

TOWN OF CHESTER
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

April 1, 2020
Minutes

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

VISITORS: Sharon Huntley; Shawn Cunningham; Cynthia Prairie; Frank; Cil Mathews; Robert Neid

Meeting was held via Zoom. There were no additions or deletions to this agenda.

1. APPROVE MINUTES:

A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to approve the minutes from the March 18, 2020 Select Board meeting as amended. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The motion passed.

Jeff Holden would like it noted that EMS stands for Emergency Medical Services and the building was cited as so in two spots. The new building should be referred to as the Emergency Services Building instead.

Jeff Holden pointed out that it should be noted that he was not at the Executive session following the regular meeting discussing the Town Manager position. Arne Jonynas stated to make the correction to the minutes for the Executive Session.

2. CITIZENS COMMENTS:

There were no citizen comments.

3. OLD BUSINESS/LAST MEETING:

Arne Jonynas asked Julie Hance to take the Board through the Old Business. Julie Hance indicated that there is not a lot new to report on the EMS building. They are still working on some changes to the building to bring the costs down as much as possible. The gravel project is on hold and waiting for act 250. The School Board signed the letter at their last meeting indicating they have no concerns for the project, helping move the project forward. Heather asked if Frank Bidwell had been appointed to the Connecticut River Transit Board, which he has not. There is currently no opening on that Board but when a spot opens, Frank Bidwell could be appointed at that time.

4. ANNUAL PAPER OF RECORD:

The Board received one estimate for the Annual Paper of Record from the Vermont Journal starting now and running through March of 2021. Arne Jonynas thanked the Vermont Journal and Sharon Huntley for the coverage that they provide to the town. He also thanked the Chester Telegraph for being on top of things. Arne Jonynas is hoping that next year it could be discussed that the Paper of Record be electronic instead of printed, however, the law states that the paper must be printed.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to have the Vermont Journal be the Paper of Record starting now through March 2021. Seconded by Heather Chase. The motion passed.

Heather Chase thanked the Vermont Journal and the Chester Telegraph stating that they are both essential parts of the community.

Leigh Dakin asked if the rates for this contract are the same as they were. Sharon Huntley stated it went up fifty cents across the board. Sharon Huntley also thanked Shawn Cunningham and the Chester Telegraph for the up to date daily news they provide that the weekly Vermont Journal is not able to do and for being a valuable resource.

5. SIGN ANNUAL FINANCIAL PLAN:

Arne Jonynas explained to the board that the Annual Financial Plan for the Town Highway is a statement that breaks down the money the town will spend on highways and bridges by miles and class. There is a minimum that the state wants the town to spend, so they require an itemized list of where the money is going to be spent. Julie Hance informed the board that the state wants to be sure the money is being used for the roads, and to help offset tax revenue. The town will not be eligible for any VTrans grants if this is not filed.

A motion was made by Heather Chase to sign the Annual Financial Plan for the Town Highway. Seconded by Leigh Dakin. The motion passed.

6. APPOINT SELECT BOARD SECRETARY:

Julie Hance, being the new Town Manager, will no longer be the Secretary to the Select Board.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to appoint Amie O'Brien as Secretary to the Select Board. Seconded by Leigh Dakin. The motion passed.

7. APPOINT WHITING LIBRARY TRUSTEE; ROBERT NEID:

Robert Neid submitted a letter of interest to the Select Board showing interest in the Whiting Library Trustee one-year position until March of 2021. Also submitted was a letter of

recommendation from Dr. Lord. Arne Jonynas thinks he would be a good addition to the Library Board and is happy he is stepping up.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to appoint Robert Neid as Trustee to the Whiting Library for the one-year term. Seconded by Jeff Holden. The motion passed.

8. APPOINT TOWN MANAGER:

Arne Jonynas explained that appointing a new Town Manager has been a long road. Things changed due to COVID-19, along with the negotiation of the Select Board and the other party involved. After review of the situation the Select Board decided to appoint Julie Hance as the new Town Manager. Arne Jonynas pointed out that Julie Hance is experienced, and the town will be well served, which is important. There has been a lot of feedback from people saying they are happy and excited for this to be happening.

A motion was made by Leigh Dakin to appoint Julie Hance as the Town Manger for one year until March of 2021 with a salary of \$68,000 and the benefits package that she had before. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The motion passed.

Heather Chase thanked Julie Hance for stepping up and pointed out the significant impact this will have on the budget. Julie Hance thanked the Select Board. Arne Jonynas pointed out that the office staff is stepping up to make it a positive change. Jeff Holden stated that the Dept. heads are all behind Julie Hance. Leigh Dakin said that the towns people are impressed and happy, and thanked Julie Hance.

9. COVID-19 UPDATE:

Arne Jonynas asked Julie Hance for an update on COVID-19. Julie Hance indicated that updates are received from State regarding the Small business developments. Amie O'Brien is updating the website with all the information we receive. As far as town operations, she states that we are still fully functional. The office is closed to the public, but things are being done by mail, email, and drop slot. Title searchers are by appointment only and being allowed in one at a time. Lister/Zoning are doing business by phone or email. Highway is doing things in split shifts while still getting projects done. Water/Sewer is down to two on due to safety reasons while maintaining their distance. Police, Fire and Ambulance are fully functional and doing the best they can. There were discussions about delinquent billing and not sending delinquent notices, but it was decided to send them. This would have impacted future projections and there is a need to show trends. If people contact us with a hardship, we will take away the penalty and interest. Dept. heads meet every Tuesday morning and have been told to be careful with spending and to only purchase essential things. Also, with budget planning for next year we should try to get back to a zero-based budget while cutting spending.

Julie Hance stated that the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development is working with the Small Business Administration. They are looking at towns that have revolving

loan funds and if towns will be willing to open the money up to certain programs. There are still many questions that will need to be answered and things to consider. This will require a policy change. There will be more information to follow. Peoples Bank has indicated that the Development Fund balance is currently \$348,733 and has lost about \$50,000 since the end of last year. Arne Jonynas pointed out that this will need to be revisited throughout the year because times have been tough on people. The board will need to look at the forgiveness of penalty and interest for people unable to pay these loans back. The economy is fragile, and people have less savings for when something like this happens. Lee Gustafson received a call from someone asking the Select Board to discuss appropriate uses of the Economic Fund and using for local businesses that are struggling. Arne Jonynas would like the discussion to be put on the next Select Board Agenda so that the Board can be prepared and have a response for people when asked about it.

Jeff Holden said that he is being asked by people if they will be given extra time to make payments and he didn't have the answer. Some people would like a delay on their water/sewer bills but understand they owe what they owe. Julie Hance mentioned that we have already been giving people breaks. Arne Jonynas points out that now is a good time to review the way the town does things and to reexamine expenses and purchases to see if we can do better.

10. SIGN CONTRACT FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES BUILDING:

Arne Jonynas stated that he has reviewed the contract and has stated that it is a standard contract. The town attorneys have gone through it and changed it to benefit the town. The attorneys are fine with the proposed changes and both sides agree. Arne Jonynas is comfortable with the contract because the attorneys are ok with it.

A motion was made by Lee Gustafson to sign the contract for the Emergency Services Building. Seconded by Jeff Holden. The motion passed.

Arne Jonynas asked Julie Hance what the next step will be. Julie Hance explained that it will go out to bid at the end of April. Language has been added to the Contract allowing the Board to reject all bids to permit the town to hold off for a better bid season if necessary. She also stated that Exhibit A will be presented to the Board in the near future for approval. Exhibit A identifies the method cost management, i.e. cost of work with guaranteed maximum price which allows for flexibility while keeping costs under control.

A motion was made by Heather Chase to authorize Julie Hance to sign the contract for the Emergency Services Building. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The motion passed.

11. NEW BUSINESS/NEXT AGENDA:

Julie Hance stated she will be removing the Academy Building Lease from the April 15th meeting Agenda.

The Emergency operation plan will be ready for the Select Board to review.

The Planning Commission has finalized the Town plan and will be added to the next Agenda for adoption.

Heather Chase would like to keep updates for COVID-19 on the Agenda. Arne Jonynas says that this update will be at the top of the agenda.

Jim Carol has been cancelled for the May 6th meeting, holding off until he can be at the meeting in person.

The financial update will be pushed to May 6th allowing Julie Hance and Cil Mathews to organize the way that they do financial presentation.

Lee Gustafson would like updates on the Chester Development Fund use and water/sewer bills.

The Solar field lease is up in February and should be discussed. Arne Jonynas asked who the Board would have a conversation with to discuss the option of the lease to decide if it's a good move. Lee Gustafson said that the lease holder should be contacted, and internal discussion should start now. He is not sure now is the right time because the purchase price is almost 1 million dollars. However, the power could be used by the town owned facilities. Arne Jonynas stated he hears the concern for purchasing another major thing. Julie Hance will pull the lease and have a conversation with Jim Carroll and give the Board an update at next meeting.

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.

12. ADJOURN:

A motion was made by Heather Chase to adjourn. Seconded by Lee Gustafson. The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Amie O'Brien
Secretary of the Select Board

Lee Gustafson
Clerk of the Select Board