

TOWN OF CHESTER  
SPECIAL SELECTBOARD

January 4, 2017  
Minutes

PRESENT: John DeBenedetti; Ben Whalen; Arne Jonynas; Dan Cote; Heather Chase;  
David Pisha

VISITORS: Julie Hance; Shawn Cunningham; Jason Rasmussen; Frank Bidwell; Dan  
Cook; Tom Hildreth; Barre Pinske; Neil Allen; Matt Wilson; Amy  
Mosher; Derek Suursoo

The meeting was called to order at 7:12 p.m. by John DeBenedetti.

There were no additions or deletions to the agenda.

1. APPROVE MINUTES:

December 21, 2016:

A motion was made by Ben Whalen to approve the minute from the December 21, 2016  
Chester Selectboard meeting as amended. Seconded by Arne Jonynas. The motion  
passed.

Visitor's List: Barre Pinske should be added to the list.

2. CITIZEN'S COMMENTS:

Frank Bidwell questioned the insurance package that the town employees are given  
which does not require them to pay towards their health insurance. He stated that he has  
spoken with David Pisha and emailed him with no response. He stated that he does not  
believe that this current policy is fair to the entire town. Frank Bidwell suggested that  
any new employee should not receive this benefit. David Pisha responded that the health  
insurance costs are down since 2008 contrary to what is taking place in the rest of the  
world. He also clarified that new employees cannot be singled out, this is illegal. David  
Pisha also provided a history on the health insurance in Chester. Heather Chase  
questioned if copay and deductible could be separated in the budget so that it could be  
tracked better. She also requested that next year, she be included in the conversations  
with the health insurance negotiator. Discussion ensued regarding the process of health  
insurance shopping.

Dan Cote stated that he has concerns that the town employees of Chester are being paid  
less in order to keep their health insurance. He would like to see the employees paid  
more appropriately if they are, in fact, under paid. He stated that he would like to see the  
salaries of employees compared to other government officials as well as the private  
sector.

It was agreed that David will meet with Frank Bidwell to review this subject in more detail.

3. OLD BUSINESS:

Water/sewer: David Pisha stated that ACT 250 has issued the Land Use Permit. He stated that ACT 250 approved the water project but has restricted their permit by reducing the number of acres that are allowed for gravel extraction. This decision has gone against the recommendation of Fish & Wildlife. David Pisha stated that he has spoken with Jim Carroll who will be consulting with a specialist attorney to determine whether or not the town should amend or appeal this permit. Any amendment would have to be filed by January 16 or any appeal would have to be made within 30 days. David Pisha stated that he feels that the town should ask ACT 250 to amend their permit at least. He will get more information from Jim Carroll as to the pros and cons either way. Heather Chase would like to have a discussion with the attorney so that questions can be answered. Discussion ensued.

Yosemite Fire House: David Pisha stated that the paperwork has been assembled and is being sent to the Court.

Brookside Cemetery: Arne Jonynas questioned the status of the Brookside Cemetery project. David Pisha will talk with Deb Daniels and will provide an update.

Historical Society: Dan Cote stated that he would like for the Board to see a copy of the receipt of payment as well as the annual maintenance report provided by the Historical Society.

Planning Commission appointments: David Pisha stated that the Board has received information showing that the interviews for Planning Commission and DRB members can be held in Executive Session.

David Pisha stated that he has a meeting with the Superintendent of Schools tomorrow.

Reappraisal: John DeBenedetti questioned if there is any new information on the reappraisal.

4. DISCUSSION REGARDING ENERGY PLAN:

Jason Rasmussen was present from Regional Planning to discuss the new ACT 174. He stated that ACT 174 was passed last year enabling towns to have enhanced energy plans that would have greater effect in the ACT 248 process. He stated that the Regional Planning has a small pot of money available to help 3 towns. It is a very tight timeline. He stated that Regional Planning is working on updating the Regional Plan to comply with ACT 174 so that they also have greater effect in ACT 248. Jason Rasmussen stated that there will be a couple of public meetings for the town to get involved in as well.

David Pisha stated that Tom Bock indicated to him that creating this energy plan is in the best interest of Chester. Jason Rasmussen stated that this affects the town plan more than the UDBs. Most projects covered in energy plan would be exempt from local zoning. Jason Rasmussen clarified that having a local energy plan carries weight in the ACT 248 process whereas the town plan does not. Regional planning would help to provide the mapping and design the plan if Chester is selected as a pilot town.

Jason Rasmussen stated that he would like to receive a letter from the Town Manager indicating that the Selectboard and Planning Commission are both interested in having Chester participate in creating an energy plan. Dan Cote stated that he would like to have an individual be a part of the regional meetings to keep the town informed in the process.

Arne Jonynas questioned if there is a downside to embracing the plan of 90% renewable energy by 2050. The Board discussed this with Jason Rasmussen. It was discussed that this could be politically difficult. Dan Cote stated that the information would be valuable regardless of potential controversy.

Frank Bidwell questioned if geothermal is considered renewable. Jason Rasmussen stated that it is, but it is limited in Vermont.

The consensus of the Selectboard is to proceed with the energy plan.

5. RECEIVE UDBS FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION:

John DeBenedetti stated that the Planning Commission has voted to move the UDBs to the Selectboard. The Selectboard discussed the length of time that it could take to review the documents.

Barre Pinske stated that he does not feel that there is anything difficult about this document. He feels that the Board should not delay in setting the meeting date.

A motion was made by Dan Cote to set the public hearing date for February 1, 2017. Seconded by Arne Jonynas. The motion passed.

The Selectboard discussed how they will review the document, either by section or time. It was agreed that by section would likely be most appropriate so that the agendas can provide detailed information about what is being discussed each night.

6. DISCUSSION REGARDING INCREASING AMBULANCE BILLING:

Dan Cook and Meghan Greene were present to discuss ambulance billing. Dan Cook explained the current situation with Ludlow and the mutual aid that currently exists. He explained that Chester is now paramedic licensed since a paramedic is available through Ludlow. If Chester calls Ludlow for a paramedic intercept, Ludlow will charge Chester for a paramedic call. This intercept can also be used with Springfield and Golden Cross.

Ben Whalen questioned Chester covering Ludlow and having to travel longer distances to provide coverage to Ludlow's service areas. Ben Whalen questioned if there is increased liability to the town being paramedic licensed but not having a paramedic on staff? Ben Whalen questioned the intercept billings that the town received. Dan explained that these are past intercepts that were not billed at the correct times. Ben Whalen questioned how long Chester waits to see if we will field a crew. Dan Cook noted that this is approximately 5 to 10 minutes. If a crew cannot be gathered, Chester would be first responding. Ben Whalen also questioned if we have a member off at a call in Ludlow, are we limiting ourselves to provide coverage to our own town. Meghan Greene stated that it is best to do this because if we don't respond, Ludlow will call for our entire ambulance which leaves Chester uncovered. Ben Whalen questioned if we transport to Rutland when covering Ludlow. This is a possibility, but does not happen often.

Dan Cook stated that Meghan Greene has been looking into Medicare rates and the allowable rates. Dan Cook reviewed these figures with the Board and explained the increases that are allowed. It was also discussed that the portion that Medicare does not cover can be billed back to the patient. This does not apply to Medicaid patients. Heather Chase noted that most people on Medicare also have gap insurance that will cover the portion that Medicare that does not. Medicare will cover 80% of the allowable cost. Meghan Greene would like to increase the rates because private insurance will pay the full amount. They want to try the new rates for 6 months to determine if revenue is increased or if the town is simply writing off a larger amount.

Heather Chase stated that she would like a report showing the break down into Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and private pay.

The general consensus of the Board was to agree with the increases that are being proposed.

The Board discussed further the relationship with Ludlow and how the shared employment relationship works.

## 7. SET 2017 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Ben Whalen questioned the breakdown of overtime for the salaried position in Ambulance. David Pisha stated that overtime is built into the budgeted number. He stated that this can be done for the budget as it is for Highway and Police.

John DeBenedetti noted that the overall budget shows a \$63,000 increase in expenses. David Pisha explained that the Grant Fund transfer was double counted. The budget showed a transfer into Capital of \$365,000 instead of a \$330,000 transfer. Therefore, the amount to be collected is \$2,874,352.93 which is a tax increase of \$27,827.26 which is a less than 1% increase.

John DeBenedetti stated that this budget includes a figure of \$60,000 as a revenue for the school refund. David Pisha provided a chart showing the school refund for the past several years. However, the appraisal may affect the refund received in 2018.

David Pisha stated that there was also \$1,000 added as the salary for the health officer which was previously omitted.

Heather Chase questioned if health insurance copays and deductibles could be split in the budget.

Heather Chase stated that the Fire Chief is now working for a company that the fire department purchases equipment from. She wanted it clear for transparency that this is taking place. She would like to have a mechanism in place that protects the town. It was discussed that the Personnel Policy does not have conflict of interest language within it.

John DeBenedetti questioned the transfers into the capital plan for sidewalks and paving. The Board took a recess to allow for David Pisha to make corrections to the overall plan.

John DeBenedetti questioned the debt payoff over time. David Pisha stated that the payments begin in 2017. Most of the bonds have a 5 year life except for the fire truck which has a longer life and therefore a longer repayment term. John DeBenedetti clarified that the price of the new fire truck is \$507,000.

Derek Suursoo stated that he remains curious about the long range debt plan. The Board noted that this was provided at the last meeting. David Pisha stated that he will provide a copy to Mr. Suursoo.

Derek Suursoo stated that the \$112,239 worth of surplus comes primarily from the school refund. He noted that the budget has absorbed this surplus as well as a \$35,000 increase in taxes. He stated that he has concerns that the town is taking a surplus and paying recurring expenses.

David Pisha stated that the Profit & Loss now shows a surplus of \$114,763.37. Leaving the budget at \$2,876,502.11 with an overall budget increase of \$29,976.44.

A motion was made by Dan Cote to present a budget in the amount of \$2,876,502.11 to the voters. Seconded by Ben Whalen. The motion passed.

8. NEW BUSINESS FOR NEXT AGENDA:

Heather Chase requested that the schedule for the interviews for the Planning Commission and Development Review Board should be provided at the next meeting.

Heather Chase stated that she would like the Personnel Policy reviewed at the next meeting

The Board agreed that the Conflict of Interest Policy should be acknowledged in writing by elected and appointed officials. Dan Cote requested that this be an agenda item.

Dan Cote stated that he would like the Historical Society maintenance report and receipt of payment at the agenda for the next meeting.

John DeBenedetti stated that the Town Warning will be reviewed at the next meeting.

9. ADJOURN:

A motion was made by Ben Whalen to adjourn. Seconded by Dan Cote. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 10:06 p.m.

Julie Hance  
Secretary of the Select Board

Heather Chase  
Clerk of the Select Board