

TOWN OF CHESTER  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

April 15, 2020  
Select Board Meeting Minutes

PRESENT: Arne Jonynas; Heather Chase; Lee Gustafson; Leigh Dakin; Jeff Holden; Julie Hance; Amie O'Brien

VISITORS: Shawn Cunningham; Cynthia Prairie; Bob Flint; SAPA TV

***Meeting was held via Zoom***

1. CHESTER TOWN PLAN FINAL HEARING

Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order and explained this is the second and final meeting discussing the changes to the Town Plan chapter 3, chapter 5, chapter 6, and chapter 10.

Chapter 3 Utilities and Facilities: No questions/comments from the Select Board

Chapter 5 Educational and Childcare Facilities: No questions/comments from the Select Board.

Chapter 6 Energy: Changes to this chapter will put the Town in compliance with State requirements to have extreme deference as opposed to limited say in projects going forward. No questions/comments from the Select Board.

Chapter 10 Economic Development: A letter was received from Cynthia Prairie at the Chester Telegraph with concerns about not mentioning business names in the Town Plan. Arne Jonynas and Heather Chase agree that business names should be mentioned in the documents keeping them personal and adding a snapshot of where we are now, giving specifics and clear examples. Arne Jonynas points out that the document is reviewed every 5 years changing statistics from the schools and things as they are upgraded. Keeping names in the documents is an important part of our economic development. Lee Gustafson asked if the 5-year review is the same process as the one happening now and if minor changes to the plan is worth the effort of reviewing the document every 5 years. Julie Hance explained that it must be done every 8 years, not 5. This process has taken longer due to adding an Energy Chapter and a true substantial Economic Development chapter. Arne Jonynas points out that the 8-year cycle allows for review of different parts of the plan, not necessarily the same chapters as the previous review. Julie Hance says that legislative changes drive the changes to the Town Plan and the big one this time was the Energy chapter. Arne Jonynas asked if making minor changes to the Town Plan would require more public meetings. Julie Hance recommended allowing the public to speak at this meeting and to adopt the changes now or at the next meeting. There was no public comment, only Cynthia Prairie's questions addressed earlier.

2. ADJOURN

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to adjourn the meeting and he thanked the Planning Commission for all their hard work on the Town Plan. Seconded by Leigh Dakin. Leigh Dakin welcomed Bob Flint and asked if he would like to add anything to the Town Plan comments. Bob Flint stated that Julie Hance had explained the changes well and had no other comment. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

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PRESENT: Arne Jonynas; Heather Chase; Lee Gustafson; Leigh Dakin; Jeff Holden; Julie Hance; Amie O'Brien

VISITORS: Shawn Cunningham; Cynthia Prairie; Bob Flint

1. APPROVE MINUTES:

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2020 Select Board meeting as amended. Seconded by Jeff Holden. The motion passed.

Lee Gustafson suggested adding a header or footer to the Select Board minutes with date of the meeting and page numbers.

2. CITIZENS COMMENTS:

Fred Greenwell submitted an email to the Select Board for comment. Julie Hance explained to the Select Board that she had answered Mr. Greenwell's email and that Amie O'Brien has added a link to the Select Board page on the website to submit comments/questions. These submissions will go to Amie O'Brien's email and will be forwarded to Julie Hance for response or to be added to the next meeting's agenda. Please see the attachment to these minutes for Julie Hance's response to Fred Greenwell's email. Some discussion ensued about the reappraisal and that people should address the reappraisal after they receive the booklet with the new values.

There were no other citizen's comments.

3. OLD BUSINESS:

Emergency Services Building: Julie Hance explained that the Public Safety building timeline shows that bids will be going out and the first round went to print. She pointed out this will be a favorable bidding season hoping for good results.

Gravel Project: The Gravel project is still waiting on act 250 and will be on hold for now. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the process.

4. CHESTER DEVELOPMENT FUND, POTENTIAL USES: BOB FLINT, SRDC

Barry Pinske submitted a letter regarding funding and requests. Arne Jonynas stated that there is a procedure in place with guidelines that should be followed. Bob Flint is present to answer questions about the fund. Julie Hance stated that the fund is currently only for capital improvement only and cannot be loaned out for other expenses at this time.

Bob Flint stated that at least 35 businesses from Chester have reached out to the SRDC, all of which were related to COVID-19. The Cares Act has two aspects to it, the EIDL (Economic Injury Disaster Loan) which existed before and has been rolled out after disasters such as Irene. The EIDL is a 30 year loan with applications open until December. without the possibility to reapply. On the mini application there is a button for the applicant to check for the EEIG (Emergency Economic Grant) where businesses can get \$10,000 in three days. No one that has applied has that money in their pocket yet. The loan is not for \$10,000 but is up to \$10,000 per FTE. If an applicant takes the loan it is considered an advance on the loan. The other part of the Cares Act is the PPP (Payroll Protection Program) which provides payroll to businesses for 8 weeks as well as assistance for leases and utilities done through SBA approved banks. Most of the banks in the area are doing this. Instructions on this loan was not given to the banks until the night before, but several businesses have utilized this loan since. In theory, this loan is forgivable, but the banks do not have the instructions as of yet on how to forgive the loan. For the amounts that are not forgiven the loan is a 2-year loan at 1% interest. The PPP loan will be forgiven if businesses keep pristine records, but the others may not. There are two more SBA programs that are ready to be rolled out but have not yet, and there will be more bills from DC. Someone taking money now may not be eligible for other money in the future.

When it comes to Chester's loan fund, there is some flexibility. Chester's loan fund was capitalized by funds other than HUD money. There is no emergency loan fund being offered by the State yet because of the uncertainty of this situation. The State has reached out to many towns and is trying to get towns put a portion of their RLF's into a common account that can be used statewide. Participation will be up to the town. Chester can be creative with their money, take a chunk of it, and create generous terms allowing people to borrow and not lose out on other loan possibilities. Businesses could use the money as bridge funding if they are not applying for another program or while they are waiting for their EIDL to process. An idea is that the town could set aside an amount for a single business allowing for a 5 year loan at 2% interest so that businesses can still qualify for other funding without taking too much of a hit from the terms of the other loans.

Arne Jonynas states that what Bob Flint has just explained makes it hard for the Select Board to make a decision on what to do with Chester's loan fund. Bob Flint simplifies the two grants by explaining that the EEIG is considered a grant for up to \$10,000 or \$1,000 per person. Also, the PPP is a grant that must be used for 8 weeks of payroll and is a forgivable loan only if used for payroll. Everything else is a loan. Woodstock has taken their money and done grants through a small grant program. Arne Jonynas points out that for the PPP to be forgivable, businesses must keep employees on the payroll whether they are working or not. Bob Flint then explains that

employees are either still working or will have to be brought back after the loan is received. Employers are running into issues with unemployment because people making less than \$50,000 a year are making more on unemployment than they would if they were still working. Companies are losing workers for this reason causing some business to wonder if the loan is worth applying for. Another program available is PUA (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance) which is for self-employed people who have never paid into the unemployment system. Arne Jonynas is concerned about pooling money from different towns funds and does not like the idea of turning local money over and not receiving anything back for it. Bob Flint explained that he and Julie Hance have spoken about that and says the State cannot just take the money because the money in Chester's fund did not come from the State. The State is trying to figure out how to get money in people's hands quickly while things on the federal level are being sorted out.

Heather Chase points out that there is a lot to understand, and Chester would want to help, but would need to be very careful. The Select Board would need time to process the plan for a while and have Bob Flint give clear direction. Part of the challenge will be how to assess which businesses to support because there are so many to consider. Another challenging aspect will be how to measure which businesses will still be up and running and able to repay the loans. Bob Flint agrees. Heather Chase is unsure how to assess businesses cash flow and debt. The application businesses fill out should be gone over and updated. Julie Hance explains that the application filled out at the town is simple, but businesses still must be vetted by the SRDC before they can receive the money. Bob Flint said that the application process would be up to the Select Board. Lee Gustafson asked how much longer Bob Flint felt this is going to go on seeing disagreeing information from different sources. Bob Flint says that if Vermont stays on the trajectory, we are on now the Governor's order is May 15. Task forces were made yesterday to better assess the different aspects of reopening. The intent is to loosen things up around May 15 while requiring that masks be worn. More than likely, there will not be band concerts this summer on the Green and he is still wondering if school will happen this fall.

Lee Gustafson's concern is that there are several sectors that could work at this time in a safe manner that are being asked to not work. He would like to open the gate a little to help stimulate the economy. Bob Flint said that may be in the next ten days some things will be allowed to open back up depending on the number of cases being reported in Vermont. Bob Flint said they are working on two more bills for recovery and ways to opening the economy.

Arne Jonynas asked Bob Flint if Chester's fund was set up to do some of the things that they were talking about. Bob Flint replied that in normal situations these loans are intended to be gap financing for things that bank loans will not cover. The Select Board should keep in mind that banks are lending with low interest rates and cautions against doing anything with the fund yet. Arne Jonynas stated that people should access other ways of funding first and to save the money for the purpose it was intended for. The Select Board thanked Bob Flint for his time. Bob Flint stated that they will be updating the information available as much as possible. The Chamber of commerce is being updated as well.

## 5. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Stay at Home Order has been extended until May 15. The State has sent some clarification on the role of the Highway Department, requiring that employees be sent home and they are only allowed to work if something is an imminent safety risk such as a bridge failure, pot holes, and grading backroads. Kirby Putnam was spoken to and has been directed to deliver the message to the employees. He will keep working along with one other employee. There is a culvert failure on Farrar Road and a bridge on Smokeshire Road that were supposed to be fixed this spring. Julie Hance is waiting to hear back from VTrans to see if they can get those projects done and explained that Public Works departments were not labeled as essential. If the employees are out working and the Police Department knows, they could be arrested. The two projects mentioned earlier are high risk and she will make that argument to VTrans. Lee Gustafson asked if VTrans has laid off all their employees and Julie Hance said yes but they must be available for emergencies. The Brookside Bridge grant was extended moving the project to 2021 freeing up some grant funds that would have been spent this year.

School payments from the municipality to the schools have been discussed with Jim Carroll, Ron Smith, and Dave Olson. The decision is to not do anything until the State gives its directive. Julie Hance will negotiate with the schools to send money to them monthly based on what the town has collected for payments and delinquencies through June 30. This will allow for an additional 6 months to pay because the town usually pays by December 31, and this keeps it within one tax billing cycle. The State may move the due date so that it does not have to be paid by June 30<sup>th</sup>. Julie Hance states that by not paying by June 30<sup>th</sup>, the money will be hard to track and does not feel that dragging out the payment is a good idea. In January or February of next year, the town will need to get a TAN, which is earlier than other years. Also, the TAN may need to be for more money than usual depending on delinquencies in September. There is time to wait and make this decision later. The amounts and dates to assess penalty and interest can be discussed, but there does need to be a date set for that. The Statute addressing penalty and interest is being considered allowing for flexibility.

Julie Hance stated that the impact to the budget will be 2021. Ron Smith indicated to her to maintain business and do things as normal as much as possible. The impact of this will not be seen for a year or two, creating a problem for the town in the future. Decisions on what to cut from departments and the budget need to be made carefully and thought about how it will affect the town in three years from now. Kirby Putnam has been getting estimates for most of the equipment for the Highway department and feels there is money to be saved because costs are coming in lower than expected.

Arne Jonynas asked Jeff Holden what is going on with the water and chlorinating it. Jeff Holden stated that his department has been mandated to start chlorination until the pandemic is over. The State is trying to make sure that compromised people will not get something else from the water system being contaminated. Jeff Holden said the department is adding the minimal amount of chlorine possible and will stop as soon as he can. There is no timeline and there has been no date given of when he can stop, possibly May 15. Jeff Holden indicated that he would call Water Supply when things look better, and he will ask if it can be stopped.

Arne Jonynas stated that he thinks the community is reacting well. Jason Tostrup and Chris Meyer manage Chester Helping Hands delivering food. The community has shown that they can

come together and help each other out during this time. Jeff Holden said Chester Helping Hands approached the Legion for the use of their kitchen so they can make meals, adding another 100 meals because of the demand. The produce boxes for \$25 coming to Chester from Boston is a fantastic deal. People are giving donations to that as well for the people not able to afford a box. Also, Lisai's is doing their part and staying open which is important.

6. ADOPT TOWN PLAN

Arne Jonynas says to hold off on adopting the Town Plan until changes are addressed.

7. SOLAR FARM DISCUSSION

Julie Hance had a conversation with Luke Shullenberger from Green Lantern and Kelsey from Greenbacker, which manages the solar field. She learned that the 7-year option does not run from the contract signing date, it runs from construction completion. The Select Board has until the end of August of 2022 to decide if the town should purchase the field. The process should start mid-2021 and the cost is based on an appraisal paid for by the town. The appraisal would not be a complicated appraisal. There are two other companies that buy power from the field. Chester would be responsible for managing the other two businesses because buying out their contracts does not seem like it would be an option. This would create a revenue stream for the town. The contract details are the same as Chester's with a 20-year term.

Arne Jonynas points out the process to buy the field is not simple because of all the maintenance and management of the other contracts. Julie Hance states that the town could manage payment from the other companies with invoices and the town would be responsible for the maintenance. Lee Gustafson says that the management of the contract invoices would be simple and GMP supplies the off takers with their benefit on their bill per the agreement. The maintenance would be to make sure the inverters are kept up, and the field would need to be mowed, possibly by sheep. The Select Board will consider this further starting around November-December of 2021.

8. NEW BUSINESS/NEXT AGENDA

The next agenda will include the Financial update, Local Emergency Plan adoption, the Academy Lease if appropriate, Town Plan if changes have been made and potentially vote to have one signer on the Warning for a temporary period.

9. ADJOURN

Lee Gustafson made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Leigh Dakin. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

**TO:** Chester Select Board  
**FROM:** Fred Greenwell 60 Colburn Rd  
**DATE:** April 15, 2020  
**SUBJECT:** 2020 Reassessment of Property Values

**Please note Julie Hance's response is in red.**

**At its July 5, 2017 Select Board meeting,** Lister Wanda Purdy indicated the Town of Chester was told by the State of Vermont it must re-appraise properties on its grand list. At that same meeting, Wanda elaborated a firm would be hired and reappraisals would begin in 2018, with appraisers visiting every property in Town including exempt properties, expecting the work to be finished in 2020.

**At its September 5, 2018 Select Board meeting** Lister Wanda Purdy reported reappraisal process started in August 2018 with appraisers [from New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC)] visiting home owners, a process expected to continue throughout 2019 in order to reassess all real property for the grand list of 2020.

By now all visits should have occurred. According to Vermont State Statute, Listers must determine the value of all property as of April 1 of each year. 32 V.S.A. § 3651, § 3691, and § 4041.

I, as a real estate taxpayer in the Town of Chester, am interested in the results of the recent evaluation, especially with the current status of the economic environment. The sooner taxpayers are notified of the results of the reevaluation, the sooner land owner taxpayers may be able to prepare for the impacts to real estate taxes in September 2020.

**My questions to the Board are:**

1. When and how will the tax payers be notified of the results of the 2020 evaluation.  
**The taxpayers will be notified by a Change in Appraisal booklet that includes instructions on how to grieve their assessment.**
2. What is the schedule for reviewing/grieving the evaluations, if deemed applicable by the land owner,  
**The tentative schedule for grievance is May 11-13 for pre-grievance and May 19-20 for grievance.**
3. When will the Lister tool on the website be updated with the town wide 2020 evaluations?  
**The access tool on the town's website cannot be updated until the grandlist is set which will be after grievance.**
4. Given the 2020 evaluation, has the Listers office submitted its form to the State to request an updated Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) used in determining the education tax rates in Chester. 32 V.S.A. § 5406(c),  
**Yes, the Listers office has requested an updated CLA since that is a requirement of a reappraisal town.**
5. If so, what is the updated Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). If not, when?  
**No CLA is available yet since we have not sent the new grand list to the State for that to be determined. That won't be done until sometime after grievance and usually those figures aren't available until December or January.**
6. At its most recent Select Board meeting of April 1, 2020, Board Member Heather Chase suggested adding a place on the website for people to ask follow up questions about the previous meeting

and put them on the next Agenda under citizens comments encouraging people to get involved and be a part of the meetings while it is electronic. What is the status of this worthy suggestion? There is a new comment section on the Town website on the Selectboard page. When comments are made on that page, they are emailed to Amie who will forward them to the Town Manager. The Town Manager will respond to the citizen and answer it at the next Selectboard meeting. The Citizen's Comment agenda item says Citizen's Comments/Answers from Previous meeting which maybe should read Citizen's Comments/Follow up for citizens

Respectfully, Fred Greenwell