

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **EMERGENCY SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING**
3 **July 13, 2023, Minutes**

4 **Board Members Present:** Arne Jonynas, Lee Gustafson, Peter Hudkins, Heather Chase, and
5 Arianna Knapp via Zoom.

6 **Staff Present:** Cathy Hasbrouck at Town Hall; and Julie Hance via Zoom.

7 **Visitors Present:** Tim Robertson, Lisa B., and Barre Pinske via Zoom.

8 **Call to Order**
9

10 Chair Arne Jonynas called the emergency special meeting of the Selectboard to order a little after
11 6:00 p.m.

12
13 **Agenda Item 1, Update on the Most Recent Severe Storm**
14

15 The main purpose of the meeting was to get an update on the severe storm that Chester experienced
16 on Monday that caused widespread damage. Chester had seemed okay until the last rainfall after
17 1:00 p.m. or 2:00 p.m. on Monday. There was widespread damage to the roads and infrastructure
18 and a lot of what had been repaired in Irene held up well but a lot of weaknesses in other areas
19 were exposed. The town has been working hard to get things back together but given the amount
20 of damage, it's been quite a battle. It almost seemed as bad as Irene and worse in some places.
21 Julie has been on top of it and the town has been doing a good job and making progress.
22

23 The meeting was an informational meeting, so everyone was on the page and was updated with
24 what was happening with the town. Julie would present updates, address Selectboard questions,
25 and then once complete, questions would be taken from citizens who were present. Arne handed
26 the meeting over to Julie.
27

28 Julie noted they were approaching three days out and the three days of emergency with FEMA
29 was ending and the next day they would enter Category B, repairs. It was important to note that
30 some of their leniency would end at midnight, tonight.
31

32 Recreation Department:

33 The pool will open tomorrow, as there was no damage to it. There was damage to the parking areas
34 and the lot going into the baseball field needed significant work. There was some damage to the
35 shed but of all the departments in town, recreation was the least affected.
36

37 Highway Department:

38 Almost all municipal roads had some form of impact. The good news was the major infrastructure
39 that was repaired following Hurricane Irene held. So, while there was significant road damage,
40 five bridges on Route 103 North will require signoff by engineers before they can be reopened.
41 There are also a couple in Popple Dungeon and Potash that will need engineer signoff but for the
42 most part, the infrastructure has held. The guys are working hard to get everything open. Most
43 roads, at this point, unless they have bridge damage, are accessible, but that does not mean heavy
44 travel. Most of these roads are only open enough for people to get in and out, which is the number

1 one priority. Final repairs will likely begin next week and it may not necessarily be the town
2 working on those projects. During major events, they bring in contractors and local contractors to
3 help get roads open. The state contacted Julie this morning and VTrans engineers are supposed to
4 be down tomorrow to assess: the 5 bridges on Route 103 North; 1 in Popple Dungeon; and 2 on
5 Potash. Once they receive signoff on the bridges, they will be able to get the aprons done enough
6 to allow people to get in and out. They are hopeful it will happen tomorrow. They had 6 roads with
7 extreme damage including the last sections of Smokeshire before the town line where the river has
8 wiped out the road leaving no road between Chester and Ludlow and there will not be one for a
9 while, as 2 large sections of the road are missing. They have 6 extreme roads and 15 that have
10 heavy damage. The rest have moderate to minor damage. This is good because it is less than they
11 had during Irene, currently. The initial devastation may have been more this time, but recovery
12 was able to happen quicker than Irene. All the contents of the salt shed have been damaged,
13 including the blower and equipment, and will need to go through insurance.

14

15 Water Department:

16 The 8" water main going into the sewer plant drained both tanks and the main line. Both tanks are
17 close to full. The boil water notice has been lifted and municipal water is now available and safe.
18 The water line to the tank has been temporarily replaced. Permanent repair will include concrete
19 encasing the line as they have others, so it doesn't get eroded again. That will come much later.
20 There is a water main break on 103 South. State Emergency Management is sending a team from
21 Colchester tomorrow morning. The water and sewer guys are too busy to get to that break so they
22 are sending a team in for Chester and that will also happen tomorrow morning. There will be traffic
23 hinderance on Route 103 South in the early part of the day tomorrow. It will be passable but down
24 to one lane.

25

26 Sewer Department:

27 The First Avenue pump station is back up and operating. They are operating on one pump, though
28 not ideal, it is functioning on one. The second pump is drying out and they are hopeful they can
29 repair it enough to get it in and keep it going until the final repairs can take place at the First
30 Avenue pump station. The main pump station is operating. Flows are very heavy but decreasing.
31 There is some minor damage to the plant but nothing significant they have noticed to date.

32

33 Dam:

34 The biggest concern in the past two days has been the reservoir dam. There was significant damage
35 to the earthen part of the dam. The structure itself has held. Naomi looked at it yesterday with Julie
36 and the structure part of it seemed fine. If they get heavy rain over the weekend, it's of concern.
37 They did have fire trucks pump out as much of the reservoir as they could. They were able to,
38 between that and opening the valve to start draining the dam, drop it two inches by the afternoon
39 and give themselves some room that they are comfortable with. The state has deployed a large
40 pump from Manchester, New Hampshire and it will be here tomorrow morning and will run during
41 any heavy rains received over the upcoming weekend. They feel the dam is currently stable.

42

43 Public Safety:

44 They are standing by at the station, per the state's request, for any storm tonight and will likely
45 continue through the weekend if any storms appear, as they are currently forecast to. Julie
46 suggested calling the police department if anyone had issues. Alicia is the emergency management

1 wizard and is amazing and any issues should be run through her. The police station telephone
2 number is 875-2035. From the state level, FEMA is expected to deploy in Vermont in the next few
3 days. They had been told it would be a couple of weeks, but it has been upgraded that they will be
4 in Vermont the beginning of next week. With that will come access for private property and
5 business owners. The state has established, through the Vermont 211 system, a reporting system
6 for personal property or businesses that have physical damage or loss of revenue. Currently, the
7 state is collecting all that damage to do an assessment as it needs to meet a certain threshold before
8 receiving any public assistance and declaration from FEMA. It has not been identified as to
9 whether they will provide coverage for private business and property. The decision was not made
10 following Irene for several weeks, so it is anticipated that it will be the same process this time.
11 What is different than Irene this time, per a briefing Julie had attended this afternoon, is that private
12 property should not hold off on repairs. Following Irene, private property repairs were told to wait
13 until assessed by FEMA. Now, they are directing people to document damage with photos to show
14 post storm damage and then document after repairs have been made and to document well in case
15 public assistance funding is received by Vermont.

16
17 As for the Selectboard part, Julie thought funding wise they would be okay for now. She wasn't
18 sure they would need to borrow at this point as cash flow is secure and tax bills had gone out and
19 they would begin to receive that revenue. They still have a fund balance to carry them for a while.
20 If they find they need to do any anticipation borrowing, she will come back to the Board. During
21 Irene it was a few months before they saw reimbursement.

22
23 Chester was holding well. Obviously, if the storms come this weekend, things could shift in a
24 moment as was observed during this event. They have a few properties waiting on the state and
25 VTrans engineers to come out and clear bridges, but they were holding on well at this point.

26
27 Arne wanted to make sure people understood to go slow on the roads because there are places that
28 are undermined that even they aren't aware of sometimes which aren't that wide or flat and just
29 beginning to get back into shape. Arne said people should make sure they travel slowly on these
30 roads and if they can avoid traveling, that is even better, but they understand people may need to
31 get out. It would take a couple of weeks for the roads to be repaired and there was potential for
32 more issues given the current weather forecast. When he was at the reservoir, the overflow was
33 working and was less in the spillway than it had been, and the valve opening is getting more
34 pressure so that would help. Arne asked the other board members if they had questions, and then
35 they would take questions from those attending by Zoom.

36
37 Lee expressed his thanks to the town leadership, highway crew, emergency services, Julie, and all
38 the people who had spent untold hours dealing with this and keeping track of the issues. Arne
39 added they had been at it for 12 or 14 hours a day and had been working hard and it was amazing
40 what they could do. They were lucky to have the crews and people involved. There were 20 or 30
41 water rescues in the first two days of the storm. Arne thought 5 to 7 years ago, they didn't even
42 have a water rescue that came into play but now they do because of Irene and other past incidents,
43 and they are used all over the state. They also had help from North Carolina, Springfield, and other
44 organizations involved and it was everyone coming together and doing what they do, which was
45 extraordinary. The townspeople also helped. They are lucky to live in a town where everyone chips
46 in and does what they can in a small way whether checking on neighbors or just helping with

1 friends or those in need. Arne said there was a lot in the background going on that wasn't even
2 seen. They had a lot ahead of them, but they were heading in the right direction.

3
4 Heather just wanted to echo what everyone had expressed. When you see statewide the devastation
5 everyone is experiencing, Chester is lucky to have the leadership and team they have.

6
7 Arne pointed out that it was Julie's second storm as she was Assistant Town Manager during
8 Hurricane Irene, so they are lucky she has the experience and the background to access the
9 available help through the state and other organizations. It was unfortunate they are having 100-
10 year floods 10 or 12 years apart and he doubted this would be the last due to climate change.

11
12 Peter questioned if the FEMA funding was 90% or 95%. Julie said it was 75% and there was
13 another hurdle the state would need to go through to get it to 90%. That has not happened yet.
14 Currently, they are looking for another 25% but potentially it could only be 10%.

15
16 Tim Robertson said they live on Colburn Road and asked Julie about the situation with the bridge
17 along Route 103 over the Williams River. Theirs is still not passable and they have been stranded
18 since Monday. He understood the state would be inspecting it tomorrow and potentially there
19 would be work done to enable them to cross it with a vehicle. He asked Julie if that was correct.
20 Julie said she had been told engineers across the state were being deployed to different locations.
21 The latest she had heard was that the engineers should be inspecting Chester tomorrow. Once that
22 is done and they have clearance the bridges are sound, they can go in and do apron repair enough
23 to enable people to get in and out.

24
25 Lisa B. who also lives on Colburn Road and is neighbors of the Robertsons, said they were under
26 the bridge today and she spoke with them. Everyone was amazing. They were under the bridge in
27 waders and said the exact same thing that Julie had. Lisa said they had already started but thought
28 with the weather, they may not be able to finish and so they would receive a report tomorrow. Julie
29 said Brian had told her right before this meeting they were being deployed tomorrow so if they
30 had already started, that was fabulous news. Lisa said they were from the state. Julie would follow
31 up with them in the morning.

32
33 Tim Robertson said there was a body of water behind their house on Colburn Road labeled the
34 Chester Reservoir and he assumed that was not the body of water Julie had referred to earlier in
35 the meeting. She confirmed that it was not but was the Reservoir Dam up Reservoir Road heading
36 out Route 11 West. Tim thanked her. Lisa added it was flowing well and the culverts had held up
37 and they had no other water damage back there and the road was still intact. Arne said when the
38 bridges go through flooding, they can't do anything with a truck loaded with gravel to cross them
39 until they receive the okay because it may make things worse so they must have them inspected
40 before they can address that. Once they pass inspection, they can do what they can to get them out
41 of there because they had been stranded for four days. Tim agreed and said the house was also
42 flooded so it was a disaster.

43
44 Julie said there were a few things they had done as they had after Irene with their lists and
45 spreadsheets going of takeaways. There have been things with this storm that were a little more
46 difficult to manage than Irene. One of them quickly became apparent. During Irene, public safety

1 and highway were under one roof and are not now. They did not anticipate that would cause a
2 hurdle with communication and had to quickly adjust to what they did. There was concern with
3 the boil water order getting the word out, partly because during Irene, they had access to V-Tel's
4 robocall system which they did not have access to this time because V-Tel changed their system
5 and no longer has that function. The town had relied on being able to use that resource. There have
6 been a few communication hurdles which they have noted and will assess when they are a few
7 weeks out from this event. They anticipate they may have more frequent events, although they
8 hope they don't, and will plan accordingly. Julie will report on the takeaways at future meetings
9 as they are identified and worked through. They love praise but also can appreciate nice criticism.
10 Julie noted posts on social media going forward will have the comment feature disabled as there
11 were people asking questions and they are entirely too busy during an event like this to be on
12 Facebook addressing comments. If people have questions, they should contact the Town Hall and
13 not rely on them to watch social media as they are not staffed that way. Phone calls or emails for
14 concerns and not do it by social media. Arne said there was a lot going on in the first two days
15 when the town was trying to assess what was happening. It took two days to figure out where they
16 stood as far as damage and what was happening, and they didn't have answers immediately. Arne
17 viewed it as a learning experience and thought the town had done a good job as far as upkeep and
18 damage control.

19
20 Arne asked if they should meet next week for an update. Julie noted the regular meeting was not
21 until August 2nd, but they could hold a meeting next Wednesday. Arne said they would consider it
22 and discuss it as things moved forward. Julie said everyone knew how to contact her but indicated
23 if by email, they should allow her 24 hours to respond. If she is needed immediately, call her.

24 **Agenda Item 2, Adjourn**

25 Lee moved, and Heather seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting. A vote was taken, passed
26 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:32 p.m.