

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

4 **Board Members Present:** Lee Gustafson, Arne Jonynas, and Peter Hudkins at Town Hall. Absent:
5 Heather Chase and Arianna Knapp.

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

8 **Visitors Present:** Bill Lindsay, Hugh Quinn, Chief Tom Williams, Chief Matt Wilson, Mike
9 Randzio, Frank Kelley, and Alicia DiPietro at Town Hall; and Karen Ericson, SAPA TV, Joy
10 Slaughter, and Chester Telegraph via Zoom.

11
12 **Call to Order**

13
14 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He
15 welcomed everyone to both the Water and Wastewater Commissioners meeting and the
16 Selectboard meeting, which would follow, and asked those in attendance to sign the sign-in sheet.

17
18 **WATER/WASTEWATER COMMISSIONERS MEETING**

19 **Agenda Item 1, Citizen Comments**

20 Bill Lindsay didn't think he had a conflict of interest because he didn't own a laundromat but
21 thought they needed economic development. He said a commercial rate for water and sewer would
22 be advantageous and knew it had never been done. He was probably the last of the laundromats in
23 Chester and the previous owner who had a laundromat had the same problem. The regular rates
24 were too stiff even though there was a large volume. If you buy gasoline or other items in volume
25 that are needed for a business, you usually get a better rate. His point was they should consider a
26 commercial rate for the future. The members thanked him. Arne asked if it was a set rate for
27 everyone. Julie said the rate was for 1,000 gallons of usage and then a base rate. 1 unit is equivalent
28 to 17,000 gallons of usage. There were a lot of different ways to do water and sewer billing and it
29 was something they could consider. It was done many ways across the state. Newsbank, Drews,
30 the schools, and the car wash are big users. Arne thought they could consider it as water and sewer
31 commissioners. Peter asked if it would be difficult to get a comparison sheet of what other towns
32 do. Julie said she and Cil went to the asset management program last year, so she had notes and it
33 was a complete conversion of their entire billing, including the program, and not just changing
34 their rate, so they should research it. Peter agreed but it would be good to learn what others did.

35 **Agenda Item 2, Set Water Rates**

36 Julie had presented it in August and said it had been many years since rates were raised so they
37 were playing catch up. The board had agreed to incremental increases starting in August of 2023
38 through the end of 2024. It was now November, and the November billing would go out this month,
39 so they would be setting the water base rate at \$67, which was a \$3 increase per unit and the usage
40 rate at \$2, a 50 cents increase. Arne clarified they were only setting November rates and not future
41 rates and Julie agreed and explained they were monitoring, so they weren't increasing rates more
42 than necessary. Arne noted they were projected, and some would not happen. Julie said they had
43 decided to review them quarterly. Arne had brought his water and sewer bill and per the math, his

1 \$255 bill would raise around \$20. Chester's rates were some of the lower in the state and they were
2 not overbilling. They are two expensive departments to operate given the chemicals and the pumps.
3 Arne mentioned there would be a sewer upgrade soon. Julie noted chemicals had doubled in price.
4

5 Lee moved to increase the proposed rate for water from \$64 to \$67 per unit and the usage rate from
6 \$1.50 to \$2.00. Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7 **Agenda Item 3, Set Sewer Rates**

8 Julie said the base rate for sewer would not increase. Usage would go from \$4.50 to \$4.75. The
9 reason was sewer was not as behind as water in its rates. Arne noted they had quite a cash balance.
10 Lee moved to keep the base rate the same and increase the user rate from \$4.50 to \$4.75 and Peter
11 seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

12 Peter asked about Arne's bill, which Arne said was for 3 months or around 96 days and his usage
13 was 14,639 gallons or about \$6.90 per day. Peter wanted to use the information for later and Julie
14 offered to provide him with various reports. Arne said it was broken down by the base charge and
15 consumption charge for water and sewer. Peter said he didn't have village water and sewer, so Arne
16 was his example. Arne said you end up paying for a service whether it's a private one that you must
17 sink money into over time as in a leach field, septic system, or a well, or if it's public water and
18 sewer where you pay continuously. Arne thought Chester was lucky to have quality water where
19 chemicals aren't regularly necessary except occasionally adding chlorine when they are working
20 on something. Arne said it was better than bottled water from the store.

21 **Agenda Item 4, Adjourn**

22 Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to adjourn, and the motion carried unanimously.

23 **Meeting ended 6:40**

24 **Agenda Item 1, Additions or Deletions to the Agenda**

25
26
27 Arne had one and asked Julie if Frank Kelley had provided her with an update on the flood response
28 and he had not. Julie said the Citizens Advisory Committee would attend the next meeting so they
29 may receive an update at that time.
30

31 There were no changes to the agenda.
32

33 **Agenda Item 2, Approve Minutes from the October 18, 2023 Selectboard Meeting**

34 Since Arne was absent from the October 18th meeting, he would be unable to vote, so it was decided
35 to postpone a vote until the following meeting since there were only three members present. Lee
36 noted on page 9 of 11, line 34, Kate Martens' name was misspelled.

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

38 There were none.
39

40 **Agenda Item 4, Old Business**

41
42 Julie noted there wasn't much because she was currently devoted to grants and flood work.
43

1 Report given by the Town Manager, Julie Hance:

2
3 Housing Commission

4 They had their first meeting on Tuesday. Their regular meeting will be held on the fourth Tuesday
5 of each month at 6:00 p.m.

6
7 Academy Building

8 Julie had previously discussed having a small group work with her about interior renovations of
9 the Academy Building. They will meet November 6, at 10:00 a.m. at her office.

10
11 Solar Field

12 Lee, Arne, and Julie had met with Mike Curtis, a part-time resident in Chester, regarding the solar
13 field purchase and he had given them some good direction and she hoped they would be moving
14 in a positive direction with the solar field. Arne thought it was a productive meeting and Julie
15 agreed. Arne said because they are a town, a lot of things don't apply, such as taxes and capital
16 gains and other things. Arne noted he had been in the business for a long time and had good
17 resources and information for them. Julie will get the contracts from the other two oftakers to see
18 if buying out their contracts is an option. Julie will provide Mr. Curtis with all their data, including
19 their usage, the rates they pay, their overall town usage and then he will have spreadsheets with
20 formulas and will apply that information. He won't charge the town and is volunteering his services
21 and will help Julie determine their return on investment. Greenbacker is not the original signer of
22 the current contract and Lee wondered whether Greenbacker must sell to them if they exercise
23 their option to buy. Lee knew they had been dragging their feet for almost a year and wondered if
24 there was anything they could do to incentivize Greenbacker to sell to them other than giving them
25 \$2.4 million which wasn't an option. Lee wondered if the contract language stated that they would
26 sell it to them regardless of whether they wanted to. Julie said they have an option to purchase at
27 7 years and they had instituted that option and entered negotiations. She thought the option stated
28 if they could come to a negotiation point, but their appraisals are \$100,000 apart. Julie thought
29 they would be legally hard-pressed to decide they weren't going to sell. She would have that
30 conversation with Jim. Lee agreed but hated to see them spend a lot of time and money and it not
31 be something they were obligated to do. Julie said after she receives the contracts from the two
32 oftakers, she would send them to Jim for his review so he could let Chester know their options.
33 Arne said it was vague in the original document regarding the 7 years' buy and there was also one
34 at 14, but it didn't include specifics. Lee agreed. Arne said to go through all the trouble and have
35 Greenbacker decide not to take their price would not be bargaining in good faith and may open a
36 door for legal ramifications. Arne hoped the transaction would happen and they agreed it would
37 be an asset to the town to power the town departments entirely on solar.

38
39 **Agenda Item 5, Short Term Rental; continued discussion re next steps**

40
41 Arne noted he wasn't at the last meeting, and they had kept the conversation short. At this meeting,
42 they were missing two members. Arne appreciated that Hugh Quinn from the Planning
43 Commission was present. Arne had some thoughts about it, and one was to involve the Planning
44 Commission more and see what they could come up with, in addition to the Selectboard. Some of
45 the courses of action were through an ordinance enacted by the Selectboard but a lot of the possible
46 actions that could be taken would involve the Planning Commission and zoning regulations. So,

1 giving the Commission some leeway to consider this may help with the whole process rather than
2 waiting until the end. Six months would go by fast. Julie noted they had given a moratorium until
3 October 31st. Arne said the six months started October 1st for the Selectboard to decide. Arne said
4 an in-depth discussion would include where they wanted to go as a Selectboard and what options
5 they had considered and wanted a full board to have the discussion. Lee wanted to know if they
6 had received any more data, but Preston was not in attendance and Hugh didn't know. Lee agreed
7 having a full board and receiving an update on the data would help facilitate a discussion. Arne
8 said they agreed to welcome conversation and help from the Planning Commission.

9 As a result of the previous joint meeting, Hugh had jotted down what he thought were goals that
10 could be used in deciding the work they were going to do. If the Selectboard were to indicate which
11 goals made sense, it would provide the Commission guidance. Arne suggested another joint
12 meeting. Peter thought they should wait and see because he knew two places that had been fire
13 inspected. Once you go over eight guests, the fire inspector comes in and they will be closed
14 because you can't go back to eight guests after the fire inspector comes in. The inspection would
15 need to be disclosed when they sold the house. It's a wakeup call when the fire inspection is done.
16 Peter thought they may even see a reduction in the number of short-term rentals because they won't
17 be able to meet the code. Arne added that maybe the issue wasn't as big as they had initially
18 thought because things had died down. People were jumping on the bandwagon and purchasing
19 properties for short-term rentals and there wasn't much inventory in town but now it was starting
20 to go the other direction. The prices are higher than they had been, which makes it more difficult
21 for people to afford housing but there are more places on the market than there were. Arne still
22 sees it as a business and tourist lodging was a conditional use in all districts except for three and
23 in those three, it wasn't even allowed. There were ideas about a two-year waiting period, and they
24 needed to decide what direction to go. Arne said it would be on the agenda at the next meeting.

25 **Agenda Item 6, 2024 General Fund Budget; Public Safety**

26 Chief Tom Williams, Chief Matt Wilson, Mike Randzio, and Alicia DiPietro from Public Safety
27 were all present. Julie had the first-round draft of the Public Safety Department's income and
28 expenses, and some numbers were missing. They wouldn't set Andover's expenses until the
29 beginning of December, which was a big revenue line missing, and capital transfers were also
30 missing and wouldn't be added until they finalized the capital plan. The board's next view of the
31 budget would likely include Julie's first pass at the capital plan. Julie was waiting on the audited
32 fund balance for the capital plan because she may propose playing with the fund balance to help.
33 She expected to have it within the next couple of weeks. Julie said it was the department that they
34 would likely see as an increase and some of it was because of changes and improvements in the
35 department and things they were doing in the community and services they were providing. Julie
36 asked if there were questions on budget lines the members were concerned about. They decided to
37 hear from the Public Safety representatives first.

38 Police Department

39 Chief Williams said there were multiple people in the departments that were cross-trained. He is a
40 firefighter, an EMS, and is in the Police Department. They change hats to get things done, when
41 necessary. Mike Randzio is a part-time officer, Deputy Chief for the Ambulance, and a part-time
42 instructor. Alicia is a trained first responder and works Monday through Friday. She has a
43 background in emergency management, which they are utilizing across the board. They are
44 revamping some of the emergency management planning and some new ideas to cover things they
45 have heard from the public, such as reaching out to vulnerable populations during storms and natural
46

1 disasters, and power outages. They bring better service to Chester.

2 Julie had asked them to look for ways they could bring back income. With the Police Department,
3 it's difficult to do because that's not their business. They have found creative ways to bring money
4 into the system. The push on community policing is the biggest change with the Police Department.
5 It comes with a lot of different things and works well. They are being asked how they're doing it
6 because it's being done so well but what works in Chester may not work in other towns.

7 They formed a Citizens Advisory Committee for the Police Department that is made up of five
8 people appointed by the Selectboard. There was one member that recently changed. They serve as
9 a liaison between the Police Department and community, but the department also has an open door
10 to the community. This was part of community policing. The department has a good working
11 relationship with the advisory committee, who is the bridge between the community and the
12 department. The committee has been provided with all the rules and regulations for the department,
13 which the officers need to know. Lee asked how someone would approach the committee and the
14 chief said they meet monthly on the second Tuesday at Town Hall, and they could attend and speak
15 during the comment section, or they could choose to contact a committee member and Town Hall
16 has their contact information. They are implementing a website just for the Police Department.

17 Chief Williams said when he started, they had three full-time officers. They are supposed to have
18 five. That's three full-time officers running 7 day shifts and 7 night shifts and wasn't an easy task
19 but there were no issues other than being tired. They now have four full-time and four part-time
20 officers. The way they work their shifts is equivalent to the two part-time officers they had in the
21 past. For the same money, they are covering more shifts. They are running two officers on most
22 shifts, which is safer. Some shifts only have one but they are trying to modify schedules so there
23 are two on every shift. There are different looks to the uniform. The gold stripe on their pants is
24 more formal and part of the professional image. They wore ball caps before and now they have
25 covers. They have new coats, and the liner is reflective on the back and the coat is like a raincoat
26 parka, so they are covered because it's reflective. They received a grant to cover part of the cost.
27 They merged their coats with the fire department and ambulance, same coats but different colors.
28 Their reflective coats indicate on the back whether they are Chester Fire Department, Police
29 Department, or Ambulance. This will help people pick them out in a crowd and make them more
30 visible. He was told people wanted more police presence, so between being reflective and
31 florescent, they are visible. It was a \$4,000 cost for the coats and was covered by a grant and cost
32 the taxpayer little if anything. The coats work in all seasons and weather conditions, so although
33 they were slightly more expensive, they are good quality, top of the line, and should last, and saved
34 them from buying different types of jackets.

35 The Chief said he and Julie were able to secure a radio grant. Fire, EMS, and Police all put in for
36 it. It was a leftover grant from 2020. When people couldn't fulfill the grant received, the money
37 went back into the pot and Chester applied for it. They were able to get about \$30,000 in radios
38 for the Police Department. Every cruiser has both UHF and VHF, Police, and Fire, and got all new
39 portables. They were denied radios for personal cars for an officer responding to a call after hours.
40 They had a merger they were attempting to do to have dispatches out of Hartford and put all public
41 safety on the same dispatch system due to VSP eliminating municipalities, but the legislature
42 decided to put it all on hold. The money that was out there is frozen and they are in limbo waiting.
43 They purchased 8 bulletproof vests which were about \$1,200 apiece. They secured the Leahy Grant
44 which paid for half. Alicia is looking into grants they can use and found in 82 pages a clause if a
45 town is affected by a natural disaster, they qualified. They have applied for a waiver, and it will

1 pay for 100% of the vests. That would be \$9,600 which would be completely paid for by the Leahy
2 Grant. He considers it income if the taxpayer isn't paying for it.

3 Chief Williams said they purchased two vehicles this year and locked in the rate. For things like
4 the flood, the power outage, and the funeral home fire, he calls in extra people and they're short
5 on vehicles so it's nice to have enough vehicles and can get a lot more done. They ended up keeping
6 the old car and have reactivated the C.O.R.E. (Community Oriented Radar Enforcement), which
7 they are using it for. The program was instituted years ago and was about traffic safety and what
8 people want. When tickets are issued, they will receive a bigger amount back from the state when
9 it's adopted by the town's ordinances. In theory, if it goes into the town pot and budget, it pays for
10 itself. When an officer is on C.O.R.E., they are doing the enforcement part of safety. Arne asked
11 if that was the fourth car and the Chief said yes, and it had a C.O.R.E. decal on it and the number
12 4. An officer just attended commercial motor vehicle enforcement school, which involved the
13 weights, permits, and inspections, and everything that goes along with the commercial vehicle
14 traffic they are getting through town. Another issue that has been brought to his attention is the
15 speed and types of trucks coming through causing problems. It requires having an officer certified
16 specifically in that. Chester is receiving 6 of the certified scales from DMV to carry in the back of
17 the car. They will be used to weigh the trucks stopped on-site. The state paid for the scales and the
18 certification of the officer. They are doing things that will potentially bring in revenue.

19 Not all traffic stops result in a ticket, as there are many warnings written. The Chief's goal is for
20 the officers to have contact, whether it's a ticket or a warning and is officer discretion. Every stop
21 is documented. As of last year, at this time, there were 67 stops, which may be due to COVID or
22 lack of officers. This year, there have been 696 stops or a 91% increase of traffic enforcement
23 within the town. April is when they kicked it into overdrive because they had enough officers to
24 be safe and go and do something. Last year's calls for service were 1609 and this year, they were
25 2,432 or a 34% increase. Overall potential in revenue from that was an 87% increase in total ticket
26 revenue from last year to this year. Arne asked if the criteria had changed from last year to this
27 year for calls and Chief Williams said it was overall. Highway safety is traffic enforcement for
28 speed, cell phone usage, seatbelt usage, and aggressive driving. They rejoined the program because
29 you must be in the program to receive the grant. Rutland County Sheriff Department holds the
30 funds and they agreed to take Chester under the grant. If you could work time and a half, the guys
31 can productively work traffic safety under the program and the time is paid for by the state under
32 that grant. They could end up in Killington or Springfield doing DUI enforcement or a roadblock
33 and Rutland could end up in Chester doing radar in town, which is welcomed. Chester will be
34 receiving a radar, which costs \$8,000 but at no cost to Chester. With this program, there is potential
35 to work with the school and is part of the community policing. The principal and vice principal are
36 very receptive to the police being in there. The Police Department is assisting them with their
37 emergency planning. Currently, there is an open-door policy, and the officers are welcome, and
38 they make their presence known and interact with the staff and students. They are both big
39 supporters of SRO, School Resource Officer. The Governor's Highway Safety has a piece of their
40 program run in Windham County with Sergeant Roy and teaches in school and has a travelling
41 drivers' education safety program which involves a driving simulator. He teaches highway safety
42 but is too busy to spread out anymore, as he is part-time with Windham County. Sergeant Roy
43 asked if Chester would be interested in the program. Governor's Highway Safety will pay for the
44 officer, the equipment, the uniforms, and time. Chief Williams said if the school is considering a
45 school resource officer, possibly the town and school district could both provide some funding,
46 and it would be more feasible and would also provide another officer in town. Chief Williams used

1 the analogy of a ball of yarn for the public safety department and how the police, fire, and
2 ambulance work together and that it's difficult to speak about one without involving the other.
3 They provide school crossing at the elementary school when available. This provides interaction
4 with the kids and parents, and the Chief was even given a homemade pair of florescent green
5 mittens. The department conducts community outreach and possibly the most popular was when
6 they gave away 200 plus gallons of ice cream and served it to the high school kids at lunch, the
7 elementary school, the Whiting Library, the HeadStart Preschool. They had so much ice cream
8 they drove around giving out ice cream to random people, such as a guy mowing his lawn who got
9 a spoon and ate from the carton while mowing. They are doing out of the box stuff. They attended
10 Fall Festival and had one officer dedicated to it who walked around and was present. This
11 Halloween, they had extra coverage with four officers out and were busy non-stop with non-related
12 Halloween stuff. They are covering traffic details for the highway department when painting
13 crosswalks. There was a rather large annual motorcycle gathering in town and they were present
14 for that. They attend school board meetings, parades, dances, art night, Chester Business Coalition
15 meetings, and are out as much as possible to be a presence.

16 They came up with an alarm policy that will be presented at the next meeting. The Chief added
17 that 99.9% of alarms are false and that's why an officer isn't screaming lights and sirens 100 mph
18 down the road for a burglary alarm. There is an issue with repeatedly false alarms and those at a
19 home owned by someone who lives out of state and it's a cost to the taxpayer for an officer to
20 respond when possibly the issue with the alarm isn't being addressed. The policy requires a
21 registration and instructions to address those that go off repeatedly and if it isn't addressed there's
22 a fine that increases with multiple calls. If the fine isn't paid, they are removed from the list.

23 They are looking at adopting over-sized permit violations into the ordinance because without that,
24 the town only receives about 30% of the ticket but if it's in the ordinance, the town receives 82%
25 from a ticket. With a 91% increase in traffic stops, 82% is better than 30%. Overweight trucks on
26 back roads that aren't permitted to be, will be able to be weighed and issued a violation since they
27 now have a scale.

28 With all the talk about mental health and issues in the community, one of the things that drove it
29 in their minds was repeat callers to 911 on non-emergency issues. If someone calls an ambulance,
30 they must respond, but if they transport someone to the hospital and they walk out before the crew
31 does, because it's a closer ride to the grocery store, how do they stop that? A social worker would
32 be able to help address whether the lack of transportation or mental health issue is why it's
33 happening. They don't have enough business for a full-time social worker but to share one with
34 Bellows Falls' Police Department and a backup is VSP's social worker in Westminster, so they
35 have a social worker if one is needed and will hopefully address the issue of the ambulance making
36 repeated calls because someone needs a ride to Springfield.

37 Jim Baker's police department assessment spoke about a 6th officer. They are discussing if it's
38 needed and how it would be funded. They are wondering if the Governor's Highway Safety could
39 be the 6th officer with most of it funded by that program. The 2013 assessment was looked at, but
40 no significant action taken, so they are going through the current assessment and trying to address
41 things from it.

42
43 Department of Public Safety is written on the cruisers and the front of their building. The same
44 staff are performing different tasks or specialty positions to ensure a better result in service

1 response and cost to the community. Most or all of it results in little or no cost to the taxpayer.
2 Currently, Monday through Friday, Chester has a full-time police department which they had; a
3 full-time ambulance service, which they did not have; and a full-time fire department to a point.
4 Monday through Friday, Mike is working full-time in the ambulance, Chief Williams works full-
5 time in the police department and usually another officer around. Every officer is a first responder,
6 which makes Mike's job easier. He can leave with the ambulance immediately and the officer can
7 meet him on the scene. The officer can be a first responder and be there faster than the ambulance
8 because they're out and about already. There are many benefits to doing it that way. Every officer
9 is a state certified first responder. No matter what shift they're on, an officer can respond to it.
10 They only need one EMT with the ambulance to show up. If necessary, the officer will serve as
11 the ambulance driver. Alicia, their administrative support, is there Monday through Friday and is
12 also a certified first responder. She can lock the door and hang the sign saying there is no admin
13 there and walk next door to serve as an EMT. The Selectboard allowed a second full-time
14 ambulance person, so the ambulance is covered 7 days a week during the day shift. It's not full-
15 time at night but they're taking steps. The fire department has EMT first responders, and they just
16 switch hats. They had a fire at the end of town and the chiefs were able to act without waiting for
17 someone to respond from home. A member coming from the Andover line must drive in and get
18 their equipment and truck when the officers are already there, which makes the response time little
19 or nothing. At first, people were surprised with a police cruiser and ambulance but now it's
20 expected.

21
22 Mike Randzio is an EMS IC and can instruct at the state level and is an instructor in the tactical
23 medic course and the Stop the Bleed and a first aid and CPR instructor. The officers need to be
24 certified regularly and can be done for no cost now. Mike has also certified other officers, EMS,
25 and firefighters as instructors in CPR and First Aid which allows them to go into town and offer
26 courses. He instructed at one of the churches as they have a new AED and needed instructions.
27 They held a Stop the Bleed class at a picnic table and invited people to attend. It's an hour course
28 but is important and is a simple course and one of many they are now offering. Some of the courses
29 are paying for the certifications with a little leftover that they are putting into a training fund. Chief
30 Williams works Monday through Thursday and Steve, who is the Facilities Director, and a captain
31 of the fire department is around Monday through Friday and is usually available to break away
32 from what he's doing. Between Chief Williams and Steve, as first responders, there is availability.
33 They have 130 calls they have assisted between them for the year. Not having them there and
34 bringing an outside first responder who is paid hourly is \$3,000 to start to cover those calls. If no
35 first responder responds to assist Mike, the call goes to mutual aid. Mutual aid from Springfield,
36 Ludlow, and Golden Cross results in a charge of \$500 to the town. The town gets charged for
37 asking for help because they can't cover their own call. 10 of those calls total \$5,000 which the
38 town pays. 100 calls total \$50,000 just to have another ambulance come in. Their calls were 500
39 plus last year. If all the calls weren't covered by the two people working, it would be a \$65,000
40 cost to the town paid to the other agencies. Now they have coverage and eliminated that extra cost.

41
42 Ambulance

43 Mike Randzio said they were currently at 396 calls for the year and expected they would be at last
44 year's call volume. A lot of it mirrored what Tom had talked about with how to improve the
45 department and planning. Mike saw it as community health and is trying to bring them to the
46 forefront and interacting with the community, so they are familiar with the providers. They are

1 starting training and providing it for the community. They trained 33 people in Stop the Bleed this
2 year, which is a low number, but it was a brand-new program. They can now instruct CPR, First
3 Aid, AED, Stop the Bleed, all the way up to advanced EMT in-house. An advanced EMT is \$2,000
4 so the savings add up quickly. They have saved \$3,000 so far by just doing in-house training.
5 When Mike did the first responder course for the Police Department, the charge was \$100, and
6 they had 3 individuals attend from outside but didn't charge internal members. The \$300 generated
7 covered the cost of Chester's individuals getting their CPR card and brought in some revenue. If
8 they hold an EMT class, it's \$1,500. They continue to bring in new members and have some old
9 ones returning who are excited about the changes. They have a new patch, have set new
10 expectations, and have new policies. This is the first year they have an award policy. Steve received
11 a state award.

12
13 They increased their ambulance rates earlier this year. There are basic and advanced life support
14 calls. Up until June or July, Mike was basic but now is advanced. Last year, 16% were ALS and
15 to date, they are at 22%. They bill at a higher level and provide a higher level of care to their
16 patients. The new chassis for the ambulance arrived last week so they hoped to see the new
17 ambulance next year, which sparked the idea of what to do with the old ambulance. Any leadership
18 in EMS will tell you 911 calls don't make money. Interfacility transfers, like from Springfield
19 Hospital to Dartmouth, generate revenue. If they did 100 transfers from Springfield Hospital to
20 Dartmouth, they could pay two salaries and more. He learned that Ludlow is taking on another
21 town with only two ambulances, so he wondered if they will be traveling to Ludlow more often,
22 especially during ski season. They have mutual aid agreements in place, so if Chester is called
23 there, Ludlow will be billed for it. Mike said they are addressing how to build resiliency in their
24 department. Now, if the primary ambulance goes out, they still get billed if Springfield takes a call.
25 If they had two ambulances, when the primary one goes out, there would be a backup.

26
27 Kate Marten is starting full-time and has been great and has helped a lot with coverage. They are
28 now asking for one part-time person instead of two. Kate will provide the next level in community
29 health. Mike said they will be conducting visits to the Senior Circle within the next couple of
30 weeks and they are very excited about it. They have helped three people between walkers, Life
31 Alert, and speaking with family who is concerned about their family member coming home and
32 how to assist them. Although it isn't generating revenue currently, it is part of the community
33 outreach and helping members. Someone had commented on Facebook the last time they were
34 there about neighbors helping neighbors and that's what Mike saw this as.

35
36 Fire Department
37 Chief Matthew Wilson said the Fire Department continues to get busier and this year was no
38 exception. They are going up 10 to 20 percent with call volume every year. He has been chief for
39 ten years and when he took over, they ran 72 calls per year. Last year, they had 255 calls, and they
40 are already at that many calls this year with two months remaining. This year is a much greater
41 jump because last year during the rebuilding phase of the ambulance, they ran quite a few calls
42 assisting them and this year they may have run 10 the entire year. So, their numbers are strictly
43 fire department numbers, and it just keeps getting busier. The types of calls they are responding to
44 are changing. They're responding to more rescue calls, even outside the flood, those types of calls
45 are increasing. Possibly more people are hiking. They performed over 50 rescue calls during the
46 flood, which doesn't include the 27 animal rescues on top of the human life saving rescues. Most

1 of the rescues came in the first 36 hours. 7 or 8 of the rescues were in another town. Chester has a
2 memorandum of understanding with the state who utilizes them as a resource for the state rescue
3 team, so they spent time in Ludlow, Proctorsville, Cavendish, and then were deployed to Putney
4 when they were in Ludlow. As they arrived in Chester from Ludlow on their way to Putney, they
5 contacted the state to inform them that they couldn't continue to Putney because they were needed
6 in Chester. There have been salary increases, which are included in the budget, because the call
7 volume has increased. They have only raised a little in training, some of which is mandated by
8 the state, and some training is to be proficient or improve. Yosemite Engine Company, their non-
9 profit, gives them for training each year and they are spending over \$20,000. Yosemite is providing
10 them with \$12,000 yearly for training. Julie and Matt were missing a vital tool they needed, called
11 a vortex, and tried to obtain grants for it and were denied. After the flood, the engine company
12 ended up purchasing it for them, which was \$6,000. He appreciated their continued support. They
13 will have three items they are requesting as part of the capital plan: one was the replacement of
14 their utility, which was supposed to be replaced after 10 years and they were now into 12 years
15 and the truck is not powerful enough to pull the trailers they need to pull, and he wasn't sure how
16 they still had a transmission or motor in the truck because of it. The new truck will have an optional
17 plow which will be useful for seasonal residents who they are unable to access on calls. A lot of
18 places rely on state resources for rescue stuff, and they are attempting to expand their rescue
19 capabilities. They have a massive sewer system in Chester, and they have no way of taking care
20 of the residents if something goes wrong. When you call a state resource, they are activated from
21 the north which can take up to five hours before help arrives. They already sent two people off for
22 training and hope to send two more. It's a specialized air pack that you need to wear, and his hope
23 is for the next three years, they can purchase two per year to get them where they need to be. Matt
24 and Julie discussed revamping the rescue truck which is a money pit. Most of the time, their vehicle
25 maintenance is spent within the first two months of the year on that truck. One problem is the truck
26 is too heavy and the stuff they've put on it to make it a multi-use truck, and the pump and tank on
27 it have been used once. Their attempt to make it a better truck is to remove the equipment that
28 doesn't get used and replace it with slide out trays in the back that they can put their lighter rescue
29 equipment on and not have to deal with it and hopefully it will result in less annual maintenance
30 and repairs.

31 Arne asked if there were any questions.

32 Peter liked what they were doing and loved the concept. He said a lot of what they discussed wasn't
33 included in the revenues. Peter noted the revenues were down from last year. Julie didn't
34 understand what Peter was saying. Peter said if they took the 2023 actuals for three quarters, it
35 should be \$80,000, down from the actuals in 2022. Julie asked him to explain his reasoning. He
36 thought it looked like there were better revenues in 2022 than 2024. Julie told him he needed to
37 look at the details. In 2022, the PD other services of \$81,416 is what was throwing his number and
38 was because in 2022, the PD did special detail. The payroll expense line for other services in 2022
39 was expended by \$62,520. They don't have the expense and revenue in '23 so they weren't under
40 revenue and where the difference was. Peter said that Tom was discussing revenue and that was
41 more revenue than he was seeing. Tom said the revenue must catch up with itself. The court
42 system, which involves the traffic bureau, was backed up because of COVID and was way behind.
43 Peter asked if it could be projected in 2024. Tom said to a point, but they couldn't predict how
44 many people would win or lose their ticket fights. Peter asked if the state paying for the C.O.R.E.
45 program was in the budget. Julie said it was a board decision to increase that line item and what
46 they wouldn't want to do is increase it without having the data to back it up. Julie left the court fee

1 at 30,000 and it was up to the board if they wanted to increase the line without having a trend to
2 help decide. Arne said court fees are neither consistent nor predictable and they've been bitten
3 before by increasing the amount rather than leaving it where it is. Arne said it was one of the most
4 difficult revenues to try to determine. Julie said this may be the year to increase it to \$40,000 but
5 there's no math to support it. Arne said half the tickets were thrown out. Arne has heard there is
6 extra revenue coming in from these areas, but their biggest concern is the safety of the town, and
7 their actions are driven by safety and the people. Peter thought the model Julie and the chiefs had
8 come up with was great but would be good to figure out how to pay for it. As they get further into
9 the budget discussion and it all comes together, it would be a line they could look at. Julie said a
10 lot of it didn't start until later in the year so the fourth quarter may help provide consistency to
11 make a more reasonable estimate. Lee said he would rather be surprised in a good way than a bad
12 way with respect to that line item. They are looking for ways to pay for it or save money and Lee
13 appreciated it and thought it would have a good impact on the community's view of public safety.
14 Julie noted they would watch the revenue lines. Arne was impressed with the cross-training that
15 probably saved a huge amount of money and increased the response times immensely. Arne
16 thanked them and said the changes were appreciated and commendable.

17 Lee questioned if there was any confusion due to the police department sign in front of Town Hall
18 now that it is located at the Public Services Building. Julie said most people know where it is now,
19 but they should have the signs removed. Chief Williams pointed out that Alicia was battling with
20 Google to get them to change the location to the proper one. The Chief said it needed to be changed
21 on Google. Arne added the Public Safety Building had been a huge catalyst for positive change.

22 Chief Wilson said it was a lot more work for him and he hoped it would come to an end but there
23 was an issue with ISO and insurance companies. Julie had heard from one person. The Chief said
24 ISO is blaming the insurance companies who are blaming ISO, and neither will fix the problem.
25 Chief Wilson is generating from 5 to 10 reports per week because everyone is renewing their
26 homeowner's insurance, and their insurance has skyrocketed because they live 2 houses from the
27 fire department but it's being reported they live more than 5 miles from it. Neither company will
28 fix it so every time it happens, he must generate a report with GPS coordinates where the hydrants
29 are, information for staffing and equipment and send it to the insurance companies who lower their
30 homeowner's insurance. He said the two agencies that can fix it are blaming each other and the
31 only current option is for him to continue to write these letters. Arne thanked him.

32 **Agenda Item 7, Flood Update; Discuss Emergency Response Initiatives**

33 Frank Kelley, who is part of the Citizen Advisory Committee, is working on a survey and once
34 they have a website available, there will be a Google doc to provide information about the
35 committee. They have put together a flood response survey and shared a draft with the board. They
36 would like it to go live soon. It will have a QR code that people can scan with their phone and
37 answer questions. That way they can receive feedback from the community to provide the chiefs
38 with information. It would include questions about whether they had 72 hours of water, extra
39 batteries, radio, etc. and finished with questions about whether they wanted to participate in a
40 forum regarding their flood experience. He noted people in western Chester had a different
41 experience than eastern Chester. Frank offered to share the QR code with the members and Julie
42 said she would email the board a link. Frank said they established a Gmail account for the Citizens
43 Advisory Committee accessible by Alicia, Julie, Chief Williams, and Frank, so people have a way
44 to communicate with them digitally. Julie said the committee would present at the November 15th
45 meeting about what they are working on. Upon Lee's request, Frank approached him and Lee

1 scanned the QR code.

2 Julie said they had been doing a fair amount of work and had discussed things that both went well
3 and didn't and comparisons with Irene and this event. They identified things that need
4 improvement, and how they communicated with the public was a big issue for Julie. Julie said the
5 admin flowed beautifully but she didn't do so well, and they are teaching her what her role should
6 be. A lot of good things came out of it. The flood was Alicia's first day on the job. Alicia has a
7 background in emergency management and does a fair amount of work advising on some things
8 they could be doing. Julie turned the meeting over to Alicia who would explain things they are
9 doing and improvements they are looking to make for the next event. Julie said it wasn't only
10 floods but the past winter there were 3 days without power.

11 Alicia said the recent flooding was her first full week on the job and she loved to see how well
12 Chester worked together. They've had two 100-year storms in twelve years, had gone through a
13 pandemic, and a multi-day power outage due to winter storms with accessibility issues for power
14 companies. The frequency of these types of events are occurring more not only in Chester, and
15 Vermont, but everywhere. At the most recent debriefing, communication brought up, as well as
16 resource management and how to improve it. Things that must be tracked during these events are
17 calls for service, location, the number of people involved, and if there are trees down, power lines
18 down and if Green Mountain Power has been contacted and their ETA. Road closures developing
19 within minutes require them to be on scene on dry ground when they were performing rescues and
20 there were times when their tires were under a few inches of water because it happened quickly
21 once it started. Alicia said one agency reported a 3-inch rise within an hour. She said when these
22 things happen, they require the coordination of a lot of information, resources, and departments all
23 at once. That is where the Emergency Operations Center idea, which was already in place, is being
24 fine-tuned. Calls came into the fire department directly and Alicia was on the phone, so they had
25 one phone and one person taking every call received which with 3,000 residents meant more than
26 one call at the same time. They realized they really need to move it from the bay of the Fire
27 Department to where they can incorporate more people and phones and technology to track the
28 resources and manage events. One idea they've come up with through meetings is to take the
29 already established training room in the Public Safety Building and add pieces and parts to create
30 an Emergency Operations Center which they will reference as an EOC. They will add common
31 equipment like laptops, phone trees, and increase radio applications so they can reach out to
32 emergency partners, like Fire, Ambulance, and PD. They have spoken with Burlington
33 Communication as far as increasing antenna or a tower on the building so there's redundancy in
34 the system. If they lose the radio tower because of its location, not only will they be unable to
35 communicate with the Public Safety but they won't be able to speak with each other so the first
36 responders and entire town will be in danger. Communicating outside of town is also important as
37 with mutual aid. There are ways to fund the EOC by way of grants and are waiting for them to
38 open. Under the model, Julie said she learned during an event that she, Debbie, and Amie pack up
39 and go there and work so they're all under one roof and everything is being funneled through one
40 space, a reason for needing a space there. Alicia said that was a great point. A Public Information
41 Officer would get information out to the public and Amie would be trained on how, what, and
42 where to communicate. Alicia said there were a couple of programs that are free and some cost,
43 but they are alert systems and have been referred to as reverse 911. Instead of town members
44 calling in to say there's an emergency, they can push out a message about what's happening, and
45 the plan and it creates a registry of people in town. C.A.R.E., the Community Assistance Registry
46 for Emergencies for special populations where there is an evacuation or multi-day event and there's

1 no power, it's a registry so they know who needs what and where. They can plan if they can get
2 the information about who needs what, and what they need and how to achieve it. These emergency
3 plans in place prior are how they can have a better emergency plan for the town and adapt. They
4 will learn from each event and improve each time. One big concern was they learned the Highway
5 Department radios couldn't reach out to other departments, nor could they reach them. They were
6 in the areas that were the highest risk because there was flooding, and washouts, and parts of roads
7 where they couldn't get to town or get back. There was a piece of equipment they couldn't reach
8 until the water dissipated. The communication piece is a huge safety factor. They found out
9 because of the scope of the flooding, there were a lot of road closures they didn't have enough
10 signage or people to block roads on both ends. 100 cones went out and they still had places that
11 weren't marked. They discussed the option of a CERT, Community Emergency Response Team,
12 who is not law enforcement but citizens who volunteer that receive training to assist for
13 emergencies, traffic control, and town events, like the fall festival. They had training discussed as
14 far as how to make improvements going forward.

15 Julie said they had discussed emergency and warming shelters that don't have designated
16 locations. They usually are located at the high school, and this was the second or third event where
17 the town is locked off from the high school because of flooding. The public can't be at the
18 emergency building during an event due to lack of room and safety issues and the size of the
19 kitchen being too small to feed everyone. They had 40 of their own staff in the building. The
20 Mountainview area is a problem for flooding. During the flood, people got put into the high school
21 and then became inaccessible because of the water over the road, which could be a problem if
22 someone at the high school needed emergency medical care. They need to recognize other areas
23 of town that could serve as shelters. There are other locations throughout town, such as churches
24 that are in the center of town. There is a desire for a community center at the Pinnacle. Julie
25 suggested accessing grant funding and having it also serve as an emergency shelter. There have
26 been a lot of discussions about emergency shelters, which need to be had at a serious level. Chief
27 Wilson suggested 3 locations even if all aren't used at every event. He thought at least 2 options
28 would be good and a third would be great and they could decide at the time which ones needed to
29 be open. Chief Williams said the CERT team would be used by Chester Public Safety, as a whole
30 and not only by the Chester Police Department. The highway is also part of the public safety team
31 during emergency incidents, as is Green Mountain Power during big storms. When they are short
32 manpower to go to each location the CERT team would go out and look and provide information
33 in a safe manner. The grants for CERT teams have dried up but there are grants for safety
34 equipment. The CERT would be volunteers but there would be a cost for training and uniforms.
35 Chief Wilson said the EOC could not be an emergency shelter. They had a fire during the flood
36 and had to take back roads that were only halfway there. Springfield, who served as mutual aid,
37 had to go up and around through Baltimore to get to the location because the roads weren't
38 available. If the centers were available to deter people, it would make sense. Julie said there would
39 be more information coming as the initiatives are developed but it seemed like an appropriate time
40 to start the conversation. Arne said with every storm they learn a little more. He thought
41 communication and being prepared were the big things that came out of it, and it was important
42 they were having the conversations and analyzing things afterwards. Arne said having a list with
43 information of what people needed would be helpful. Mike agreed and said after going on so many
44 calls, they get an idea of who is at risk. It would be nice to have someone develop something in
45 town and plan with people ahead of time to make sure individuals have an appropriate amount of
46 oxygen or medication. Alicia said she and Amie have looked into various paid services for reverse

1 911 and some of the programs will benefit public safety and general town information. Alicia said
2 you can pull up mapping and highlight an area of town and send only that area specific messages
3 which helps so people don't ignore messages because they receive them all the time.

4 The board thanked them for the information.

5 **Agenda Item 8, New Business/Next Agenda**

6 Julie hoped they would have the false alarm policy, the traffic ordinance, an update for the Citizen
7 Advisory Committee, and the budget would be admin, facilities, and recreation. They would add
8 short-term rental. Peter wanted to see the capital fund filled out completely because there were
9 holes in it. The tanker purchased two years ago wasn't included. Julie said it was because it was
10 grant funded, except for \$30,000 which was in the capital plan. Peter disagreed and Julie said she
11 would show him after the meeting. Julie was happy to make the first pass at it, but the issue was a
12 lot of the numbers she didn't have yet. Julie offered to sit down with Peter and go over the numbers.

13 **Agenda Item 10, Executive Session: Union Grievance Settlement**

14 Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to enter executive session for the purposes of a Union
15 Grievance Settlement. The motion carried unanimously.

16 (Executive Session – 8:51 p.m. to 9:02 p.m.)

17 Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to exit the executive session. The motion carried
18 unanimously.

19 Lee moved to authorize the Town Manager to sign the Settlement Agreement and General Release
20 and Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

21 **Agenda Item 9, Adjourn**

22 Lee moved to adjourn, and Peter seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed
23 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.