 putting the information out there is a huge success. People argue over the smallest things and once
3 they receive the information, it's communication and not a one-way street. They are trying to be
4 transparent and visible. Policy is to be reviewed and discussed with the panel and meetings can be
5 had with the public. It is one big information sharing event. The topics will drive different things.

6 Chief Williams said he was very supportive. In the State Police, he had the southern half of the
7 state and in most of his career, the entire state from Canada to Massachusetts for fire and explosion
8 investigation. It's nice to have people recognize that you're doing something to make a difference.
9 The advisory panel is the connection and a tool he hoped they could use to everyone's benefit. He
10 thought even in the worst-case scenario, they would still be moving forward.

11 Arne thanked Chief Williams for his input and noted the committee had come up in their
12 discussions over the past half a year, but they wanted to wait until a new chief was in place before
13 moving forward so they could have their input and guidance. Arne agreed with a lot of what he
14 had said and that they want it to be a very positive organization. Arne noted in the package for the
15 night's meeting there were police advisory committees from Barre and Milton as examples to use
16 to give them an idea of how it could be formed and operated and the guidelines that could go along
17 with it. Arne thought maybe the committee should get formed first and then the committee, along
18 with Chief Williams' help, could decide where it should go and how the guidelines should be
19 formed. The Selectboard would approve and have say in it, but he didn't know the exact process
20 at this point. Arne thought with Chief Williams' help, it would help the town and the citizens and
21 have a positive committee and work the way they hope it would help everyone in the town. Arne
22 was interested in other board members' thoughts and comments.

23 Lee said it seemed like there were a few examples of committee policies established elsewhere.
24 He did not feel confident or that he had the necessary skills so he recommended having Julie and
25 Tom work together to put a skeleton framework out there for the board to look at and how it would
26 fit in with their goals for the town. He asked Tom how many members the committee would have.
27 Tom thought of a sampling of the community, which included someone from the school board, the
28 business side of town, someone involved with recreation, and someone from the Selectboard. He
29 said they have a clean slate and could build as they wanted. He suggested even different portions
30 of the town because things going on in Gassetts aren't the same as things happening on Route 103.
31 There are different communities, issues, and desires. He reminded them that they are a small
32 department. He said members could have 1- or 2-year terms and mix the committee up. They could
33 build it as they wanted. He thought representation across the board would provide the best input.

34 Arne thought Lee's idea of getting Julie and the chief together to flush it out was a good idea but
35 also thought there should be some community members involved. Lee agreed. Lee thought the
36 framework could be established, then get community input, then it would come to the board. That
37 way they wouldn't be making stuff up as they went along. It would also give them an idea of who
38 from the community would want to serve. Lee also liked Tom's idea of mixing it up. Arne thought
39 they should get the word out sooner than later that they are seeking community members for the
40 committee. Arne liked the idea that the committee would be more positive and a communication
41 type thing rather than punitive.

42 Heather agreed with both Arne and Lee about having Julie and Tom get together and having
43 community involvement and bringing it to the board but she wanted a timeframe, such as a goal
44 of two months before they assign or nominate people to the committee. She thought giving a

1 timeframe would make people feel better knowing that they were moving forward. She told Chief
2 Williams she was happy about his philosophy and that he wanted community involvement. She
3 thought that was essential going forward.

4 Leigh was very pleased to receive the Police Advisory Committee paperwork in the packet and
5 thought a lot of energy had gone into it. She said it was well done and was happy to see it and
6 thanked them for putting it together.

7 Arne told Heather a timeline was fine and now that the ball was rolling, he thought they would
8 accomplish what they wanted in a short amount of time. He hoped there were citizens who would
9 join the committee and help the town. He saw it as the determining factor of when the committee
10 was formed and how it was formed.

11 Heather agreed with Lee about the expertise and Julie and the Chief had that expertise.

12 Vincent Buckholz of 116 Maple Street had been in the mental health community for many years
13 and wanted to talk more about mental health representing on the committee. He thought that would
14 be of some benefit to the advisory committee and Arne said it would be a huge help. Leigh agreed
15 and thanked him. Julie told him they would be in touch. Arne, Leigh, and Heather thanked him.

16 Ben thought the idea of coming up with a concept and guideline and establishing that to move
17 forward was good and that way the advisory role would be defined as the committee was made up
18 and not just created by the committee. Ben liked the model policy and the concept of
19 communication and transparency. He thought they were all really great things. He followed up to
20 the Chief's comment that there was no mission statement, no vision or core values were the things
21 that an agency like his should be striving to achieve daily. He thought not having those was
22 surprising and it was a great thing to work on and a great first task for the committee to work
23 through with the entire law enforcement team. Arne thanked Ben.

24 Arne thought the consensus was they were all on the same page and it was a positive idea to have
25 the Chief and Julie flush out the basic framework and guideline for the committee and getting the
26 word out to the public that they wanted people to help with it. After they saw what the response
27 was, they could take it forward from there.

28 Arne thanked Tom for all his help and thought it was important for the town and would work out
29 well. Leigh also thanked him.

30 **Agenda Item 6, 2023 General Fund Budget Approval**

31 Arne noted that Julie had been working extremely hard on it. Julie said there was a last-minute
32 change, and the budget was proposing an increase of \$206,084.96 which was down a little over
33 \$21,000 from the previous budget they had seen. It was primarily due to Amanda Silva leaving
34 Chester Ambulance to be home with her family. They are taking the opportunity to potentially
35 restructure some of the emergency services. In the meantime, they have hired from within. One of
36 their part-time EMTs and police officers, Mike Randzio, who was part of a pilot program where
37 they are cross-training EMTs with police officers and fire with EMTs. Mike was the first one. His
38 primary responsibility will be ambulance but while he is waiting for those calls, he will be in a
39 cruiser running radar as a part-time police officer. They have slated him as full-time admin which
40 came with a change in benefits. They went from a family plan to a single person opting out of
41 health insurance which saves \$17,000. In addition, Mike takes over the role of health officer and
42 his salary includes that task, so she removed the health officer stipend. That removed \$3,600 from
43 the budget. Arne noted it was a little higher than before but had to do with the school which was a

1 difficult number to pin down. Julie noted that while the general fund ended 2022 with a surplus of
2 a little over \$5,000, highway ended in a deficit. Highway funds must be allocated separately. They
3 went from a surplus in 2021 of \$53,000 to a deficit in 2022 of \$54,000. Most of the cost increases
4 were in highway. The price of culverts tripled and lumber for bridge material tripled. That was a
5 big part of the increase. Arne mentioned that it was still a budget that would not impact services
6 and was a testament to the hard work of Julie and the department heads. Julie said they had
7 removed anything that was an extra project. Arne noted that when ARPA funds were first received,
8 they thought they could finance things on their dream list, but they had become extremely valuable
9 for the budget. There were remaining funds in ARPA. Arne said that some places in Vermont had
10 much higher increases and Chester was able to keep the budget down.

11 Lee asked if they were looking for a motion to approve it. Julie said they could set it or wait until
12 Friday morning to approve it. She didn't see any changes unless they made cuts to services.

13 There was discussion about the availability of members on Friday. Leigh would not be available
14 as she was having a knee replacement. Some members were available virtually in the morning. It
15 was decided they would meet at 8 a.m. on Friday morning.

16 Donna McNeill Hudkins asked about the status of the library budget and if the increase had been
17 accepted. Arne said it wasn't included and was the same money as last year. He thought that was
18 a good question and asked if it was the consensus of the board to leave it at last year's amount or
19 should it be increased to \$100,000. Lee was happy with \$93,000 and the budget was already being
20 increased causing concern for taxpayers, so he didn't want to add another \$7,000. Arne heard what
21 Lee was saying but noted that every single line was up except the library. Heather proposed \$5,000
22 instead of \$7,000. She thought they should have consistency and give them \$5,000 when they had
23 asked for \$7,000. Ben said he appreciated all the library does. Ben thought they had a fund with a
24 large amount of money that seemed to sit there. Donna said there were other expenses they would
25 be covering from the fund. Donna said their assets are mostly fixed. They could take a percentage,
26 but they had already earmarked \$10,000 to \$15,000 because they need to upgrade many of the
27 systems in the library and that had nothing to do with the \$7,000 that they had requested. Donna
28 said the board had gone through the budget and they are going to try to increase what they bring
29 in through fundraising and grants. Donna said if every other expense in the town is increasing,
30 why was the library staying the same. Lee appreciated what she was saying but said the town is
31 already expending \$108,000 on the library with \$93,000 specifically to the fund. The remainder
32 was going to utilities, fuel, repair, and maintenance of the building. Lee would feel more
33 comfortable if he saw something from the library showing the money they had, what they could
34 and couldn't spend it on, and their plans for it. Lee said the town was in the same position as were
35 the taxpayers.

36 The new librarian, Pamela Spurlock, spoke about capital improvements needed, including
37 technology and a new library management system, due to deferred maintenance and they are still
38 trying to do the community grant for the library backyard for the town. They need \$7,000 more in
39 their annual operating expenses and that's all they were asking for.

40 Heather disagreed with Lee and felt the opposite. She didn't want to go to her constituents and say
41 they increased everything but the library. She said they all agree the library is a very important
42 part of the community and thought they should increase their line item and her suggestion was
43 \$5,000. Arne was leaning toward Heather's idea of \$5,000. Arne said partly because every other
44 department and line item hadn't gotten the scrutiny the library was getting. Arne didn't think the

1 debate had ever been that decisive. To Lee's point, Arne thought the fund should be more well
2 defined but not having those answers didn't mean they should punish the library. Lee took
3 exception to Arne's comment that it was punitive. Arne agreed it was the wrong word to use. Lee
4 thought they needed to be careful they were recognizing the value of various institutions in town,
5 and he agreed 100% the library was valuable and if they had the money, he would give it to them
6 with no problem. Lee thought like the Trustee of Public Funds, they had a lot of money that wasn't
7 being used as it was intended. To Donna's point, it wasn't clear to him what the use of the money
8 was, or the policies related to it. Lee hadn't heard a good explanation yet. Lee said as a town, they
9 were already doing capital improvements for everything. While he understood it was a difficult
10 year for everyone, he wasn't saying it would remain at \$93,000 but for this year, it would be
11 difficult to add a \$7,000 increase to the budget and make more of a burden on the taxpayer. He
12 thought they should defer it for another year and look at it again next year.

13 Heather said the library in the past year had undergone a lot of turmoil and she thought the
14 volunteers and employees deserved the next year to get it together and be clear on what they would
15 do and have a plan. She thought supporting the library should happen. As Arne had stated, Chester
16 has done a good job considering the current environment. Heather thought adding the \$206,000
17 plus the \$5,000 would be \$211,000 and it would still be about a 5-cent increase per Julie. Heather
18 thought about what the library did for the community, especially during COVID. Heather said they
19 had a lot of vulnerable citizens and loneliness was in an epidemic proportion prior to pandemic
20 and didn't know the status. She thought the fact there was a library people could go to, she thought
21 they could do the \$5,000 increase so she was advocating for an increase in the budget. Lee noted
22 that Heather had mentioned fragile community members but that they also had financially fragile
23 community members and he was concerned that everyone has been hit by the current economic
24 turmoil and the increase may put some people on the edge of being able to live in Chester. Lee
25 also wanted to support the library but thought they needed to be aware of the impact on people
26 struggling with increased costs of food and other costs to live. Heather said she saw that but that
27 her priority this year was to come to the budget with a sense of compassion and understanding for
28 all their departments and the library was one of them. Heather wanted to know if a motion was
29 needed. Arne thought a consensus about who was for \$5,000 and who was against would work.

30 Carrie Roy King, Youth Librarian, resident, and taxpayer of Chester said she wanted to advocate
31 on behalf of the library. She understood their concern about adding money and asking the taxpayers
32 for more and appreciated their due diligence. She said she wondered why the library was only
33 getting that attention when the other line items were increasing. She thought the other departments
34 were getting increases. She addressed they were utilizing the funds in so many ways that had
35 benefited the community. She said the library had been underfunded for many years and she, as a
36 youth librarian and certified public librarian, was paid much below grade to the average librarian.
37 It wasn't just about wages, but the services provided to the community. She reads books at the
38 local preschool, she collaborates with the kindergarten and first grade teachers, as well as students
39 at the middle school and their teachers. She said it was a universal situation they were funding,
40 and the library was not standalone. She said they are the front porch of the community, and they
41 were there to connect the community and she appreciated their support.

42 Arne was irked that Lee was characterizing the increase as the breaking point for someone. Arne
43 said it didn't ring for him to be true because it was such a small amount. Arne said he didn't take
44 any amount or increase lightly but thought \$5,000 was a good compromise. Arne said there were
45 years the budget was at \$50,000 or \$60,000 and stayed there for 8 years before they were able to

1 get any increase and the speeches were always the same that it was an important part of the
2 community they supported and there was always a but. He thought the \$5,000 would help put them
3 in line a little better and help them cope with what's happened this past year. Arne thought when
4 they revisited it next year that maybe they would have some answers regarding the funds and what
5 they could be used for, and it would be an entire year after having a new board in place and a
6 director and without all the turmoil and problems that had happened over the last year.

7 Pamela pointed out that the library is a community resource and if it's underfunded, it impacts the
8 resources the community can access such as Wi-Fi, resources for books, entertainment, and
9 education purposes. She said that people many people flock to a library during a recession because
10 their budgets have been cut and the library is a vital resource that helps provide those outlets that
11 they otherwise could not afford. She said if they are underfunding the library, they are
12 underfunding their constituents and their educational pursuits. She thanked Heather for suggesting
13 \$5,000 and thought a compromise was reasonable. She thought they needed to think of the bigger
14 picture and how it would impact the population.

15 Ben thought they were at a point where they could all say how they felt. Ben said every time they
16 talk about where there are different accounts of money, he thinks about Derek Suursoo sitting there
17 talking about money being his money versus other money it made sense. Ben said when they look
18 at the accounts with quite a bit of value and where they're coming from, he saw a difference
19 between the library and the other departments who don't have a surplus. Ben fully supports the
20 library and their mission but has a hard time saying they will give them more money when they
21 have \$300,000. Ben also appreciated everyone's opinion and thought the past few meetings they
22 had good conversation regarding the issue. Arne noted, as a board, they wouldn't always agree,
23 and it was the makeup of the board and community and the fact they could have a civil discussion
24 was valuable. Arne said the question was leaving it at \$93,000 or an increase. Ben and Lee weren't
25 in favor of the extra money. Arne, Heather, and Leigh were in favor of an increase of \$5,000
26 bringing it to \$98,000. Lee asked Leigh Dakin if her husband was a trustee of the library and if it
27 had any influence on her decision. Leigh said it didn't but what it has done is helped her to
28 understand why he is in the chair he sits in and what they do down there. Leigh couldn't say it
29 doesn't influence her but said they have good conversations. In the spirit of transparency, Lee was
30 asking the question. Leigh thanked Lee. Arne noted it was a small town and there was a conflict
31 of interest in many things. Lee agreed.

32 There were no further questions about the budget. Heather and Leigh noted they were happy with
33 the budget. The board will vote on the budget at 8:00 a.m. on Friday.

34 **Agenda Item 7, 2023 Capital Plan/Bond Plan Approval**

35 Arne said the packet included the lasted numbers on the revenue and current expenses, proposed
36 expenses for the bonds, and the capital plan. Julie said they proposed to use some of the fund
37 balance to reduce the taxpayer contribution. That would leave the capital plan fund balance at a
38 little under \$126,000 going into 2024. The only 2023 proposed purchase is replacement of a dump
39 truck. The ambulance has been ordered and they received the grant for the tanker with a \$37,000
40 match. The expenses of those 3 items would not come in until 2024. The bond this year would be
41 a paving bond for the Andover-Weston Road which is in dire need. They are hoping to receive the
42 two for one grant for that. Their portion is being budgeted higher, but they only borrow what the
43 actual price is. That puts paving at \$300,000. They have the match for the project on Green
44 Mountain Turnpike she had spoken about. It is grant funded but there is a match. The last part of

1 Route 35 they have a match for. The first payment for the bond wouldn't be until 2024.
2 Arne knew some of the ARPA funds were used for the last payments. He wondered if there were
3 other places that could be used, and Julie said in 2024. Arne asked about the numbers for 2023 that
4 drop off in 2024. Julie said for the last payments for 2023 they are using the capital fund balance.
5 There is a \$500,000 fund balance and they are using some of that. It was being used for the loader.
6 Julie's thought was not using it all in one year because they don't know what 2024 will bring. Her
7 conversation with the auditors has been to be careful not to suppress the 2023 budget because
8 economists are predicting that 2024 and 2025 will be even worse. Arne said it wouldn't artificially
9 suppress it because it would be a payment that would end next year. Julie noted they may need the
10 ARPA funds next year. Julie said they had used \$125,000 from the fund balance and a little over
11 \$300,000 from the ARPA funds. There is a little over \$400,000 remaining in ARPA funds.
12 Anything that is a final payment in 2023, the capital fund balance is paying.
13 Lee confirmed with Julie that the total expenses for 2022 were \$750,000 roughly and for 2023 it
14 will be \$1.13 million and drop down to \$957,000 in 2024. Julie said part of what was inflating the
15 number was the \$200,000 on the Depot Street sidewalk. The money had already been put in and
16 was being held in the capital fund. Depot Street would likely be constructed this year, but they
17 were still waiting for rail clearance. It will shift over to 2024 so it's inflating the number. Julie said
18 if the \$200,000 were removed, they would be spending about \$800,000. Lee said that would mean
19 they would spend \$1.1 million in 2024. Julie agreed but said the \$200,000 was already there. Arne
20 said that by the time the sidewalk went through, there would be no trains. Lee said the railroads
21 have zero incentive to change and are protected by all kinds of laws and it's been that way for a
22 long time. Julie said it was the state's division of rail and the Green Mountain Vermont Rail and
23 the two agencies don't communicate very well and have different rules and policies, but she
24 thought they were nearing the end as she had senators working on it. It had been going on for
25 almost 6 years.

26 **Agenda Item 8, Review 2023 Town Warning**

27 Julie discussed the Selectboard appointing the Town Clerk and Treasurer rather than having them
28 voted in. Julie said one of the benefits of moving it to an appointed position was the requirements
29 and skills necessary to do the jobs were increasing. It would protect against someone running who
30 didn't have the skills. In some towns, people without knowledge have been elected and wreaked
31 havoc and that's why the legislature had changed the statute. They would not be the same status
32 as a regular municipal employee. They can only be removed by the Selectboard for just cause so
33 there still was a layer of protection like the Zoning Administrator. It allows the Selectboard to have
34 say in who is filling the positions. Julie noted that some people won't run for office and would
35 rather apply. She said the big issue was the Treasurer's position. They hired a bookkeeper and
36 have a financial system in place that works well. Julie added that by statute, they could have a
37 treasurer who came in and completely changed their financial system as there is a lot of power
38 with the position. As a result, many towns are moving to the appointed position. It is a voter
39 decision. Julie said if it passed, the appointment would take effect immediately. Lee asked what
40 the downside was, and Julie said some clerks felt it was taking away their freedom. It wasn't an
41 issue for Chester because their clerk doesn't think that way. Julie said they had done the same for
42 the listers. Lee was in favor of it because accountability was important. Arne thought with the
43 added demands on the person in that position it was important to have a person who was qualified
44 rather than someone elected by the town who was popular. Heather was in favor of putting it on
45 the ballot to the voters. Leigh was supportive of appointments because the Town Manager and

1 others in those positions knew the needs required to serve as the Town Clerk. Arne said the
2 consensus was to leave it on the town warning and have the voters decide.

3 Lee knew they had added in the past the special requests for the articles and questioned if it would
4 be included in this warning at the bottom. Julie said it was noted at the bottom of the budget. Lee
5 wondered if it could be added to the bottom of the warning as a note. Arne suggested discussing it
6 and making it clear on the day they voted on it and before voting on it. Arne said there were years
7 it had been debated.

8 **Agenda Item 9, Service Line Inventory Loan/Grant Application**

9 Arne said it was a discussion they had with the water department to find the lead lines in town, but
10 it was a lot more than that and was an inventory of all the main water assets. Julie agreed. She said
11 it primarily had to do with the lead lines and would be 100% funded by Drinking Water so there
12 was no expense to the town. They would map out all the water as a result. Ben moved and Lee
13 seconded a motion to sign the Vermont Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Regarding Service
14 Line Inventory Loan Application. Lee questioned on page 2 where it had Other Personnel/Board
15 Members, the title role was overted. Julie noted it was their PDF form. The motion passed
16 unanimously. Heather noted that she would sign it Friday.

17 **Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda**

18 Lee asked if they would have information about the solar field appraisal by the next meeting. Julie
19 thought they would by the first meeting in February. Lee asked for it to be put on the agenda if
20 they had the information by then. Arne added once they had the appraisal, they should be able to
21 go forward.

22 Arne asked if Julie had been contacted regarding a stage for the Academy Building. Julie
23 understood there was a conversation coming and would get more information. She thought she
24 may have a voicemail but hadn't listened to it yet.

25 **Agenda Item 11, Executive Session Police Collective Bargaining Agreement**

26 Julie had emailed the changes and they had agreed with them so there was no executive session
27 needed.

28 **Agenda Item 12, Approve Collective Bargaining Agreement**

29 Arne noted a lot of hard work had gone into it over the past year. Arne thought it met all the needs
30 of the union and the town. Arne thought most of it was the relationship they already had but that
31 it was now put in writing. Arne entertained a motion for Julie to sign the agreement with The New
32 England Police Benevolent Association Local 443, dated January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2025.
33 Ben moved and Leigh seconded the motion. Lee noted on page 24, Article 39 the subsections were
34 numbered as Article 38 which could become confusing. Article 38 on page 22 had no numbers
35 with it and Article 39 on page 24 the subsections were labeled as 38.1 and 2. Julie would have it
36 changed. Lee suggested numbering the subsections under Article 38 to make everything uniform.
37 He recommended Julie signing it once it was satisfactory. Ben questioned if the January to
38 December dates worked for the town and Julie said it did. The motion passed unanimously.

39 **Agenda Item 13, Adjourn**

40 Lee moved to adjourn the regular meeting, and Leigh seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and
41 the motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

1 **Water & Wastewater Commissioners Meeting**
2 (Immediately followed the regular meeting.)

3 **Agenda Item 1, Citizens' Comments**

4 No comments.

5 **Agenda Item 2, Approve 2023 Water Fund Budget**

6 Julie had a few changes primarily having to do with labor. All the employees have been pooled
7 into one and divided by 50% between water and sewer. It is a better representation of what is
8 taking place. Benefits were also divided between the departments. The only change since the last
9 time was an increase in chemicals for both budgets. The other thing they learned and would affect
10 the capital fund was in the first bond series in 2016, in that bond was water and hydrants and the
11 purchase of the land where the new tank went. For sewer, two pump stations were appraised which
12 were part of those bonds. For the capital plan, water and sewer were supposed to contribute to the
13 capital fund yearly from 2016 as part of their payment. Those transfers never took place. Julie
14 caught it when she did a deep dive. When the bond was set up, the transfer and payment never got
15 to the bookkeeper. The payments had been coming from the general fund without water and
16 sewer's contribution. A transfer was made this year for those years and caught them up. In 2023,
17 their last payment will be made. It will impact the fund balance in the capital plan in a positive
18 direction. The fund balances are healthy in water and sewer. Julie noted those contributions needed
19 to be made to the general fund and they had happened. Once they get into the year, they will look
20 at raising rates. Rates have not been raised for years but Julie did not expect that any increases
21 would be excessive. The cost of water and sewer is going up, so the rates need to reflect that. They
22 don't want to tap the water and sewer fund balances because they have large projects coming. It
23 would be nice to use those fund balances for grant matches and other things. Worker's
24 compensation and property casualty are up across the board. Julie explained that the co-insurance
25 was looking higher because they have two employees who are married to each other and are on
26 one plan, so it should be split, and water should carry a portion of the insurance which is why there
27 was an increase. Arne said it was a better representation of what is happening.

28 Arne asked if there were any questions or concerns regarding the water or sewer department
29 budget.

30 Lee moved and Heather seconded a motion to approve the 2023 water budget. The motion passed
31 unanimously.

32 **Agenda Item 3, Approve 2024 Sewer Fund Budget**

33 Leigh moved and Lee seconded a motion to approve the 2023 Sewer Fund budget. The motion
34 passed unanimously.

35 Lee moved and Heather seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion passed and the meeting was
36 adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

Chester Vermont Local Cannabis Control Commission - January report
Compiled by Arianna Knapp on behalf of the LCCC
To be presented to the Selectboard January 18, 2023

January 12, 2023

Vermont and Chester Cannabis industry timeline:

- Legalized adult use in the state – October 2020 (S54, now ACT 164)
- Town of Chester “Opt in” vote – March 2022
- Chester Select board decides to empanel commission – March 2022
 - Arianna Knapp, Riesa Alexander, Lee Gustafson (Selectboard Member), Ben Whalen (Selectboard member), Tom Diak, Barry Penske (1 vacant seat)
- 1st Local Cannabis Commission meeting – April 2022
- Charles Beard fills empty seat – September 2022
- State opens applications for Retail Cannabis businesses– September 2022
- Retail Cannabis for recreational use open for business – October 2022
- 1st application for Retail sale in Chester – anticipated January 2023

What the commission does (and does not do):

- Review and approve applications
 - Since the commission was empaneled in March, the State has continued to set policy and procedure which has developed in a manner which leaves the local commission with little or no substantive decision making authority.
- The Commission has no authority or responsibility for cannabis-related businesses that are not retail to public. (i.e. – there is no local licensing requirement for growers, wholesalers or manufacturers who are interested in establishing business in Chester)
- Education resource/Community information – our hope is to provide a clearing house for questions and concerns about Vermont’s Cannabis industry, as well as to be a resource for Chester entrepreneurs/business leaders who may be entering this new business sector and provide information to citizens.
- When and If a Retail Cannabis business is operating, LCCC as a body may receive concerns regarding those issues we do have engagement on - noise, light, signage, nuisance. However, the Zoning Administrator continues to hold primary jurisdiction for any of these concerns regardless of the nature of the business.
- If there are concerns about non-retail cannabis establishments in Chester in the areas of noise, light, signage, and nuisance, the local Commission can be a resource for compliance questions. However, the Zoning Administrator continues to hold primary jurisdiction for any of these concerns regardless of the nature of the business.
- Stay up to date on the shifting regulations that are evolving from the state to inform/support town zoning, DRB, etc

State snapshot:

- Adult Use/Recreational Sales legal as of 10/1 – 2.6 Million dollars in business for the State of Vermont in October 2022 which generated over \$300,000 to the state General Fund in the first 9 weeks of retail sales.
- (At the time of writing this) Thirty-two retail licenses have been issued and there are 21 retail dispensaries open in Vermont.
- Thirty towns or Villages have Local Commissions as of December 2022
- Anecdotal news from other VT towns (small and large)
 - Bennington
 - Montgomery
- Questions regarding funds to towns from taxes or fees (evolving at State level)
 - VT sales tax on Cannabis is 20% (14% Excise, 6% retail), Act 164 states that “revenue from the sales and use tax imposed . . . on retail sales of cannabis or cannabis products in this State shall be used to fund a grant program to start or expand afterschool and summer learning programs, with a focus on increasing access in underserved areas of the State.”
 - A \$100 local application fee is collected by the State and distributed to the town.
 - Excise tax is allocated by the state and is earmarked for education and community resources. (Not as a financial benefit to the town)

Issues (general)

- Inventory – statewide
 - Due to the timing of the growing and cultivation cycle, retail businesses that have already opened have access to a limited supply of product. Cultivator licenses as well as manufacturer and testing labs have all been coming on line at a steady but slow pace.
- Consumption laws - Who, How and to what measure can cannabis consumption be tested as relates to driving? This is the purview of the State regulations
 - Legitimate concerns, but the purview of the State regulators and legislators.
- Compliance

Education:

- We are not experts, but we are in the position to find answers if we don't know.
 - The goal is to be a resource to community members and business interests for information and updated regulations which are changing quickly.

Mission

- Review applications (zoning has the bulk of the responsibility)
- Be a resource for incoming cannabis businesses in Chester
- Local compliance (Signage, Light, Noise, Nuisance)
- Provide information to community

Looking ahead

- Retail - The State projects 30-40% growth year over year for the next two years
- Value of commission - As of October 2023, the state will have all aspects of regulation and compliance under their jurisdiction, likely rendering local commissions unnecessary
- Value of thriving market - over \$1,000,000 projected to be added to the State's general fund in the first year. Speculation for tourism impact has yet to be published.
- Community and business growth - the Vermont Cannabis industry has been rolled out with a conscious effort to keep business owners and their profits here in the state.
- New England - Connecticut and New York have both opened for retail sales in the last three months. With availability becoming less of an issue, Vermont continues to focus on the boutique, unique, craft nature of Vermont's Cannabis entrepreneurs and their products.

Q and A