

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **SELECTBOARD MEETING**
3 **December 21, 2022, Minutes**

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

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

8 **Visitors Present:** Bill Lindsay, Pamela Spurlock, Bill Dakin, Donna Hudkins, Peter Hudkins,
9 Cheryl Joy Lipton, Nick Boke, and The Vermont Journal at Town Hall; and SAPA TV, John
10 Velit, Tim Roper, Bob Harnish, Linda Diak, Robert Nied, Deb Velto, Jesse Bailey, John (no last
11 name), Al Wakefield, Andrew Malaby, Norman Cohen, and Tuckerman Wunderle via Zoom.

12 **Call to Order**

13
14
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 2, Approve minutes from the December 2, 2022, Selectboard Meeting**

19 Heather moved and Leigh seconded a motion to approve the December 2nd minutes. Lee asked
20 about the list of visitors present and didn't think it included everyone at Town Hall or online.
21 Richard Koonz was listed as speaking and he wasn't included in the list of those who attended.
22 Lee wondered how they keep track of who is present and if it mattered. Julie said it does matter
23 and that he must have been missing from the list of attendees. Arne noted that sometimes they
24 struggle with those who attend via Zoom because they identify themselves with a telephone
25 number or a first name only. The correction would be made to include Mr. Koonz. A vote was
26 taken, and the minutes were approved, as amended.

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

28 Arne asked for any citizens' comments and there were none. Sue noted that she had asked John
29 with no last name on Zoom to identify himself and he had not answered.

30 **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

31 Report given by the Town Manager:

32
33 Police Chief Change of Command Ceremony/Advisory Committee

34 It went very well and was well attended. Rick Cloud is now officially retired, and Tom Williams
35 is now officially Chester's Chief of Police. He has some ideas for the committee, which will start
36 soon. Julie and Tom are having discussions, she is updating her research, and they are looking at
37 town models where it has been successful. They would present something at the second meeting
38 in January. Lee asked for a reminder of the purpose of the committee. Julie said that would be part
39 of the Board's discussion. Community members and the Board have talked in the past about
40 whether a police advisory committee is good for Chester. She and Tom both see value in it as a
41 liaison between the citizens and the police department. It can be used for data mining,
42 communication, and improving community policing. It will not be used in any form of department
43 oversight as statute doesn't authorize it. Tom would love to start a restorative justice program here.

1 They will present it to the Board and then the Board can decide if the committee would be
2 beneficial to the community. Arne suggested getting people involved earlier. Julie agreed. They
3 were only presenting to the board his thoughts, what other towns do and then the Board can decide.
4 It is a committee appointed by the Selectboard. The police department is not against an advisory
5 committee. Julie agreed it should be a public process. Arne noted that Bennington had oversight
6 and Julie said it had been challenged. Lee said the biggest thing he has seen over the past couple
7 of years is the more communication the better. He saw the committee as a means of communication
8 between the community, police force and everyone. He thought they were not good at getting their
9 message out and people weren't paying attention. This would be another way to get the message
10 out. Arne has had people come forward who are interested in volunteering on the committee.

11 12 Police Department Union Agreement

13 The full agreement has been presented and they will vote on it, likely this week. Once they vote,
14 she will bring it to the Selectboard for discussion. She hoped it would be on the January 4th agenda.

15 16 Grants

17 The town was awarded the Historic Preservation Grant which pays \$20,000 towards the
18 renovations of windows and doors at the Yosemite Firehouse. They were also awarded a \$48,000
19 grant to grade and repave the park and ride on Cobleigh Street, serving as overflow for the Green.

20 21 Snow Guards for Academy Building

22 The snow guards for the Academy Building have been ordered and will be installed soon.

23 24 Wastewater Management Plan

25 The application was approved for the Wastewater Management Plan. The town was awarded a
26 \$39,000 grant, which is a 50% subsidy for the total cost of \$78,000.

27 28 Lead Lines

29 Applications have now opened for the lead line inventory. Chester is in place to receive 100%
30 funding to inventory any remaining lead lines in Chester. The application will come to the Board
31 soon for signature. Arne asked if the asset management was just for inventory or the condition of
32 things. Julie said it will prioritize and give them the report needed for the forest main on Depot.
33 Arne thought it important when they need to decide on money to spend and the condition of things.

34
35 Arne asked if there was anyone who had any old business and there was none.

36 **Agenda Item 4, Chester Community Garden; License Agreement**

37 Arne wondered how they got to the point of having something of this depth for a simple project.
38 Lee thought any time the town allowed use of its property, it had to be fully protected and have an
39 agreement. He agreed it was more complicated but thought it was needed as a springboard to start
40 the discussion. If they didn't have anything in place, the town was open to liability. Arne
41 understood they were there to protect the town but pointed out they had issued a letter of support
42 for the community greenhouse and this document would make it difficult to accomplish anything.
43 Lee asked why. Arne thought because at any time, they could vacate them from the property with
44 no reason. Lee noted there was a clause that allowed for a 160-day notice but there was a process
45 that would allow them to talk with the board and have those discussions. Lee wasn't sure he would
46 be satisfied with anything less, especially for a structure as cumbersome as a greenhouse on town

1 property that has several liabilities associated with that. Arne would agree as far as the greenhouse.
2 Arne wished they were consistent dealing with other 501(c) organizations such as Chester
3 Townscape, who use land in Chester without agreements. He wondered if the process was the same
4 for everyone or just this group. Lee wasn't familiar with Chester Townscape and what they use.
5 Julie said they use flowerboxes and Arne said this group wanted to put in vegetable gardens. Lee
6 thought what the Greenhouse Committee wanted was more permanent than Chester Townscape.

7 Arne wanted consistency because it seemed like they were handling organizations differently. The
8 Historical Society has a month-to-month lease. Julie said they were revisiting it. Arne pointed out
9 that it was 1 page and 3 sentences. Julie said that's why it hadn't been renewed yet and there was
10 yet to be a discussion about the future use of the building. Leigh read it thoroughly and she thought
11 it was a license agreement and was hopeful that it indicated the use of town property was one thing,
12 but the other part was liability if someone got hurt and that's what the license was all about from
13 what she could tell. She thought the license agreement was well-worded and she was glad to see
14 it. Heather wondered if the Greenhouse Committee had any issues with it. Arne said Cheryl Joy
15 was present and would probably want an attorney to review it. Heather thought maybe they needed
16 to take some time to do it and noted they needed insurance and thought they needed to show
17 evidence of that and if they happy with the terms. Heather thought it was needed because it was
18 2023. Lee thought discussion among the board was necessary before they asked the committee for
19 input but wasn't disagreeing with Heather. Heather didn't mind going through it but couldn't see
20 how the board could disagree if legal counsel had recommended it and wasn't going to argue with
21 their attorney at this point. Arne said there are towns that have no document and community
22 gardens and some that have strict leases. This was a recommendation of the town attorney.

23 Cheryl Joy said the Greenhouse and Gardens Committee had gone over it. They had questions and
24 concerns but wanted the Board to discuss it and then take what they came up with to their lawyer.

25 Arne went over the license regarding fees and terms. Lee suggested the amount of time should be
26 equal unless there was good reason for it. The town would have the power to cancel the lease for
27 any reason. Arne was concerned about that but understood the reasoning. Julie said it wasn't for
28 any reason but if they were not in compliance. Arne pointed out that C said for any reason with
29 186 days' notice. Ben said if the town needed to use the property, it would provide notice and
30 allow the town to use it. Arne thought the time for that was during the renewal period. Lee
31 questioned under notices that it should be sent registered and language to that effect should be
32 included. Lee thought the maintenance language included in the license was reasonable.

33 Arne didn't think they would need access to any utilities except water and wondered if they would
34 have to pay for it. They would talk with the water department about making water accessible. Arne
35 questioned if they would address the driveway that is currently shared. He suggested they
36 distinguish between the 2 driveways. He thought people abutting it would be protected. Lee
37 considered that when he looked at the survey map and suggested the road be kept on town property
38 to avoid any conflicts.

39 Insurance would be on the licensee. Julie said all the other policies she sees are a \$1 million policy,
40 so she didn't think \$2 million was right. Lee agreed.

41 Arne continued through the rest of the license and reminded the other members if they had any
42 questions as he was going through the list to say something.

43 He asked for any other comments or concerns regarding the lease from any Selectboard members.

1 Julie would go back to the attorney with questions the Board had including the difference in two
2 terms, language about return receipt notices, and utilities. Heather wanted Julie to ask if there was
3 a reason for \$2 million instead of \$1 million. Julie will discuss delineation of the driveway with
4 Kirby and what would be involved.

5 Lee mentioned the third paragraph in Jim’s email about the difference between a license and a
6 lease. Lee questioned if they would require a user agreement. He wondered if the agreement
7 between the garden group and the user was something that they wanted to know. Arne said they
8 were getting to the point that the garden group didn’t have many rights, they could kick them off
9 the land at any time, and they wanted them to make all the rules, and wondered why the town
10 didn’t just run it. Lee said that was certainly an option. Lee wondered whether they had any specific
11 obligations relative to the agreement between the users and the operations. Julie would ask Jim.
12 Arne thought this was overboard but understood they were protecting town property.

13 Julie would follow up with answers to the questions with Cheryl Joy so she could take them to
14 their attorney for review and copy Cheryl Joy on the email to the town’s attorney. Cheryl Joy
15 added that Chester Townscape also had gardens in the grounds at a few places and not just in
16 boxes.

17 Lee asked if they would have discussion on the Canal Street Survey Map. Arne thought there were
18 2 pins to check out, but it would basically be the finished product. Gary emailed Julie that there’s
19 an abutting property owner who asked to show him where the pin is as there’s a question on one
20 of the boundaries. He will be meeting with him this week. Arne noted that it was based on 2 or 3
21 different surveys, so it didn’t seem like there was much controversy. Arne will walk the property
22 with him. Cheryl Joy wanted a copy of the map. She also had emailed copies of an agreement they
23 were working on and rules and regulations for the gardens, as well as a timeline. They had not
24 received them so Cheryl Joy would confirm they went out.

25 **Agenda Item 5, Statement of Inclusion**

26 Arne read the Statement of Inclusion. “It is recognizing that diversity strengthens and enriches a
27 community. The Town of Chester condemns all forms of discrimination and bigotry. We strongly
28 commit ourselves and our institutions to the fair and equal treatment of everyone including
29 members of traditionally marginalized groups who live, work, or pass through our community. We
30 strive to ensure that all our plans, policies, programs, procedures, statements, and actions reflect
31 these commitments and support a community in which all persons feel welcome and safe to express
32 their opinions, engage in the community.” Arne thought it said what they were as a town and liked
33 that it was reaffirming core beliefs and hoped and believed most people abided by this type of
34 statement. He thought it was important for Chester to declare it and reaffirm it and saw it as a
35 positive statement for the town who should take it to heart. He asked other members if they wanted
36 to get behind it, make it more forceful, or if it would just be a declaration. He saw a lot of positive
37 that could happen if they had it. He opened it up for discussion among the board members.

38 Leigh fully supported the declaration. She didn’t think it was negative in any way and was well
39 done. She hoped they all lived by it anyway and hoped they would have it on record.

40 Lee wanted to know the genesis of it and the various iterations before this and wanted to know
41 what happened after it and how it would impact them as a community down the road. Arne thought
42 the genesis of it was in northwestern Vermont where it was borrowed from a small town in Maine.
43 A few gentlemen from Rutland helped with it and Arne thought they were on Zoom.

1 Al Wakefield said Bob Harnish was the one who really got it started, then he became involved,
2 and then Norm Cohen, who was also on Zoom. Bob spoke to how it got started. Two years ago,
3 he was visiting with his cousin who is Chair of the Franklin Selectboard and his board had just
4 adopted a Declaration of Inclusion. He provided Bob with a copy who thought it was fantastic
5 considering George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's murders. He felt it would favor Vermont if they
6 could get the public to recognize their biases and work together to make all feel welcome. Bob
7 said Vermont needed to gently increase its population to keep tax dollars flowing to support
8 infrastructure and programming. He presented it to his town of Pittsford, and they met and passed
9 it at the next meeting. Then the Town of Brandon adopted it. At that point, he reached out to Al
10 and Norman, who is a retired attorney, and they have been working to try to get every town in
11 Vermont to adopt a Declaration of Inclusion. Al said there are currently 85 towns across the state
12 that have adopted some form. Most have adopted the original statement found on the Vermont
13 Declaration of Inclusion website. Some towns have gone further, notably South Burlington and
14 Saint Albans. When this was started a year and a half ago, the Governor also issued an extensive
15 Declaration for the state and designated the second week in May as Inclusion Week in Vermont.
16 Several towns, notably Milton, set up programs during that week. They also issued a research
17 paper during that week. Their goal is to have 100 towns adopt it by May and eventually all towns
18 in Vermont making it the most inclusive state in the country. He suggested implementing the
19 declaration by listing it on the town's website and making sure new businesses are aware. The
20 state just established a program to help towns further implement it. The Vermont League of Cities
21 and Towns has a similar program. All the information can be found on their website.

22 Lee glanced briefly at the ongoing implementation online. It seemed to him there were 2 things he
23 wanted to explore further. Lee asked if he saw Chester as not being inclusive and if any of their
24 policies lead to discrimination. Arne didn't think anything obvious popped out but thought a
25 committee could get together and review the documents. Lee thought Julie had control of all the
26 policies and had been through them. He wondered what problem they were trying to solve. As a
27 town, they don't discriminate. He must think how he acts every day to make sure he's treating
28 them with respect and dignity. The first version he saw talked about a committee being formed
29 and he was against that. This version made sense from the standpoint of alerting people that
30 Chester will strive to make its policies and actions inclusive. He was concerned because he didn't
31 know where it was going. Looking at the website was some vague language that could lead to
32 anything. He thought it didn't go far enough and they needed to be inclusive of others. He thought
33 they should add that they commit themselves to be inclusive and protective of all people from the
34 elderly to those with disabilities, physical, mental, or otherwise, and the preborn. He thought
35 adding that language would make it more acceptable and inclusive. Lee said, "We strive to ensure
36 that all our plans, policies, programs, procedures, statements, etc. reflect these commitments." He
37 thought they did and if they didn't, it was something Julie should take on.

38 Heather thought it was difficult for an individual to say a policy was okay when it wasn't inclusive
39 of everyone. As a person of color, a woman – all sorts of people would perceive things differently.
40 She noted that within the last couple years, the Human Rights Commission found them not in good
41 standing with some practices. She thought the statement on their website for employees and people
42 coming through town would say it was their commitment and the language was not as specific as
43 they liked but it was a general statement and a good thing to strive for. She thanked the board who
44 worked on it. It was dynamic and she was in full support of it. Leigh echoed what Heather stated
45 and said sometimes they need to say things out loud and not assume or wait for other issues to
46 come up. She also thanked those who worked on the declaration.

1 Lee agreed with Heather that not everyone had behaved in accordance with proper protocol, but
2 the town had taken steps to remove those people from their positions so the policies and procedures
3 in place are working to prevent the types of actions that the declaration was relating to. It still
4 wasn't clear to Lee the problem they were trying to solve. He understood there was discrimination
5 and exclusion and there were several things that were a concern. He thought it was an individual
6 problem and they couldn't control the citizens of Chester to make them more inclusive and less
7 discriminatory because that was something they needed to do on their own. They can encourage
8 others to live that way. He didn't think the declaration would have an impact on Chester if they
9 adopted it. From his standpoint, he saw it as a laudable goal or objective. He thought the goals on
10 the website were wishy-washy. He was concerned it could be used down the road to discriminate
11 more against certain people who don't fall in line with the accepted practice or beliefs.

12 Heather thought it was saying, as a community, it was one of their values and what they believe,
13 like a company mission statement. Because they dealt with a difficult situation a few years ago,
14 doesn't mean it won't happen again. This was just something to set the tone of what they believe.
15 As a white woman walking through the world, she can't say she understands how it is to be a white
16 man. Our history is where the predominant amount of power has been in white males' hands, so
17 the structures that are set up view the world through that prism. She didn't want to suggest she
18 could relate to how it was for another individual, but this was saying she was going to be inclusive
19 of others who are subject to different discriminations and impressions. In acknowledging there can
20 be differences is a step towards healing our nation and healing is needed in Chester too. She
21 thought a general positive affirmative statement that Chester is inclusive of people who march to
22 a different drummer, that they will be inclusive and accepting of them. She was strongly
23 supportive, and Leigh was too.

24 Arne said he viewed the declaration as a reminder to keep these ideas on the table. It wasn't a
25 directive and wouldn't tell them what to do. It would be up to them to decide what they would do
26 with the statement. As a town, they needed to decide how to approach it and deal with the issue.
27 Arne thought the fact they say they don't have a problem was up for debate. Each town that adapts
28 it will travel its own course and do what they want with it. Would they just make a declaration and
29 put it on the shelf or take it to heart and apply it as much as they can. The fact that they are
30 reaffirming the beliefs they have that are his core beliefs was positive and he couldn't see a
31 negative. Arne told Lee he insinuated that it could be used in the future for discrimination, and he
32 didn't know how Lee got to that point. Lee asked what it looked like to do something. Arne
33 suggested getting a group of people together to decide and discuss it. Lee wasn't following. Arne
34 said the people involved in it had spent a lot of time discussing it and suggested they may be the
35 core group to discuss it and to see how they handle it and which direction to go. Lee was concerned
36 about that. He wondered if a group would look at all the policies and procedures of Chester and
37 how they could improve them and who would be the final arbiter of that. Lee wanted to know
38 where it was going to end up and what would be the impact of it. Lee thought some of the things
39 that are going on in society weren't imaginable 50 years ago, or even 10 years ago yet those are
40 the things consuming society and causing us to be fractured because we're not acting on the behalf
41 of others but ourselves. He wanted to understand the problem being solved by it. He wanted to
42 know how it would impact the highway crew, the guys that mow the cemetery, or the police
43 department. He was concerned they would be expecting certain attitudes and actions from people
44 and if they don't measure up, they would act. Heather asked Lee what he was fearful of. He thought
45 the Declaration of Inclusion was fine in its current form, but he didn't think we were in a better
46 place than we were 50 years ago, and he thought that was due to removing personal responsibility,

1 becoming more dependent on government, and becoming less considerate than those around us.
2 As a result, we don't know our neighbors or how to love and treat them as we ought to. As he sees
3 the crumbling of our society, he doesn't see the declaration as necessary. He wasn't hearing a plan.
4 Heather thought the plan could be to post it on the town website and reflect upon it when making
5 policy, hiring, including people of diverse backgrounds for boards. She said it stated they wanted
6 to be an inclusive community and would help the fabric of the community have value about
7 inclusiveness and treating other human beings well. Leigh agreed with her 100%.

8 Ben had told Arne when approached recently by him that he thought the wording of it was fine.
9 As he read this, it was different than the previous version. Arne said there was one line that was
10 different, and he had emailed the members. Ben acknowledged receiving it. Ben thought the
11 sentence should end with the fair treatment of everyone. He didn't feel there was a need to include
12 members of other groups because everyone should mean everyone. In his first year on the board,
13 a document identified them as the Selectmen, and they changed it to Selectboard. They have made
14 a giant effort to make the boards as diverse as possible to make everyone's voice heard. He would
15 not be in favor of the last part of the sentence in paragraph one of the declaration. Additionally, he
16 didn't believe they needed another committee. His opinion was they have a Selectboard and a
17 Town Manager and can address things that come up. Arne asked Ben which part of the sentence
18 he was referring to. Ben would leave out the part about traditionally marginalized groups, people
19 who live, work, and pass through the community. He would end it with everyone and didn't see
20 the need to split it up into groups. Ben suggested as things came up, to address them. Ben would
21 be open to accepting the statement of inclusion and committing themselves to doing the right thing.
22 His reservation was it sounded like there was further backstory of things to happen. Arne thought
23 he had the same fears as Lee. Ben said he had no fear and thought it was an unfair comment. Ben
24 thought Arne had a need. Arne said he didn't have a need for anything. Ben wanted to know the
25 concepts and processes of the future to know if he was okay with Arne's direction. Arne wasn't
26 sure what Ben's concern was about having a committee. Arne wished they could say the fair
27 treatment of everyone, but history has told them differently. There are marginalized people and
28 those who have been treated wrongly throughout history. To Heather's point, it is a white male
29 society that has brought them to where they are. Arne said marginalized groups haven't been
30 included in the conversations throughout history. Arne came from a life he used to live when he
31 was a police officer in the 70s and 80s and was involved in a lot of situations he wasn't proud of,
32 and it formed his opinions and ideas about a lot of things that happen in this world. He sees things
33 that go on and what happens in a small town like this. He thought it was wrong to disregard and
34 turn a blind eye to it. He thought when they made an affirmation like this, it should be backed up
35 one way or another. He thought the discussion should be continual and something they're always
36 thinking about. They all want a fair and just society, happiness, a family, and a lot of things and
37 this is one item that would help in that direction. Arne said life is hard for everyone but it's harder
38 for some groups to get to the place they are and that was why he felt how he did. Ben stressed that
39 everyone should be treated fairly.

40 Heather moved that they adopt the Chester, Vermont Declaration of Inclusion as it was in their
41 packet and Leigh seconded the motion. Lee moved to add additional language. Heather didn't
42 think they should. Lee said it was his right whether she agreed and could choose not to vote for it.
43 Lee moved to amend the language to read, "Recognizing that diversity strengthens and enriches a
44 community, the Town of Chester condemns all forms of discrimination and bigotry. We strongly
45 commit ourselves and our institutions to the fair and equal treatment of everyone, including
46 members of traditionally marginalized groups who lives or works in, or passes through our

1 community. We also commit ourselves to be inclusive and protective of all people from the elderly
2 to those with disabilities, physical, mental, or otherwise, and the preborn. We strive to ensure that
3 all our plans, policies, programs, procedures, statements, and actions reflect these commitments
4 and support a community in which all persons feel welcome and safe to express their opinions and
5 engage in the community.”

6 There was no second on the amendment, so it did not pass.

7 Ben asked for clarity about which declaration they were voting on as Heather had moved to adopt
8 the one in their packet. Heather asked Arne to read the one emailed to them with the change. Arne
9 read it aloud. It was the one he had read earlier. Heather stated that was the one she had moved to
10 accept, and Leigh seconded it. Ben asked if Julie had given it to the town’s attorney. She had not.
11 Arne didn’t think it necessary. Julie said it was more of a statement and Leigh agreed.

12 Ben moved to amend the first paragraph to read, “Recognizing that diversity strengthens and
13 enriches the community, the Town of Chester condemns all forms of discrimination and bigotry.
14 We strongly commit ourselves and our institutions to the fair and equal treatment of everyone.”
15 Lee seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The ayes were Lee and Ben. The nays were
16 Heather, Leigh, and Arne. The amendment failed. They were back to the original declaration of
17 inclusion. A roll call vote was taken. The ayes were Heather, Leigh, and Arne. The nays were Lee
18 and Ben. The motion passed 3 to 2.

19 Arne thought it was a difficult conversation and amazing that they didn’t want to take it further.
20 He thought that when they disagreed that much and had issues on a simple statement like that, they
21 would welcome a conversation to take it further. He hoped it would include the faith leaders in
22 town, the schools, the library, and everyone else involved and not just the Selectboard. It was a
23 topic that should be discussed and evoked a lot of emotion and feelings and was important they air
24 the objections, considerations, ideas, and feelings they have. Lee thought it was a good discussion
25 and appreciated everyone being willing to listen. Ben asked if it was worth reading the meeting
26 chat. Arne said it was difficult to follow it. Julie said at future meetings, it would be disabled. Arne
27 said if people raised their hands to speak, he would be happy to call on them.

28 Shawn Cunningham noted if chat was turned on, it was part of the public record and could not be
29 destroyed. Arne said it would not be destroyed but board members would not read it until after the
30 meeting. He thanked Shawn for the information.

31 Bill Lindsay said it had been a lively discussion. He believed the Declaration should be an article
32 for the Town Meeting where there would be better representation of how people feel. He wondered
33 what happened to the word precedence. He didn’t have to tell them about Act 250. Some things
34 have been good for Vermont and some things not. He looked at the problem and wished he was an
35 attorney. He could see with the elements of the words presented, it would infringe on many
36 people’s rights, do no good for the community, and be at the expense of someone. He thought it
37 could be used against the town as a supporting document. He thought it was the best discussion
38 he’d heard. He thought it should be presented at Town Meeting as an article of adoption.

39 Arne wanted to mention the people who were part of the conversation that brought them to this
40 point. They were Tuck Wunderle, Janessa Purney, Sheldon Ghetler, Beth Brothers, Cathy Pellet,
41 David Lord, Nick Boke, and Bill Dakin. Arne thanked them for their involvement.

42 **Agenda Item 6, Whiting Library Discussion**

43 Pamela Johnson Spurlock, the new librarian, and Donna Hudkins, Chair of the Library Board,

1 were present. The board's packets included a funding request and some information.

2 Donna introduced Pamela who had been there a week. They had submitted the budget at the
3 November Selectboard meeting and the anticipated budget for 2023 was increased by 10.54% to
4 \$142,922. The library plans on increasing its fundraising goal, income from grants, and book sale
5 goal, while decreasing costs where it can. The library is requesting funding in the town budget in
6 the amount of \$100,000, which is an additional \$7,000 for 2023 over 2022. It is 70% of the library
7 budget. This has been the percentage paid by the town for the past couple of years. The request is
8 based on hiring the new director and updating the technology used in the library. There will be
9 additional expenses for the cost of upgrading the computer systems and technology. The previous
10 board of trustees, previous director, and the children's librarian had done extensive work putting
11 together a strategic plan for the next 5 years. That plan had never been approved so it was not
12 presented to the Selectboard. The current board of trustees has reviewed the plan and now that they
13 have a new director and her input, they would like to fine tune it before it's approved and submitted
14 to the town. They want to bring the Whiting Library into the 21st century and make it an integral
15 part of the Town of Chester. They hoped to have the plan submitted before the end of 2023 to the
16 Selectboard. They want to develop programming for all segments of the community and provide
17 a comfortable space for members of the public to gather, learn, socialize, and foster connections.
18 They want to address significant issues and update tablets, computers, and software.

19 The \$300,000 plus or minus is the sum of all the library assets. Initially, they thought it was a
20 separate fund. It includes wealth management funds, money market accounts, petty cash, and
21 another fund where any net income after expenses at the end of the year is deposited or deducted.
22 As of December 15, they are at a negative \$13,771.77. The Selectboard had asked why in the past
23 if there was money left over, did they need more money from the town. They can't look back at
24 what has been done in the past to determine why there was money left over. They've gone through
25 records and were unable to answer that question. They can only look at what they plan to do now
26 and in the future. Past overages shouldn't be used or counted as operating funds because they're a
27 finite nonrenewable resource. They are asking the town for an operating budget. Going forward,
28 they can consider how much overage or underfunding there is based on a normal year with
29 customers coming to the library because neither has been normal for the past three years. The
30 funding they ask for is based on the current needs of the library. Currently the fund is \$146,000.
31 Donna asked where the money had originally come from, and Kathy Pellet thought it started from
32 a bequest and then property was sold. It is not an endowment.

33 Pam noted that while they haven't had to pay a director, due to the director and previous board
34 leaving, the library has not been able to fundraise as they normally would, so they have a deficit.
35 2023 is almost here and the technology the library has reminds Pam of the 1990s. There is so much
36 room for improvement to serve the community. Technology needs to be updated desperately.
37 Coming from a school with a wonderful technology department and technology at her fingertips,
38 she now feels like she's going back in time. The library management system is very basic and
39 there's a lot of deferred maintenance. The library is the jewel of the community, and they need to
40 honor it as such.

41 Ben was in favor of supporting the library but noted there was \$30,000 surplus so he thought the
42 negative \$13,000 was from wealth management and due to the stock market. Julie said the
43 expenses were down as well as revenue. Ben understood and thanked them for the clarification.

44 Arne questioned maintenance because the town owned and maintained the building. Pam noted

1 maintenance referred to maintaining the collection and a lot of it needed updating. She said she
2 was only 4 days into the position but could see room for improvement. Donna noted that's why
3 they wanted Pamela's input for the strategic plan. Arne asked about the \$300,000 and what it could
4 be used for. Donna noted some funds were in investments. Pam added there was no disaster plan
5 in place for the library and her experience has been that most libraries have a plan in place for the
6 collection.

7 Lee asked what obligations the library had in addition to what they had listed on their budget.
8 Donna said their treasurer said they may have budgeted enough for technology because they don't
9 know what the costs will be yet. Lee asked what the rough amount was that they hadn't budgeted
10 for. Pam said they had mentioned \$25,000 for technology. Lee noted they were asking the
11 Selectboard for \$100,000 and in the past, it had been \$75,000 until last year, which was \$93,000.
12 He thought about the constituent asking him why the library was asking for \$100,000 when they
13 had \$300,000. He understood they couldn't get money from that fund forever but didn't see a
14 reason why they couldn't use some of it. Pam said they need to pay the staff a living wage which
15 had been historically neglected by the town. They need to pay the children's librarian for all the
16 work. She has kept the library afloat for the past 6 months, especially in the past 2 since they lost
17 Will. She didn't think people had acknowledged that. She is not getting paid enough for her
18 professional level. Arne noted that salaries aren't under the town's control. Julie wanted it clear
19 that the town had not underpaid them. Lee appreciated the library and thought it was a great asset
20 to the town but was considerate of the taxpayer and was aware taxes would increase this year
21 because of other expenses and when he tells his constituents part of it is the library when they're
22 sitting on \$300,000. Pam felt the library was a drop in the bucket compared to other things the
23 town pays for. Lee asked which funds were not accessible. Pam said \$146,137.28 of the \$300,000
24 is accessible by the library. Heather was comfortable with the \$7,000 increase the library was
25 asking for this year and it had been a difficult year. Arne appreciated the feedback and noted that
26 they would not make the decision at this meeting. They were only gathering information.

27 Robert Nied fully supported the library's request for funding because it was a terrific resource. He
28 agreed with Heather that the library had been through a difficult time. He said the library has
29 maintained the sustainability fund which is managed by M&T Bank and built into that fund is the
30 ability to withdraw funds and the previous board had voted on how much could be taken annually
31 which he thought was around 5%. It was built just for contingencies such as unexpected expenses
32 and losses of revenue. He suggested any open questions could be answered by M&T Bank or the
33 previous treasurer. He agreed the technology upgrades were critical but wanted to correct the
34 misconception that the upgrades were deferred. He said the trustees had deferred to the director to
35 do asset assessments and do any upgrades, so any needed upgrades were not known by the board.
36 He has seen two or three times that the strategic plan was never approved by the previous board.
37 The board voted for the content of the strategic plan. The director was tasked with final formatting,
38 graphics, and cleanup of that plan and it was never presented to the trustees because she resigned.

39 Bill Dakin pointed out that they had a \$13,000 deficit and that money had to come out of their
40 source of income, so they weren't ignoring those funds. Bill also noted that Robert Nied had said
41 the wealth management fund provided an annual withdrawal of income for them, but Bill said it
42 had suffered a significant loss with all the other stock investments the past 12 months or whatever
43 that period was. They are down over \$30,000, so if they had that increased value in their stock
44 plan, they would certainly be able to withdraw that 4% or 5% amount. As with others involved in
45 investments, their fund has dropped significantly so the money wasn't available. He was sure M&T

1 Bank would support the 4.5% withdrawal because of the drop in value of their investment fund.
2 The \$13,000 deficit is coming out of their surplus and the management fund isn't nearly as robust
3 as it was a year ago. Arne and Julie thanked Bill for the information.

4 Arne agreed with some of the statements that the library was an important part of the community.
5 It was well staffed and well embraced by the community. Arne thought it was attractive for
6 businesses and people moving to town and hoped they could do what was equitable and right when
7 they looked at it.

8 Lee asked if Donna had the amount of accessible funds. She will provide copies of the balance
9 sheet. Pam hoped to see everyone at the library.

10 **Agenda Item 7, 2023 General Fund Budget Review**

11 Julie had updated expenses through December 15th and noted one more payroll would be added
12 and more revenue before the end of the year. She had met with the auditor and went over the
13 financials. They discussed expenses that could be kicked out to one-time funds for 2023 only. The
14 auditor agreed it was the thing to do this year and encouraged all his towns to use their ARPA
15 funds in ways they are proposing, such as for cost overruns from the Emergency Services Building
16 and the Town Garage project which were directly related to COVID. The money is available, and
17 it wouldn't use all of it. Arne noted the Board had discussed using the ARPA funds this way
18 previously and agreed.

19 On January 4th there will be a discussion with the Trustees of Public Funds that they want \$16,000
20 for the Cemetery shed expansion, \$8,000 for the cemetery tree maintenance for 2023 and the tree
21 maintenance cost of \$8,000 that was expended in 2023. Arne noted the fund was specifically for
22 these expenses. Julie said Chester has economic development funds and policy dictates how that
23 is spent and there is language that allows the town the ability to borrow from it. Arne suggested
24 that if the Town borrowed from itself, there wouldn't be the interest charged if they borrowed from
25 an outside source. Ben said to Bill's point, it may be better to let the money sit with how money
26 markets are doing. Julie was going to compile what they needed to borrow for 2023 into one bond
27 because bonds are getting better rates than going to the bank.

28 The next budget presented to the board will have final expenses for 2022.

29 Heather understood the community input received regarding ARPA funds was done before they
30 knew any of the expenses but solar was also included and she asked where it stood presently. Julie
31 said Lee had helped tremendously with it and they now had everything. She expected to receive
32 the appraisal by mid-January and as soon as she had it, she would give it to the Board. If there was
33 interest at that point, true negotiations could begin. Julie said there would still be a balance of about
34 \$500,000 in ARPA funds.

35 **Agenda Item 8, Sign Loan Documents**

36 When the capital plan was approved for 2022, the voters approved the paving of the highway
37 garage and their match to the Popple Dungeon Bridge project. Julie doesn't borrow the money
38 until needed. The projects, which came in under budget, are finished, so that's what the loan
39 documents were for.

40 Ben moved and Lee seconded a motion for the Town of Chester Capital Improvement Note dated
41 December 29, 2022, for \$210,000. A vote was taken, and the motion passed.

42 Ben moved and Lee seconded a motion for the Town of Chester Resolution Capital Improvement

1 Borrowing for \$210,000 at an interest rate of 4.25%. A vote was taken, and the motion passed.
2 Lee moved and Leigh seconded a motion for the Town of Chester Tax Certificate Capital
3 Improvement borrowing for \$210,000.

4 **Agenda Item 9, Health Officer Reappointment**

5 Heather moved to reappoint Amanda Silva as Health Officer for 3 years. Leigh seconded the
6 motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. Several stated what an amazing
7 emergency services group the town has.

8 **Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda**
9

- 10 • The budget, the Trustee of Public funds, and the union agreement on January 4th.
- 11 • Set the budget, review the Town Warning, and the Local Cannabis Control Committee will
12 update the Board, and the Police Advisory Panel Discussion on January 18th.
- 13 • Special Meeting on January 20th to sign the warning.

14
15 Arne noted there had been a building purchased for retail cannabis. Lee said the permit for retail
16 cannabis had not yet been submitted to the State. Julie knew there was an intent to file one. Lee
17 stated the Zoning Administrator had informed the Commission a permit was requested. Lee said
18 when it goes to the state, they will be notified and it's official.

19
20 Ben said bad weather and very strong winds were coming for the weekend and to prepare to be
21 without power and possibly flooding. Leigh thanked the crew and public safety for doing the
22 fabulous job helping those without power during the horrific storm recently.

23 **Agenda Item 10, Adjourn**

24 Lee moved to adjourn, and Ben seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed,
25 and the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

26 (Brief intermission.)

27
28 **WATER AND WASTEWATER COMMISSIONERS' AGENDA**
29 **December 21, 2022**
30 **Following Regular Selectboard Meeting**

31 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 9:07 p.m.

32 **Agenda Item 1, Citizens Comments**

33 Arne asked for any other comments and there were none.

34 **Agenda Item 2, 2023 Water Budget Review**

35 Julie noted revenue was down slightly but was because a billing was done in November that wasn't
36 due until December, so it had not yet been received. They expected it would come in on target.
37 The 2023 budget there was income on the facilities line and was due to the Facilities Director
38 needing a vehicle and water was getting rid of their truck, so he is utilizing that vehicle. The general
39 fund is purchasing it from the Water Department. Expenses are up as they have been doing
40 maintenance that had been put off for years in water and wastewater and were able to get caught
41 up. For 2023, Jeff was not anticipating any price increases. They have had one staff member leave

1 and are not feeling the need to replace him at this time. If it changes down the road, they will
2 advertise. All 3 staff members in the past were divided by department and are now covering both
3 departments so the budget lines will reflect that as far as health insurance and other expenses. To
4 help the general fund, they have a married couple who work in two different departments and the
5 general fund has been carrying the entire expense because they are on one plan and now, they have
6 divided it. It allocates to water what is appropriate and is relieving the general fund. They are
7 expecting a slight decrease in water.

8 **Agenda Item 3, 2023 Sewer Budget Review**

9 The same applied to sewer regarding a decrease in salary. Jeff is not anticipating any real price
10 increase and the budget is down. Both accounts have healthy fund balances, but they have started
11 using them. There may be a potential rate increase and do not expect it to be extraordinary. They
12 have the asset management plan, and a potential second well. They will propose something in early
13 2023 and do not anticipate it will be a big increase. Rates have not been raised for 7 or 8 years.

14 **Agenda Item 4, Adjourn**

15 Lee moved and Heather seconded to adjourn. A vote was taken, and the motion passed. The
16 meeting was adjourned at 9:17 p.m.

