

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

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

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

8 **Visitors Present:** Shawn Cunningham of The Chester Telegraph, Bill Lindsay, Kathy Giurtino,
9 Todd Parah, Josh Schroeder, Keith Hill, Scott Kendall, Mike Davey of EEI at Town Hall; and
10 SAPA TV, Evan Parks, Jim Goodfellow, Kim McLeod, Steve Mancuso, Eric Schubert, Brendan
11 McNamara, and Susan Goodfellow via Zoom.

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13 **Call to Order**

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15 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He
16 welcomed everyone to the meeting.

17
18 **Agenda Item 1, Approve minutes from the October 19, 2022, Selectboard Meeting**

19 Lee moved and Heather seconded a motion to approve the October 19th minutes. Leigh noted page
20 3, line 13, should have read “we were awarded” and not “they were awarded”. Arne noted the
21 visitors’ section had the principal’s last name incorrect and it should have read Keith Hill instead
22 of Keith Hall. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved, as corrected.

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, Julie Hance:

27 Short-Term Rentals

28 Both versions of the proposed ordinance have been sent to the attorney for review and Julie hoped
29 to have them back by the November 16th meeting, at which time the board could act, if they wanted.

30 Chester Community Garden

31 A simple lease has been drafted and sent to the attorney for his review. Gary Rapanotti had advised
32 the cost for the survey is \$1,800, so he will be working on that soon.

33 Police Chief Search

34 Applications were due last Friday and six were received. Trevor Whipple from VLCT and Jim
35 Baker met with Julie this afternoon to review them and narrowed it down to two or three applicants.
36 She emailed the committee who will help conduct interviews which will take place the week of
37 November 14th. She hoped they would have a decision by early December. Chief Rick Cloud
38 officially retires January 7, 2023.

1 Police Department Update

2 Julie heard from someone in town asking about the status of the Advisory Committee, so she
3 thought it was a good time to update the board. She thought they should hold off until the new
4 chief is hired. Currently they are short-staffed, so it is not a good time. Julie suspected once a chief
5 is hired, they would fill the open staff sergeant position. Another option is re-running the
6 advertisement and putting someone through the academy. The new chief needs to be a part of the
7 advisory committee, so it is better to wait.

8 Fingerprinting Machine

9 The Vermont Emergency Management received a federal grant and offered to replace Chester's
10 fingerprinting machine. Chester has had a difficult time getting it funded through a grant as it's
11 not eligible for many of them. They will be able to start fingerprinting again.

12 Bill Lindsay asked if there was any progress on the solar panels. Julie was given a list of items
13 needed by the appraiser and she has provided what she can. She only needs to get photos. The only
14 other information is needed from Greenbacker and she's waiting on that.

15 **Agenda Item 4, Presentation of School Improvements and Current Bond Request**

16 Todd Parah, Facilities Manager, Keith Hill, Principal, and Josh Schroeder, Board Member, were
17 present to give a synopsis of the bond. They brought Mike Davey of EEI with them who is a project
18 manager and would be on the team as well. The Supervisory Union has a bond proposal for around
19 \$20 million on the ballot for next Tuesday, Election Day. Just over 70% of that amount is for the
20 Green Mountain High School building which is just over 50 years old. Not much has been done to
21 the mechanical systems or the safety and security systems in the school. The school was built well
22 and maintained. They updated the boiler in the 1980s but many of the systems are nearing end-of-
23 life and many are obsolete. Efficiency is being lost. To go along with the times, the School Board
24 decided a ventilation system for the school would allow the air to be heated and filtered and meet
25 compliance with various regulations. It would allow them to reach a MERV rating of 13, one of
26 the highest before true HEPA. They would get new ductwork allowing better filtration, upgrade
27 the lighting, fire alarm control, sprinklers, upgraded elevator, and address code compliance and
28 egress issues. Windows would be upgraded.

29 Lee asked what the capacity and usage of the high school was. The high school was built for 600
30 students and the current enrollment is 340 and fluctuates between 340 and 350 students. Lee asked
31 if they considered upgrading in pieces and steps. The way the building is used compared to when
32 it was constructed may not allow for that and has not been considered.

33 Kathy Giurtino asked if solar had been considered. She heard the state may provide electric school
34 buses and asked if electric charging stations were considered. Josh told her not in the current
35 proposal, but they had discussed solar. They decided by the time the solar got put on and utilized
36 to its full capacity they would have to change over the roof system. The best time to do solar is
37 with a brand-new roof. It is something on the deck for the next 20 years. Charging stations were
38 not considered as the buses are newer so they will continue to utilize them. The Board's current
39 focus is on safety and ventilation.

40 Arne asked if the \$21 million was an estimate or a set number in place and was there any
41 contingency built in. Arne thought contingencies helped because of the unknowns that come along
42 when doing something like this. Josh said if the bond was approved, EEI and the team will go out
43 for bid for everything. The estimate is based on EEI's experience. If approved, they will get on it

1 immediately. Mike Davey said it was helpful that they were doing Springfield High School and
2 had current pricing based on that project. They had recently updated the pricing to hopefully
3 account for inflation. They tried to keep it consistent and felt comfortable that the prices reflected
4 current pricing. They have included a 5% design and contractors' contingency. The mechanical
5 end of it is up to date with code but some systems such as the fire alarm system are so old, they
6 can't repair them. The safety and security systems are so outdated they need to be changed. The
7 heating and cooling are not up to code. If they're lucky, they may have a MERV 4. Mike Davey
8 said the pneumatic system is at the end of life and is the original from when the school was built
9 and is the reason why the temperature isn't consistent throughout the building. One of the best
10 things that may have come from COVID is nobody had considered the quality of air the children
11 breathe. These upgrades would give the children better quality air. The windows are original and
12 have issues. The high school has a large amount of asbestos which would be removed. They want
13 people to vote informed and realize it's a lot of money.

14 Lee asked if the asbestos was friable or non-friable. It's in the tiles and pipe joints above the
15 ceilings and they have been told it's probably in the caulking. Lee asked how much of the proposed
16 project was mandated federally or on a state level. The State of Vermont has adopted a code but
17 there are no ventilation police. When a building is remodeled, the Fire Marshall's Office enforces
18 it. Although the regulations have been in the books, the school has not been renovated for over 50
19 years so nobody has gone through and inspected it. It's being triggered because the systems are at
20 the end of life. The State ranked all districts throughout the state and the Supervisory Union was
21 in the top 10 of most depleted infrastructure. Green Mountain was 87% or 89% depleted. The
22 Federal Government isn't driving it, but the systems are very old and need to be upgraded. The
23 question is should they upgrade them to meet the bare minimum or try to make them energy
24 efficient and try to get another 50 years out of the infrastructure. Lee questioned the design
25 standard proposed upgrade for each classroom for air exchange and wondered if they were
26 determined on class size and if so, what class size. The Vermont Code dictates it per classroom
27 square footage and then per how many people are in there. The proposed system will monitor the
28 air based on how many people are in the classroom. It is designed for full load but can modulate
29 down to partial. They are designed for full capacity with the ability to modulate. It will have
30 dehumidification for the classrooms. Given the increase in fuel prices, the initial savings of
31 \$70,000 have increased to \$150,000 by switching to high efficiency propane.

32 Leigh said it was such a wonderful project to be a part of.

33 Josh said it was impressive to see how well it was built. The board considered options of A, B, C,
34 and D, A being the Cadillac and D was the bare minimum. They took pieces from each option to
35 try to keep the school going forward and planning. The current proposal doesn't include everything
36 nor the most modern due to the price tag. They added a few nice to haves, such as a softball field
37 for the girls on campus rather than playing across the highway which poses a safety issue, and the
38 change would provide equality for the girls' team. The Cavendish playground is all but condemned
39 and they wanted to help with replacing that. They were able to upgrade the Chester-Andover
40 School's heating and ventilation system with ESSER funds at a cost of \$870,000 which was
41 originally part of the \$20 million bond. There has been a lot of good research and they felt strongly
42 it was the right direction.

43 Kathy asked how long the bond would be for and the interest rate. They believed it was a 20-year
44 bond and the interest rate is determined by the Vermont Bond Bank who integrates all the bonds
45 passed and will sell the bonds on the open market and project a rate, but the actual rate isn't locked

1 in until April.

2 The project would take about 2 years and the lion's share of the mechanical and architectural
3 design has already been completed. Some equipment takes anywhere from 28 weeks to a year to
4 receive, so the schedule would account for that. Because of the significant manpower shortages,
5 the project could not be completed in a summer. They will hold temporary classrooms in rooms
6 such as the cafeteria to be able to complete work in other areas.

7 Jim Goodfellow asked if there was any grant money, State or Federal, that had been factored into
8 the proposal. Because they were able to use Federal money for the ventilation system at Chester-
9 Andover, it was already taken off the top. They anticipate rebates from Efficiency Vermont
10 somewhere in the \$100,000 range. There is no current State aid and hasn't been for some time.

11 Lee, as Chair of the Emergency Services Building Committee, recognized the position the School
12 Board was in and appreciated their work and information. He asked if they had planned for the
13 bond not passing. They hadn't officially discussed it yet, but the initial chatter centered around
14 what systems would need to be approached first. The elevator is the most important because they
15 need to access all 3 floors. They would need to consider extensive capital improvement projects
16 and approach each project in the most cost-effective way. They would prefer not to approach the
17 problem that way and hoped the bond passed. Lee suggested doing the buildings by section. Due
18 to special services, the entire building is occupied and used to its full capacity. They could shut
19 down a few classrooms but not an entire floor, if necessary. Every classroom is being utilized to
20 keep up with the changes in the educational system. Although most of the money would go towards
21 the high school, they are paying attention to what is happening at the elementary schools. If the
22 bond passes, the schools will be in really good shape. It would be something for the community to
23 be proud of.

24 Steve Mancuso asked if there was a specific list of the proposed upgrades and if they could detail
25 the systems and why the upgrades were necessary. Josh said the TRSU website has a detailed list.

26 Arne said they would spend more money if the improvements were made piecemeal and would
27 not be advantageous to the taxpayers. It is a tough time with inflation and interest rates, but the
28 school has been in need and the longer repairs are put off, they would spend more money in the
29 end. He thought if the bond didn't pass, they would spend more money for a lot less. Josh agreed
30 that it will be more costly to the taxpayers if they did it piecemeal.

31 Susan Goodfellow said it was clear that the Board had worked hard to know what the school needs
32 today as opposed to 50 years ago. She wanted to thank them for their hard work and wished them
33 well in getting it passed. She thought Arne made a good point to how much more expensive it
34 would be to do the work in a piecemeal fashion.

35 Heather wanted to remind everyone that they needed to come in to vote, as it wasn't on the ballots
36 mailed out. They can vote early or on Election Day.

37 Arne thanked the School Board for their work and hoped people informed themselves about what
38 the school needed to bring it up to the 21st century. He didn't see many frills. He said the softball
39 team going across the road had been a safety issue.

40 Eric Schubert, who lives in Springfield and is a property owner in Chester, wanted to vote on the
41 bond and asked how that worked. Julie told him he could only vote where he is registered to vote
42 as a primary resident. He thought that was unfair. Julie told him the law was set by the legislation.

1 **Agenda Item 5, 2023 General Fund Draft Budget Review**

2 The third quarter financials were hard to show where the town was at, as almost everything
3 happened in the last quarter. It showed where they are as of September 30th. It was the first round
4 of the budget. A lot of estimates haven't come in. Getting bids is challenging. The fuel bids came
5 in and they got locked in for propane at \$1.67 which was a positive. A large company from
6 Springfield, Mass., who was significantly less to the tune of around \$0.30 per gallon successfully
7 bid on diesel fuel. They hated to go away from the local vendors, but the savings were
8 significant. Some of the cost overruns have to do with the level of cyber security. In 2022, rules at
9 the insurance level came down regarding coverage so they had to meet certain requirements to be
10 covered for cyber-attacks. The budget reflects a cost of living of 5% because COLA is above 8.5%
11 this year. Some employees have retired, and their replacements are on single plans instead of
12 family plans which have helped. They are offering the opt-off for employees and one person has
13 taken advantage of that. Employees are very mindful. Some employees are turning 65 this year
14 and are planning on going on Medicare which will save the town money.

15 Health insurance is the number one retention tool for staff and why good employees are attracted.
16 At the point where a good number of staff will be 60 or 65. A lot of changeovers are anticipated
17 in 5 to 7 years. She proposed any new hires after November 1st pay a percentage of premium and
18 it will keep Chester attractive. Arne added that this country has a healthcare system that is
19 unsustainable and will implode someday.

20 **Agenda Item 6, Personnel Policy Change: Health Insurance for New Hires**

21 It needs to be an official part of policy. Julie asked for a vote approving that new hires contribute
22 5% of the premium only beginning November 1st. Heather moved, and Leigh seconded to approve
23 the motion as Julie stated. It will only affect new hires. Arne has never been for employees paying
24 a part of the insurance but understood why it was necessary. The employees have given up a lot of
25 benefits, such as dental and vision to keep 100% of insurance and have given up a week of vacation
26 time. Heather said the country has a huge healthcare crisis and the mean wage was low, and the
27 costs were being passed on. She was agreeable to 5% for new employees and it was overdue, but
28 they needed to do it. 10% of the total budget increases annually because of health insurance and
29 Heather thought it was the responsible thing to do. Julie said she always likes to be careful about
30 balancing the budget on the backs of employees. In government, it happens but doesn't in the
31 private sector. A vote was taken with Arne voting nay. The motion carried.

32 **Agenda Item 7, Appointment Deputy Health Officer**

33 Noah K. Glover, part-time EMT for Chester, was appointed Deputy Health Officer. Heather moved
34 for the Chair to sign the appointment of the Deputy Health Officer for Noah Glover and Lee
35 seconded. Heather was Health Officer for a while and could relate that it was a big role which
36 continues to grow. A vote was taken, and the motion passed.

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

38 Short-term rentals at the next meeting.

39 A simple lease for The Community Gardens.

40 The budget.

41 The SRDC will provide an update on the Working Communities Challenge.

1 Ted Brady, Executive Director, of VLCT will visit the Board on December 7th.

2

Agenda Item 9, Adjourn

3 Lee moved to adjourn, and Heather seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed
4 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

DRAFT