

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**  
2 **SELECTBOARD MEETING**  
3 **November 16, 2022, Minutes**

4 **Board Members Present:** Arne Jonynas, Ben Whalen, and 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:** Lori Quinn, Shawn Cunningham, Bill Lindsay, Kathy Guirtino, Nick Boke,  
9 Cathy Hasbrouck, Peter Hudkins, Donna Hudkins, Ian Montgomery, and Polly Montgomery at  
10 Town Hall; and Preston Bristow, Hugh Quinn, Jim Goodfellow, Susan Goodfellow, John Garison,  
11 Joy Slaughter, N&K Ericson, Robert Nied, SAPA TV, Scott Blair, Tim Roper, and Lora Cokolat  
12 via Zoom.

13  
14 **Call to Order**

15  
16 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He  
17 welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologized for the late start due to technical difficulties.

18  
19 **Agenda Item 1, Approve minutes from the November 2, 2022, Selectboard Meeting**

20 Lee moved to approve the November 2<sup>nd</sup> minutes and Leigh seconded. Leigh noted on page 5, line  
21 7 the word dieseling should have been diesel. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved,  
22 as amended.

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

24 Arne asked for any comments and there were none.

25 **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

26 Report given by the Town Manager:

27 Police Chief Search

28 They are down to two candidates and the committee working with Julie will meet on Friday. She  
29 will update the Board as the process continues.

30 Police Union Negotiation

31 They thought they had reached a final contract and hoped to give it to the Board for approval at  
32 the next meeting.

33 Danny Cook

34 Danny Cook, longtime employee of the Town Highway Department, has officially retired.  
35 Congratulations to him. There will be an open house lunch at the Town Garage on December 1<sup>st</sup>  
36 from noon to 2:00 to wish him well.

37 Community Garden

38 The lease will be available at the next meeting.

1 Arne noted he had not heard from Gary Rapanotti and Julie had not either and said she emailed  
2 him. Arne was aware he had done the preliminary work.

3 **Agenda Item 4, Working Communities Presentation**

4 Bob Flint and Amanda Sidler gave a presentation about the Working Communities Challenge in  
5 Vermont. The Springfield Region received the grant in 2021 which was funded by the Federal  
6 Reserve Bank of Boston. The mission of the Springfield Region is to increase workforce  
7 participation by addressing systemic barriers that prevent low- and moderate-income people from  
8 finding and maintaining employment. The Springfield Region consists of 16 towns. They  
9 identified barriers to employment. The top five were transportation, childcare, housing,  
10 technology/education, and recovery/substance use disorders. The pandemic had greatly  
11 exacerbated many of them. It's designed to be a cross collaboration between community  
12 organizations, service providers, and employers. The Springfield Regional Development  
13 Corporation (SRDC) functions as the backbone to the grant. They want to create a holistic support  
14 and referral system. The Employer Resource Group functions as a monthly workshop and  
15 addresses issues employers are interested in or barriers they are trying to address. It's free and  
16 open to employers and meets on the third Wednesday of every month. They have designed the  
17 Employment Research Study around topics they are interested in. A data analyst in Boston who is  
18 from the area has volunteered to help with the project. In the past year, around 60% of the almost  
19 110 participants have changed their employment. The trends driving people to seek new  
20 employment are pay, finding a schedule that meets their needs, and matching their skillset.  
21 Childcare and transportation are barriers to employment and are becoming more of a barrier. A  
22 family of working adults often relies on one vehicle. The Town of Windsor has been afforded a 3-  
23 year micro transit grant which will show how micro transit can impact a rural community and  
24 hopefully is successful and can be replicated in other communities. Childcare remains a problem  
25 with the three typical issues being scheduling, cost, and quality. DCF recommends families spend  
26 no more than 7% of their annual income on childcare. They estimate families in this region spend  
27 around 18% on childcare, which is more than double the recommended amount. Amanda thought  
28 it was likely closer to 25%. Working Communities Challenge partnered with the Springfield Area  
29 Parent Child Center to offer a Childcare Assistance Fund and were able to support 26 families  
30 throughout the region to cover costs so they could remain in the workforce or cover future costs  
31 so they could re-enter the workforce. The program was very successful and operated for 18 months  
32 and received a little over \$20,000. The fund was discontinued but they are not out of the woods.  
33 They would like to strengthen childcare in this region by making it more accessible and offering  
34 support to providers, especially home-based. It's a 50/50 split for the region between home-based  
35 and center care. Many of the home-based providers are planning to retire within the next 2 to 5  
36 years. They are small, female led businesses in this region, and they want to invigorate that group  
37 and support the early childhood education workforce that has steadily declined. Prior to the  
38 pandemic, a study was done, and it was determined that they needed 126 new childcare staff in  
39 this region. They need to focus on that need.

40 They are also offering their free laptop program. Students at the River Valley Tech Center have  
41 refurbished the laptops and the Federal Reserve has donated over 60 devices to support the  
42 program. They received over 112 applications and had distributed over 100 laptops. She would  
43 circle back to the recipients to learn how the devices helped them reach their long-term  
44 employment goals and if there are other resources, they can help them connect with. The program  
45 is still available, but the participants need to be referred by one of their partner organizations, so

1 they know they are receiving that long-term support.

2 Bob said they have intentionally not taken on housing issues because many other programs have.  
3 Their role has been to facilitate available resources to potential developers regarding rental  
4 housing. This month, the Missing Middle Program will launch through the Vermont Housing  
5 Agency for people who are interested in building single family homes that would have permanent  
6 affordability covenants. There are a couple of developers in the area who have an interest in that.  
7 He asked Heather Chase, as a legislator-elect, when there was a discussion about housing, to  
8 consider programs that have more flexibility and less permanent affordability covenants. They are  
9 working with EverNorth and the Windsor & Windham Housing Trust on a 25-unit apartment  
10 project in downtown Windsor. It was a good project for Windsor, but he wasn't sure how this  
11 community would view it. 5 of the 25 units are geared towards people experiencing homelessness.  
12 5 would be for people who make up 100% of area median income, and the remainder are for people  
13 who make between 30% and 60% of area median income. The cost of construction is sky high for  
14 a variety of reasons and the cost of building housing is challenging and the available resource for  
15 housing is an interesting public policy discussion. He said when housing is the topic, what  
16 community he is in dictates the discussion. There is a shortage, and it would be great to have  
17 apartments for professionals and people that are nursing or teaching. But towns like Springfield  
18 have tired housing stock which is undervalued. He believed the average purchase price between a  
19 home in Chester and a home in Springfield was a \$100,000 difference. He believed Weathersfield  
20 was even more than that. There is a complicated set of dynamics going on. He said childcare  
21 screams out no matter where they go as a topic. Many of the small homebased providers need to  
22 view themselves as businesses and realize they need more money coming in than going out to  
23 enable them to do the care they want to but many of them are retiring. He expected childcare would  
24 be a dominant topic this year in the State House. He thought there would be a proposal that would  
25 emerge based on a report coming to the Joint Fiscal Office next month. How they pay for childcare  
26 and what is childcare would be an interesting discussion.

27 Lee asked if the top priority of the list they had provided was childcare. Amanda said nothing takes  
28 priority over anything else. They are trying to exert energy everywhere it's needed. The reason  
29 they form subcommittees dedicated to childcare and transportation is there is a lot happening in  
30 the world of housing but in terms of childcare and transportation, there are many groups, especially  
31 in childcare, working on different things and in this region, they needed to start having a focused  
32 conversation. There are a lot of resources in the state and a lot of people working to improve this  
33 region and they are trying to bring them together. Lee noted the barriers listed for people seeking  
34 jobs and asked what employers thought the biggest barrier was to finding good employees.  
35 Amanda said it depended on the industry, the employer, and where they were in the region. In rural  
36 areas, transportation is a barrier. In terms of childcare, last year she observed in the beginning of  
37 the year, employers would cite childcare as the biggest issue and over the course of the summer,  
38 it dropped off and she realized people were quitting. People are just not applying for jobs, and they  
39 wonder why they're not getting that flow in. The scheduling issue is a huge one. They have  
40 observed employers who are proactive and provide flexibility, especially for parents, generally  
41 have a larger candidate group because they get a reputation of being flexible and willing to be  
42 adaptable because that dictates a lot of people's ability to work. Bob added they should know their  
43 workforce. Employers must engage and know who their people are and what their needs are and  
44 deal with them and their lives in and out of the workforce for them to be successful. That can  
45 include flexible hours, remote work, and mental health support. Food insecurity is another issue  
46 and being able to offer breakfast and lunch at work can help. For many people living on a benefits

1 cliff, the fear of losing those benefits supporting their family determines how they pursue  
2 employment. Where childcare is an issue, they may restrain themselves in the type of employment  
3 they have because if they accept that promotion or go for that new job, they lose their childcare  
4 subsidy and then their childcare which is a bigger problem. Employers trying to get creative to  
5 help offset unique costs that pertain to their workforce can be a good strategy to retain people,  
6 build loyalty, and is a good recruitment strategy.

7 Lee asked what the biggest barrier is to finding childcare and what the underlying issue is relative  
8 to the childcare issue in general. What is causing the crisis? Amanda said there is not enough  
9 childcare and slots available to families, especially infant care. There are not enough people  
10 working in that industry and the ones that do, do not make a livable wage. It's a stressful  
11 environment and can be energy draining and the financial payback isn't there. If someone is a  
12 proactive employee, if they're good with kids, they go into education. Strengthening the childcare  
13 workforce and compensating them appropriately is something being discussed at a statewide level  
14 and why they're not focused on that. During the pandemic, they saw a huge loss. They need to  
15 encourage people to go into that field and making it a small business could help increase the  
16 workforce. Lee wondered as a society what they were doing to minimize the need for childcare  
17 and strengthen the family and the parents being able to take care of their own kids. He realized it  
18 wasn't a possibility for everyone but encouraging people to be able to and to reduce the cost of  
19 living in Vermont relative to what it costs to live here, he wondered would both parents need to  
20 work. He recognized there was no easy answer. He thought the more they could support the family  
21 unit and the ability to, as a society, have the tools necessary to cut expenses so they can raise their  
22 own kids and not need to rely on someone else to care for their kids while they're working.

23 Lee appreciated all they were doing. He knew his V-Tel bill for internet was steep and asked how  
24 participants in the laptop program had access to affordable internet. Amanda said it was a  
25 requirement for the program to have access to the internet and it could be a workplace or library,  
26 but they don't ask them how to protect their privacy. Participants are referred to the program by  
27 the Department of Labor or Higher Ability or Working Fields. Bob said initially they used money  
28 to buy them and then the Federal Reserve offered them ones they don't use anymore so they made  
29 two trips to Boston to get devices and the students at River Valley Tech Center refurbished them  
30 for the program. Some people didn't know how to use them well so with SEVCA and Vermont  
31 Adult Learning, they created a 6-week, in-person program to help them learn to use the devices.

32 Arne asked if the wages for the jobs were livable. Amanda said some employers may be unable to  
33 compete with larger corporations who keep raising the base pay, but they need to so people can  
34 live. Currently it's a candidate's market. She knew Vail just raised their base rate to \$20 per hour,  
35 which is roughly a livable wage. It's about quality of life and not just getting people into a job but  
36 creating a situation where they have sustained employment so they can have a career. In the short  
37 term, it's hard to answer with the current economic climate. Many employers are trying to be  
38 proactive and offer a livable wage. Throughout the pandemic, those who are not proactive are  
39 probably not going to survive. Arne thought having universal healthcare was important and was  
40 not part of the discussion about budgets and when you're looking for a job, it determines where  
41 you can go or not go. When he hears two-thirds of the foreclosures and bankruptcies in the country  
42 are because of medical bills, how do you fight that? It was encouraging to hear what they were  
43 doing on their end and when people are working and happy, they are bettering themselves and the  
44 communities they live in. Arne thought it was a hard battle for so many of the basic things people  
45 should have. Bob added Working Fields is a program out of Burlington that is a Temp Agency for

1 people in recovery from substance use, alcohol, and other situations. They help get people back  
2 into the workforce who are dealing with issues but also provide wrap-around support for what else  
3 is going on in that person's life. It has been successful for some employers, including some in this  
4 community. The workforce participation rate in this region is less than 60% and is below the state  
5 and national average, even before the pandemic. While the state is recruiting people to come, let's  
6 take care of our own and figure out how to make that happen.

7 Arne asked if it was a three-year program, what happens after the three years? They discuss that  
8 too and will have an update for the Board next year. They are trying to lay a solid foundation but  
9 can't solve all the problems in 3 years. They are focusing on long-term sustainability.

10 Lee appreciated they were local and knew the needs of the community rather than having someone  
11 somewhere else trying to fix what was going on here. Arne saw it as being a small rural community  
12 in Vermont where everyone knows everyone as helpful. He imagined in a bigger area it would be  
13 more difficult. Amanda said they had observed that with their New England colleagues. The  
14 Vermont teams banded together quickly which didn't happen naturally in other places.

15 Leigh thanked them for being there and thought it was important and looked forward to updates.

16 Heather appreciated the presentation and saw it as a positive thing for the region.

17 Arne thanked them for coming.

#### 18 **Agenda Item 5, Chester Snowmobile Club Approval**

19 Arne read the request which described the area they wished to use. Every year they come before  
20 the Board for permission to use some of the town highways and roads for the Snowmobile Club.  
21 Arne stated they do a great job maintaining the trails and attracting winter folks here. He thought  
22 it was one of the bigger snowmobile clubs in the state with a lot of support and people who worked  
23 hard to make it happen. Heather moved to allow the club to use the roads stated. Leigh seconded.  
24 Heather and Leigh agreed it was another positive thing. The motion was voted on and passed.

#### 25 **Agenda Item 6, Short-Term Rental Ordinance**

26 Lee asked about Section 4, requiring the annual issuance of short-term rental registration. He  
27 thought they weren't issuing anything, only collecting information to know who is operating short-  
28 term rentals. Arne said they had discussed it at their last meeting and agreed to send it to their  
29 attorney for review. Lee said annual issuance had been added by Jim, so his question was they  
30 were not really issuing anything but only asking for information. He compared it to registering a  
31 dog. Arne was under the impression it was an annual registration. Lee agreed but it was worded  
32 that they would be issuing something. Arne thought registration was part of the process and the  
33 legal part that gave them the authority to do it and have fines and waivers associated with it. Arne  
34 didn't think you could have one part without the other. Lee compared it to issuing a building permit  
35 by Preston. Julie added there was no approval process and Jim's language made it sound like there  
36 was. Arne said there was a process and state regulations. Lee said they weren't taking  
37 responsibility for what the state was asking for.

38 Preston said his experience from other municipalities that offer a registration was you get  
39 something back saying you're registered for a certain number of bedrooms. Lee didn't think it was  
40 approval or permission and just an acknowledgment. Preston understood what Lee was getting at  
41 but if they advertised for more rooms than they're registered for, they would be in violation. Lee  
42 asked if they needed to issue something, and Preston said normally they do. Lee thought they were

1 only collecting data and based on the data, they would decide if they needed to take additional  
2 steps dealing with noncomplying properties. The State would have the teeth behind it, not Chester.

3 Leigh mentioned the short-term rental registration application they were given in the packet, and  
4 it made sense. She was pleased to receive the State of Vermont Department of Taxes, Health, and  
5 Fire Safety which they asked for. She thought they had good information to use and had been  
6 talking about it for a couple meetings.

7 Arne said they were now at this point in their discussion, and it sounded like Lee wanted to  
8 backtrack. Leigh agreed with Arne. To get the information, there were forms to fill out and rules  
9 and regulations were necessary regarding how they proposed to get it. Lee understood and  
10 apologized for what he was bringing up at this point. The idea, at least in Lee's mind, was to get  
11 information about who was operating a short-term rental hosted and unhosted and then using that  
12 information to determine how many there were and to proceed to the walk stage and determine  
13 whether they wanted to limit the number of short-term rentals. Lee thought Preston's application  
14 form was great but was confused by the language Jim included about an annual issuance rather  
15 than an annual collection of data and maybe that was his misunderstanding.

16 Hugh Quinn said the goal was to get better information about what was going on in Chester, but  
17 also to have very basic requirements with respect to fire safety, water and sewer, and liability  
18 insurance, and the number of bedrooms so there were requirements embedded in the draft  
19 ordinance beyond data collection.

20 Heather asked Preston in the changes Jim made, did he have any concerns. She asked if he thought  
21 it strengthened it and what was his view. Preston thanked Heather for asking and said he felt Jim's  
22 changes were neutral and legalese that would make the bylaw more durable. They considered  
23 including a 6-month grace period but didn't think that was the place to put it. Preston thought the  
24 Selectboard could separately direct him to administer the program with a grace period but not  
25 include it in the ordinance. Preston said there was nothing Jim added or changed that troubled him.

26 Arne said if the registration wasn't done annually, it would only be a snapshot in time, and they  
27 wouldn't know what was going on in the future and why he thought it was a yearly renewal. He  
28 saw it as basic protection for people in town to promote and protect the public health, safety,  
29 welfare, and convenience of the town, to preserve residents' rights to the quiet enjoyment of their  
30 homes and properties and to ensure the safety of the occupants of the short-term rentals. He thought  
31 it was minimal. They were talking about a business and people were opening businesses all over  
32 town without any regulation, oversight, or anything and he didn't think that was right. Heather  
33 thought it was strengthened by having the attorney look at it and thanked Preston for his comments.  
34 She was okay voting on it tonight but wanted to see a clean copy and recommended that and vote  
35 at the next meeting. Peter Hudkins said they weren't looking at anything new or invented and a lot  
36 of it was state regulations that people should follow. He didn't think having the registration was a  
37 liability if they had to follow the State guidelines that they should have followed all along. Many  
38 of the regulations only applied when there were 8 or more people, and most were self-certifying.

39 Kathy Guirtino noticed Section 3(a) talked about a host or a designated agent and she thought if  
40 someone owned 10 houses, they could get a real estate agent to be their agent which negated hosted  
41 versus unhosted. Julie said if someone from out-of-state owned a property, they could have an  
42 agent take care of the property and could speak for them. Kathy asked if the agent didn't live on  
43 the property, how would it be a hosted property. There was a discussion about the term host  
44 because it was confusing. The host is the person who owns the property or the agent of that person.

1 Hosted and unhosted was one thing but they all had a host. For a hosted property, someone must  
2 live on that property. Lee suggested changing host to operator in A for clarification.

3 Susan Goodfellow was confused about the whole thing. Arne had mentioned it was clearly a  
4 business. She wondered why this business didn't have to meet the requirements as other businesses  
5 do for approval. When she had her garage done, she was told if she wanted to have rental above  
6 it, they would need to meet all sorts of requirements, such as the erection of a firewall and any  
7 number of things. She thought requiring registration was letting the horse out of barn. She didn't  
8 think it addressed the rights of a neighborhood such as if having 10 additional cars was appropriate.  
9 Her neighbor's access to their property was blocked by a short-term rental occupant.

10 Arne saw it as the town's small stab at getting control of the situation. There are other towns that  
11 address it through their zoning regulations and short-term rentals are listed as a conditional use  
12 where they must go through steps required for any type of conditional use. Arne thought this was  
13 a small step in the right direction. They were trying to get a handle on it, and he saw it as a safety  
14 measure for the occupants and for the people of the town. He saw it as a small thing they were  
15 doing in the right direction compared to other avenues that were available to address the issue.

16 Ben recently took a job as a State Fire Marshall and wasn't speaking on behalf of the Division of  
17 Fire Safety. He said they are trying to create checks and balance to make sure people are doing the  
18 right thing. By having the registration, they are saying they must prove they've done what is  
19 necessary to get their registration. By doing that, they are meeting all the safety, health, and fire,  
20 wastewater, and other things. The concept of the associated cost was so they could monitor through  
21 the software to see how many rentals there are. Ben was in favor of it. Through registration, they  
22 may consider other options, but they couldn't do that until they had information. They didn't know  
23 how many short-term rentals there were and the effect they had on the emergency services in town,  
24 the wastewater facility, and other services. Ben was happy the attorney had reviewed it and didn't  
25 think they were asking anything out of the ordinary. He thought the reason they weren't treated  
26 like other businesses was likely state statute.

27 Preston said Vermont Supreme Court has decided renting your house is an extension of your real  
28 estate right. You don't need a permit to rent your house unless the town says otherwise and  
29 according to the Vermont Supreme Court, renting your house is not commercial but the town can  
30 say differently and that's what they're proposing. Arne said this is the avenue they could take to  
31 regulate and get the information and data and it seemed like a logical step in that direction.

32 Leigh was happy to receive the information. They had discussed it at the past several meetings and  
33 come up with some thoughts and ideas and talked with their attorney and it would probably take a  
34 few more meetings to make it the way they felt most equitable. She wasn't ready to vote yet.

35 Arne asked if anyone had concerns about it before it came back to them to vote. Lee said listening  
36 to the comments, he thought it came down to two points of view. It sounded like they need to treat  
37 short-term rentals in a more serious manner as a business and have more authority as a town to  
38 regulate and enforce and require certain things versus collecting information so they can be better  
39 informed to the status of short-term rentals in Chester currently and decide whether to implement  
40 the ordinance as listed including all the definitions and fees. Lee wasn't necessarily quarreling  
41 with what was presented to them but was a little hesitant to jump in with this level of enforcement.  
42 He wanted to collect the data but wanted to be more reticent to come up with something as the  
43 town government to know what they were regulating. He agreed with Leigh and Heather who  
44 wanted a clean copy to look at it fresh and push it to the next meeting so he could think a little

1 more about what to ask for. Arne thought that was the consensus of the board to get a clean copy  
2 and look at it at the next meeting. Arne asked if there were any concerns with the application  
3 Preston provided. The others thought it was well done and had no concerns.

4 Julie added that she and Preston had discussed when and if it was implemented, they would  
5 recommend it become a statement for properties requiring signoff by the State to have some  
6 flexibility and a grace period. Anything with the State of Vermont is currently backed up. Lee  
7 thought if they gave people 120 days, it would give them time to get the information they wanted.  
8 Julie added to also comply with the State. Heather thought they could leave it up to Preston to  
9 write. Arne said they discussed at the last meeting to offer some flexibility and they weren't out  
10 there to hammer anyone, only to get ahead of a problem, which he thought was a big one. He  
11 thought they had different views about it. Data gathering was one part of it but also what it was  
12 doing to the character of towns like theirs. The numbers they may not have but are up to 8% and  
13 increasing. A lot of people in town are getting older and their properties are going on the market  
14 for double what properties were two years ago and people in our own town can't afford to live  
15 here anymore because they're being bought up. It scared Arne a little. He thought if they did  
16 nothing, by the time they did, it would be too late. He welcomed the discussion because more  
17 minds consider it and, in the discussion, they will come up with a better answer at the end.

18 Lori Quinn looked at paperwork for the first time today and thought it was clear. She thought the  
19 application was excellent. She was concerned about a delay because there were a lot of violations  
20 going on. She knew there were homes rented far beyond their bedroom and septic capacity because  
21 it had been a completely unregulated or self-regulated industry. She felt the longer it was delayed,  
22 the more problems they would have. With ski season coming, it wouldn't impact it if it was not  
23 enforced until Spring. It was plenty of time for people to be transparent, get their papers in order,  
24 and do the right thing. She thought a lot of good work went into it. She encouraged the members  
25 to speak with other communities and dig deeper. Other communities are making these moves now.  
26 She was afraid they would become a community with a completely unregulated scenario and more  
27 people buying up properties for short-term rentals. She supported them working hard on it and  
28 getting it done.

29 A clean copy of the ordinance would be at the next meeting, and they would look at it again in two  
30 weeks.

31 Jim Goodfellow was confused about the next step. He heard they should just collect information  
32 and worry about everything else later. And he also heard no, they should pass the ordinance which  
33 contained some steps of getting a handle on things and making sure people are doing the right  
34 thing. He asked at the next meeting if they would just be looking at getting information or would  
35 they discuss looking at the ordinance to get the ball rolling. Arne's impression was they would  
36 look at the ordinance and decide. Jim hoped the board would agree to pass it.

37 Heather said when they did the junk ordinance, it took a while. When a community adopts an  
38 ordinance, she thought they had acted on it in due diligence and doing it in a timely fashion. She  
39 thought the next meeting was quick for a turnaround on an ordinance.

40 **Agenda Item 7, Library Budget**

41 Donna Hudkins, Chair of the Library Board gave a presentation on their budget which had been  
42 submitted to the Selectboard. She presented information on how libraries enhance the quality of  
43 life in Vermont. Patron visits to date in 2022 increased by almost 2,000 people compared to 2021.



1 She expected it to continue to increase. 10 years ago, the attendance was doubled, so they are  
2 trying to get an even higher rate. They have almost 100 new patrons this year. Although their  
3 assets are okay, unexpected expenses have come up. The income was much less this year than  
4 what they had budgeted for. Partly, they had budgeted \$18,000 for fundraising which didn't  
5 happen. They had only budgeted \$1,800 for donations and so far, they have received over \$3,345  
6 with another \$1,000 recently. They received specific donations of \$500 for the children's library  
7 to purchase materials about diversity. They also received more grants than they had budgeted for.  
8 They had budgeted \$92,570 from the Town of Chester and are asking for an 8% increase from the  
9 Town of Chester and 8% from the Town of Andover. They budgeted for \$130,000 for expenses,  
10 but through October they are only \$93,000 because they had reduced payroll because they didn't  
11 have a library director and their part-time employee was also not there and sadly had died this  
12 week. Because there was no fundraising or silent auction, the 2022 budget came in at 10.54% less.  
13 The Board of Trustees was concentrating on recruiting and trying to find a new library director  
14 and operating the library. The 2022 expenses were down from what was budgeted by 28% because  
15 payroll and benefits were reduced because of no library director or benefits and no assistant for 1  
16 month. For 2023, they expect a 10% increase in the overall budget. They anticipate higher costs  
17 for many services. They upgraded some of their software services and their website. The trustees  
18 and employees will have Whiting Library emails. They have worked on a lot. Some of the  
19 computers are old and worn. Last year's budget wasn't realistic with the current inflation. They  
20 had nothing budgeted for legal and have spent over \$4,000 so far, which is going up again. When  
21 they searched for a library director, and the reason they are asking for an 8% increase, they did  
22 surveys and in the State of Vermont for salary ranges for directors and the previous director was  
23 very low. With Donna's HR background, she looked at the State and other towns with comparable  
24 size, population, and libraries, and what the trustees chose was a mid-median range for the salary  
25 which is what they offered. They just added 3% to the health stipend that was approved a couple  
26 of years ago. The librarian that has accepted the position is based on a median range salary. She  
27 has a master's degree and will probably bring in a lot more grants and has experience writing them.  
28 Donna expected more donations and fundraising once they had things straightened out.

29 Lee thanked Donna for sticking with it and the work she was doing. He asked what the purpose of  
30 the equity fund was. She knew it was library money invested and the money they didn't spend this  
31 year goes into the fund. If there's a year they overspend, they can take money from the fund. Lee  
32 asked if the past year would be a reason for pulling money from the fund rather than asking the  
33 town for the 8% increase because it sounded like next year, they should be able to recoup that  
34 money. Donna said the town basically pays for the payroll for employees and the library pays for  
35 everything else. Lee said going to the taxpayers and asking for an 8% increase when there's a pot  
36 of money, he had difficulty approving especially when they're adding more money to it this year.  
37 Donna said they may not be because they just got some bills in that weren't listed yet. Historically,  
38 Chester gives a 4% increase every year and she was asking them to double it. She said they were  
39 also hiring a highly qualified library director and hoped they wouldn't need as much from the town  
40 in the future. The board had discussed if the town didn't want to give them money, they would  
41 need to take some money, but they didn't want to depend on it. Lee agreed but was concerned they  
42 had money sitting there. Donna said they need new furniture and computers. She said they needed  
43 to pay the librarian for what she is educated for and as a professional. She thought the town was  
44 very supportive of the library and didn't think people would argue with 8% more.

45 Arne asked about the salaries between the previous director and the current. The previous was at  
46 \$32,000 a year for 32 hours and the new director was offered \$50,000, which was the median range

1 for the State of Vermont for a librarian. Arne thought it was hard to find a qualified person at  
2 \$32,000. The cost of living was 7% or 8% this year. Donna said she had gotten more than an 8%  
3 increase from social security. Donna also pointed out the other candidates were from other areas  
4 and wondered where they would live if they came here. She was grateful that the person who  
5 accepted the position was local. Arne said that had been an issue at the schools where they couldn't  
6 take the job because they couldn't find a place to live. Donna said that was a huge issue when she  
7 was the HR person for TRSU 2 years ago.

8 Heather thought 8% may not be what they had done previously but thought they were also doing  
9 a 5% across the board for employees and thought they should consider an increase for the library  
10 considering inflation and a qualified director getting paid a reasonable wage. She said they had  
11 talked about that earlier in the meeting and that was what employers and employees needed to do.  
12 Arne said that it was a decision they didn't need to make today but when they did the budget and  
13 Julie agreed.

14 Ben said the auditors would probably think it was good they have that fund considering their costs.  
15 He asked if there were things that she saw the money going for. They hoped to start new programs  
16 after the new director starts in December. Businesses are waiting to donate after the new director  
17 starts. The computers have old software and need updating. Yesterday the library was packed with  
18 people, which is unusual this time of year. She thought it was incredible. To help people  
19 understand, Julie noted the librarian's salary was being increased from \$32,000 to \$50,000 and  
20 they were only asking for another \$7,000 from the town so obviously the library was contributing  
21 the larger amount of the salary increase. Lee asked if they were allowed to ask questions about the  
22 equity fund and how it would be used. Julie said yes. Lee asked Donna what the plan was for the  
23 \$300,000. If there was no plan, it concerned him because the money should be used rather than  
24 being kept for a rainy day. If the town owns the building, that's not the library board's concern.  
25 He wanted to see a 10-year plan with the costs. He wasn't asking them to spend all of it but wanted  
26 to see a plan before he felt comfortable approving an 8% increase. The library board had asked if  
27 they were allowed to take money from the fund to pay the librarian's salary and they are but that  
28 they shouldn't depend on it as it was a reserve if they needed it for other things. Arne suggested it  
29 may be good to see what that money was used for historically. Lora Cokolat, Treasurer, said the  
30 money was supposed to be for a rainy day and emergency situations and not used for operational  
31 purposes. She said they also have money carried over from year to year and were told they  
32 shouldn't use that money for operational purposes. She wasn't sure what it was used for in the past  
33 but was told it wasn't a good way to do business using it to operate the library. They are left raising  
34 money, getting grants, and using what they get from the town. She acknowledged it was a bigger  
35 amount of money than they had asked for, but they also found a highly qualified candidate who  
36 was local, and the community would benefit. They have a strategic plan that was put in place last  
37 year, but they hadn't really looked at it as a board because they had only stepped in during May.  
38 They want to look at the strategic plan and work from it to create a 3 to 5-year plan. Coming from  
39 another library and being a librarian for over 20 years, she thought the library didn't have a strong  
40 infrastructure when it came to technology. She said there are a lot of gaps and insufficient security  
41 and gave the example of the database that lists the information about all the patrons that have  
42 signed up for library cards. They want to make sure the infrastructure is strong but that costs money  
43 and it's something they will discuss with the new director when she steps in. There are things they  
44 are looking at but are operating on a shoestring budget, and she's very concerned about what they  
45 have available. She said they are very creative, and the staff have been very creative with the  
46 money that's been given to them. Looking at what they get for the town and what they pay in taxes

1 isn't very high compared to other towns. They want to make a very strong library. The town loves  
2 it, and it has high patronage.

3 Arne said the budget will be tough this year for everyone with prices increasing and they will look  
4 at it in depth when it comes to finalizing it. Donna said she will look at what it's been used for in  
5 the past and follow up. Lee thanked her. Arne thanked her and all the directors and said it's been  
6 a tumultuous year to say the least. He recognized it wasn't easy and they were volunteers who had  
7 good intentions and wanted to help the community. Donna said Carrie King has been working hard  
8 at keeping the library going and that she hadn't even been taking a lunch. She said Carrie was very  
9 committed, responsible and had been running both desks. She also thanked the many volunteers  
10 who put in extra hours. Arne recognized Will Wilcox, who had recently passed away, and been  
11 part of the library forever. It was a sad loss for the community. He always had a smile on his face.

12 **Agenda Item 8, 2023 General Fund Budget Review**

13 2022 actuals are through November 4<sup>th</sup>. She will continue to update the budgets they see after  
14 every payroll through the end of 2022. For 2023, fuel costs have been added in. It was her first  
15 stab at the capital plan and a lot of the numbers are settling in and potential expenses have been  
16 included in the '23 budget. There are still some unknown areas and big revenue lines they are  
17 waiting on, one being the Andover assessment which she expected by the next meeting. Highway  
18 surplus deficit could be a big contributor in the revenue line.

19 The department heads and Julie had good conversations about expenses and the need to consider  
20 revenues like what they're charging for a building permit or cemetery plot. As expenses increase,  
21 charges need to also increase. Some revenues will increase slightly. They are considering potential  
22 revenue streams which aren't currently practiced. They are allowed to bill for bringing a patient  
23 back from Springfield Hospital to Chester and they're considering it.

24 Some alarm system stuff they do with the Police Department could be billed. The oversized loads  
25 that come through Chester and are issued tickets, the money all goes to the state because Chester  
26 doesn't have an ordinance that allows them to collect it, so they need to change that.

27 Lee asked about the amount for the proposed expenses for 2023, specifically the cruiser for  
28 \$50,000 for 4 years at \$25,000. Julie said it should have been \$12,500.

29 Julie noted the bond numbers were not in yet. They will be looking at the paving bond and the last  
30 section of Route 35 and their match for that as well as the bridge on Green Mountain Turnpike.  
31 There's a culvert on Green Mountain Turnpike that's failing, and they received a State of Vermont  
32 V-Trans grant funds to fix it. The Director of the Vermont Bond Bank has been talking about long  
33 term interest rates will hold much better than short-term capital expense notes. Julie will probably  
34 lump everything into a bond because interest rates will be significantly lower. They will pay it  
35 over the same time but at a much lesser interest rate, possibly 2 percentage points.

36 They need to purchase an ambulance cot for 2023 with a price tag of around \$48,000. She had  
37 budgeted it as a straight payment of \$48,000 but it could be funded over 2 years or ARPA funds  
38 could pay for it. There may be some fund balance, and this is the year to use it. She is finetuning  
39 it and will report back. She's looking for ways to be creative and keep expenses down.

40 The other item is an expansion to the cemetery shed because the guys are running out of room.  
41 She didn't know that it was a necessity for '23. It may be something that could be postponed to  
42 '24. '23 is the last payment for several things in the capital plan so sometimes stretching things  
43 one extra year can make a difference.

1 The only other expense that wasn't included because she had just received the numbers was for  
2 replacing all four dugouts at The Pinnacle. On two of them, the concrete wall is bowing out and  
3 moving. Doing all four dugouts with a concrete base and metal roof will cost \$18,000. She didn't  
4 want to keep hitting the ARPA funds, but it was a potential use. Lee asked if they had used any  
5 ARPA funds. Julie said they had been used for Brookside and there was \$800,000 left. They had  
6 already voted on it, and it still needed to take place were the cost overruns for the Highway Garage  
7 and the Emergency Services Building. They wanted to take \$200,000 from ARPA funds. Arne  
8 said it seemed like the ARPA funds were for things like that, directly related to COVID. It would  
9 still leave about \$600,000. Julie said they are working on a couple things they may come to board  
10 for that won't hit the budget like redoing the pool house. They are looking at replacing it and  
11 making it a year-round facility. They will come to the board next year.

12 Lee asked about the total General Fund payment. Julie said 2024 is the first year the principal  
13 payment hits for the Emergency Services Building and 2025 is the last year for another round of  
14 bonds. Julie reminded them that they are just trying to get through year to year and over the humps  
15 and after that they will start working on an asset management plan that builds capital. It's not  
16 projecting long-term expenses but going one year at a time at this point.

#### 17 **Agenda Item 9, New Business/Next Agenda**

18 Lee asked if there was any more information on the solar field and Julie said they are still waiting  
19 on Green Lantern for data she doesn't have which included equipment information and yield  
20 production. Lee could go over and figure out the equipment and get information and Julie said they  
21 may need to do that. Julie and Lee will get together to go over that. Lee meant to volunteer a long  
22 time ago, but it is difficult to find the time.

23 Short-term rental ordinance.

24 Lease for the Canal Street property.

25 Ted Brady, Executive Director of VLCT, will attend the next meeting. He is making his way to all  
26 the towns in Vermont and talking about VLCT and their work. Julie has learned so much being a  
27 part of that board.

28 Arne said when he was on a site visit near the Academy Building, he thought they should have the  
29 discussion Julie had mentioned about getting a group together about the future of the building.  
30 Julie said one of things she learned from Ted Brady is having a goal of 5 things each year and  
31 that's one of her 5 things for 2023, getting a group of people together. Jon Clarke is the head of  
32 the Historical Society and had reached out to Julie and he and Steve and Julie did a walkthrough  
33 of the building. There is so much potential, but it needs a lot of TLC and money. The nice thing is  
34 it has a conservation easement and historic preservation ties so getting funding for it shouldn't be  
35 a hurdle. She thought possibly federal funds would be available. She suggested having a  
36 committee of Historical Society members and others interested in the building developing a plan  
37 of how they can move forward in its future. She would love to see it open year-round, every day  
38 as a visitor center for the town. Structurally, it's in good shape, the roof and walls are sound, and  
39 the windows are new. It's time to start moving inside and getting something done.

#### 40 **Agenda Item 10, Adjourn**

41 Ben moved to adjourn, and Lee seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed  
42 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

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**WATER/SEWER COMMISSIONERS MEETING**

Arne called to order at 8:52 p.m.

**Agenda Item 1, Citizens Comments**

Arne asked for any comments and there were none.

**Agenda Item 2, Approve State Revolving Loan Fund Application for Water Improvement Project**

The application for hydrogeological study per Julie for a second well site. The loan amount would be up to \$75,000. They would pay it back within 5 years. It had a 28% grant attached to it. They pay it back when they do the construction. The loan is wrapped in it. Naomi had presented it to them.

Lee moved and Ben seconded a motion to apply. Leigh was a little confused by the two of them. This one was for clean water, and one was for the secondary well. A vote was taken, and it was approved unanimously.

**Agenda Item 3, Approve State Revolving Loan Fund Application for Wastewater Improvement Project**

The drinking water application was \$78,000 for the wastewater asset management plan presented by Naomi. The report was like what they did for water a couple years ago to identify the projects needed. The other key piece to the asset management plan is it would give them the reports needed to go after the funding for the Forest Main on Depot Street. It will also be the steps needed to go after the funding for the planning and engineering of the sewer upgrades. The asset management plan has a potential grant of 50%. If they get the 50% grant, they won't be repaying \$78,000.

Ben moved and Lee seconded to apply. One was for the second well site, and one was for the upgrades to the sewer department and the forest main. A vote was taken, and it passed unanimously.

**Agenda Item 4, Adjourn**

Lee moved to adjourn, and Leigh seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and it passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m.