

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **SELECTBOARD MEETING**
3 **February 15, 2023, Minutes**

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

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

8 **Visitors Present:** Shawn Cunningham, Dr. Victoria Dubin Master, Cheryl Joy Lipton, Arianna
9 Knapp, Jerry Aldrich, Bruce Aldrich, Jerene Slivinsky, Steve Slivinsky, Leslie Thorsen, Scott
10 Gilgus, and Eva Ryan at Town Hall; and SAPA TV, Tom Diak, Melody Reed, John Velit, Joy
11 Slaughter, Evan Parks via Zoom.

12
13 **Call to Order**

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 and asked those at Town Hall to sign the attendance sheet.

17
18 **Agenda Item 1, Approve minutes from the February 1, 2023, Selectboard Meeting**

19 Lee made a motion and Leigh seconded it to approve the February 1, 2023, minutes. There were
20 no changes. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved. Heather abstained from voting as
21 she had not attended the meeting.

22 **Agenda Item 2, Citizens' Comments/Answers from Previous Meeting**

23 Arne asked if there were any comments and there were none.

24 **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

25 Report given by the Town Manager:

26 Solar Field

27 The appraisal has been sent to Greenbacker with no reply received yet. Julie will give them until
28 next week to respond before she contacts them again.

29 Brookside Trail

30 The signs are up and ready for the Winter Carnival.

31 Winter Carnival

32 The carnival is this weekend, and it will be interesting to see what happens given the weather prior
33 to the weekend. There will be different events around town on Friday and Saturday.

34 Wayfinding Signage

35 They are hoping to go out to bid this spring. They are currently working on maps for the kiosks.
36 A few people in town are helping with what they want them to look like. The map won't identify
37 individual businesses as they want the map to stay true for years to come but they will be creative
38 with some different things. They are looking to install signs this summer.

1 Policies

2 Preston and Julie will work on reviewing policies this summer. Preston does policy and ordinance
3 writing. Julie hoped there would be a list for the board at the next meeting showing the current
4 policies and proposed updates and if some policies are still needed.

5 Arne said if there were no objections by the board, he wanted to bring up the Chester Community
6 Gardens after the Canal Street discussion. There were no objections.

7 **Agenda Item 4, Canal Street Well boundary line discussion**

8 Prior to this meeting, they had a site visit at 5:00 p.m. on Canal Street. Part of the work the town
9 had been doing as part of the Community Gardens was to verify the boundary lines on the Canal
10 Street property. There was a discrepancy in the survey done for the town and one done by a
11 neighbor on the southside. It was Aldriches' property next to the Canal Street property. The survey
12 was done in the 1960s. The town had relied on one from the 1950s and then the 70s or 80s. Lee,
13 Arne, and Julie visited the property. Arne said it was a sliver of a property and a small triangle on
14 the border and if anyone was interested, maps were available. Arne thought it was 150 feet long
15 and 30 or 40 feet wide to a point. Lee said it was 3,800 square feet of property that they were
16 talking about. There are two pins, one pin that the Aldriches claim was the corner of their property
17 and one that was set by Gary Rapanotti for the survey he did for the town. Physical evidence
18 seemed to favor what the Aldriches were saying. Arne said it was up to the Selectboard how they
19 wanted to pursue it. Arne said they could have a giant court battle and get surveyors for a sliver of
20 property, but it wouldn't serve the town and wasn't in a place that would change anything that may
21 come along in the future. Arne asked for the other members' opinions for proceeding.

22 Lee agreed that it wasn't a critical piece of property that the town needed to own, and he didn't
23 see any reason they would spend any more money or time on the issue and was happy to see it
24 work out for both parties.

25 Leigh could agree with the information received from Gary Rapanotti and she could also see from
26 the information received from Mr. Aldrich that although there was a discrepancy, it didn't seem
27 like it was something that would bother him.

28 Heather was curious if they did a new title, what the tax implications would be and if they were
29 retroactive because the property would be assessed at a different rate. Julie said the town doesn't
30 have any interest in the 3,800 square feet and would do a boundary line adjustment between the
31 town and the Aldriches. Once approved by the Development Review Board, it would trigger the
32 listers to do a new valuation with the additional acreage that the Aldriches are given. That would
33 affect their April 1st Grand List. The Grand List is not retroactive. Arne wondered how the tax
34 maps showed the property and Julie thought they showed it to the Aldriches' perspective, which
35 Arne said if that was the case, probably would not affect their taxes. Heather said since she didn't
36 go on the visit, she would yield to Arne and Lee and go along with them. Arne said both he and
37 Lee agreed the boundary adjustment was the best way to go. Arne thought it wasn't worth spending
38 more money on surveys and lawyers, and the physical evidence leaned toward the Aldriches' claim
39 with the vegetation and the way the canal may have been there at one time. Lee said the site listed
40 the actual acreage as what was shown in green on the map and listed it as half an acre, so Lee
41 didn't think there would be a tax implication.

42 Heather said as long as the property owners were aware it could change the Grand List, she was
43 okay with it. Arne said it may be a few dollars but that the Grand List could also be correct and

1 there would be no change. Julie noted the property owners were in the room.
2 Lee said the town had talked about making a river walkway and it may be an opportunity to ask if
3 the owners would mind people walking through the backyard to the river. Mr. Aldrich said it was
4 something they would need to think about.
5 Lee moved and Heather seconded the motion to start the process. The members agreed it was the
6 right thing to do. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.
7 The property owners thanked the board for their careful consideration.

8 **Agenda Item 8, Chester Community Garden Update**

9 At the last meeting, they gave the community garden group a license agreement. Arne said it started
10 out as a lease agreement and was changed to a license agreement per recommendation of the town's
11 attorney. The Community Garden's attorney has reviewed it and come up with some ideas and
12 thoughts and issues they weren't comfortable with. Following discussion and debate by the group,
13 they have considered joining in with the town under an agreement where they would carry out
14 their community gardens under the auspices, direction, and collaboration of the town. Arne wanted
15 to bring that up as an option that would solve a few problems, including the legal end of it with
16 responsibilities and insurances. He wanted to know how the other members thought about that.
17 Arne knew the group met yesterday and was okay with that and were agreeable to start the project
18 on a small scale. Arne wanted to know if the others on the board were open to that or wanted to
19 proceed with the license agreement.

20 Heather asked how the frisbee course on town property was managed. Arne said it was under the
21 auspices of the recreation department and had been built by a group of volunteers. The town has
22 helped now and then over the years, but it was with permission of the town under with a group of
23 volunteers who basically built it. Julie agreed and said it was run by the town. All money was run
24 through the town. Arne asked if the Community Gardens would work the same way. Julie agreed.
25 She said if it was going to be run through the town, the financial piece would also need to be.
26 Heather was just using the frisbee course as an analogy and Arne thought that was a fair
27 comparison. Arne mentioned Chester Townscape as a comparison, although not the same. Julie
28 said Chester Townscape has the town's permission, but the money doesn't run through the town.
29 Heather asked if it was the same with the snowmobile association who only gets permission to use
30 trails and Julie agreed. Lee said the frisbee course falls under the direction of the recreation
31 department but was an actual town course operated by the town. Lee wondered if the garden space
32 fell under the direction of the recreation department, who would do the actual operation and
33 manage the plots. Lee wondered how that would work. Julie thought it would work like the frisbee
34 course. The recreation department runs it but most of the work is done by the conservation
35 committee. Julie added that it wasn't something that consumed a lot of Matt's time. She could see
36 the garden being very much the same. Arne agreed and didn't see it falling back on the town. Lee
37 wondered if there was an issue with the gardens or the group not being able to continue, who would
38 be responsible for the cleanup and Julie said the town. Arne said Matt did very little with disc golf
39 and the separate organization working in conjunction with the town made it work the way it did.

40 Heather asked if they could approve the gardens for a two-year period and then reassess. Lee
41 wasn't ready to vote and wanted more time to consider it as it was the first he had heard about it.
42 Lee thought Cheryl Joy may have more information to share. Before Cheryl Joy could speak,
43 Melody Reed of the garden group spoke up and said according to the Vermont Community

1 Network Organization, there were over 600 community gardens in Vermont and she thought half
2 were on town property so they didn't need to reinvent the wheel. She thought the other half were
3 on school property. Melody thought Julie had reached out to other towns to ask them questions
4 about their gardens. Melody just wanted to mention that most were on town property and run by
5 their recreation departments.

6 Cheryl Joy pointed out that most of them were part of the letter of support when the project was
7 even bigger than currently. She said it was now smaller and wasn't permanent and she thought it
8 was easy to remove gardens, if necessary and didn't include the greenhouse which all who were
9 in attendance had supported. She pointed out it was mid-February and wanted to start when mud
10 season ended and needed to know to move forward giving out plots. Cheryl Joy said the only
11 difference was they would have no lease and less protection while the town would have more
12 protection. She said they had talked about it for a couple of years and answered questions and
13 didn't know what would hold them back. Lee wondered what the cost impact would be on the
14 town. Lee said it wasn't that he didn't think it was a good idea but wanted to make sure they
15 weren't setting the town up for something that was unforeseen for the taxpayer. Lee was only
16 asking for two weeks. Cheryl Joy said she meant to say the comparison between the town and the
17 organization wasn't that the town had more responsibility but that they have less liability. She said
18 the group would have less protection and the town would have more protection without the license.
19 Lee said he wasn't disagreeing with her but now the town would be taking on more financial
20 responsibility than they would have had, and he wanted to make sure he considered all the
21 implications. Lee thought it was a good idea but wasn't ready to vote and said if the others were,
22 to go ahead.

23 Arne thought over the past two years, whenever it got closer to something positive happening,
24 more questions would come up. He said the garden group had provided everything they had asked
25 for, including plans, schedules, details of their mission and how it would work. Arne would be
26 surprised if it involved more than one hour of Matt's time per week. They would have control over
27 what was happening. Arne thought the fact that Lee brought up a fear of the future seemed to be a
28 common thread when people were against things. Lee said it wasn't a fear but a concern for the
29 unknown and thought they may be splitting hairs, but it seemed to him that while they had been
30 given a lot of information, he had to ask for it and it wasn't provided up front. Lee just wanted
31 time to consider the new proposal. He said he was concerned for the taxpayer of Chester and was
32 surprised he was the only one concerned. Arne thought they were looking at it through different
33 eyes and he wasn't worried about it becoming a problem for the town or the fact they may have to
34 spend a few dollars to help it along. He thought it was a positive thing for the town to get
35 community members together.

36 Cheryl Joy didn't see that the town would have to spend a lot of money on it. She only saw going
37 to Matt on occasion for something. Lee gave the scenario that the town gives permission and a
38 dozen plots go in and the Garden Group dissolves, then the town must clean it up. Lee said there
39 could be timbers and other things put in that the town must clean up or someone uses a banned
40 substance that causes issue with the ground or groundwater. He thought they needed to be totally
41 aware of the potential they may face down the road.

42 Heather asked Julie if she saw any cost to the town. Julie saw only occasional labor but not a lot
43 of cost. Heather wondered if they would allow up to 12 plots for the next two years, would Julie
44 be comfortable it wouldn't bring a lot of cost to the town. Julie wanted directions from the board
45 for phasing in and a definition of the number. Julie didn't see it as being something they couldn't

1 work through and said if they were going to go this route, she could prepare a memorandum of
2 understanding and lay out the details with Cheryl Joy or go without it if that's what the board
3 wanted. Arne questioned why that was needed if the town had complete control over it. Julie said
4 the board had been divided and as town manager, she needed direction from the board.

5 Heather wanted to see something written up and then vote at the next meeting for X amount over
6 the next two to three years and how they wanted to phase it in and the relationship between parks
7 and recreation and the group making her very comfortable voting. She was supportive of it.

8 Lee said that was fine with him.

9 Melody Reed said they had been planning to finetune their strategic, fundraising, and business
10 plans and would meet with Stephen Plunkard on Sunday the 26th and she was hoping for a decision
11 before that meeting. Plunkard has years of experience working with non-profit groups and
12 municipalities and is on the Selectboard in Cavendish. They were lucky he wanted to help them.
13 She said it would help them finetune reality if they had permission before they met. Cheryl Joy
14 said they would update the strategic plan at the meeting, and it would be helpful to know.

15 Arne understood some of the board wanting to wait two weeks, but it struck him as being
16 disingenuous. He couldn't remember any conversations even remotely resembling what they have
17 had for the past two years for the Chester Disc Golf or the Chester Townscape. They never
18 discussed money, yet the Townscape receives money from the Trustees of Public Funds. They
19 never discussed liability but they're on bridges watering plants while tractor trailers zip by. For
20 some reason, the Community Gardens project has drawn more criticism and more concern than a
21 lot of other things that were equally comparable. Leigh agreed with Arne. Heather was fine voting
22 and having Julie and the board of the Community Gardens do a memorandum afterwards. Heather
23 was just putting it forward because of Lee's concern.

24 Arne asked how the board would like to handle it. Julie said they could make a motion to approve
25 the gardens with the understanding there would be a document prepared that clarified the first
26 phase. Heather moved that they approve the garden and work with the town and Julie to come up
27 with a written statement and Leigh seconded. Arne asked for discussion and Lee noted that he
28 already had said his piece. A roll call vote was taken with Leigh aye, Heather aye, Lee abstained,
29 and Arne voted yes. The motion passed. It will be on the agenda in two weeks to finalize the
30 details.

31 Arne thanked the group for sticking with them and thought it would be a fantastic addition to the
32 town and offer a place for people in town who didn't have access to a place to grow things. He
33 hoped people embraced it as other projects with community involvement had been. Cheryl Joy
34 thanked them and thought the group would make them all happy. She was excited to move forward.

35 **Agenda Item 5, Coin Drop; American Legion**

36 The American Legion is requesting to have a coin drop on Friday, May 26th. This was the first one
37 requested for 2023. Heather moved and Leigh seconded a motion to accept the request. A vote was
38 taken, and the motion passed.

39 **Agenda Item 6, Citizen Advisory Committee**

40 Julie and Chief Tom Williams had spent a fair amount of time looking at different policies from
41 other towns in the state who have an advisory committee. The document before the board was a
42 compilation of those policies. The group would be a liaison between the community and the police

1 directing how they want policing in Chester and the needs of the community. Tom is excited and
2 has thoughts and ideas of how it could benefit Chester. Julie posted an ad in the paper for people
3 who wanted to serve on the committee with a deadline of March 3rd. At the March 15th Selectboard
4 meeting, interviews will be conducted and then appointments made. They are proposing a 5-
5 member group. Julie and Tom will not be members of the committee but will attend the meetings.
6 Lee and Leigh both thought the document was well laid out. Lee said the composition and
7 committee expectations were good. He said the goal was to have 5 members who sat for a 3-year
8 term with the first grouping staggered. Lee noted it was limited to two consecutive terms to allow
9 for rotation in the community. Arne asked if anything in the document had to be changed by the
10 Selectboard or if it could be changed by the committee. Julie said it had to be changed by the
11 Selectboard, but the committee could make recommendations and hoped they would.

12 Heather suggested they request a joint meeting once a year to see how it is all going. She wanted
13 to include a sentence that the Selectboard's expectation was having communication by the
14 committee with the board. Arne thought that was a good idea to have a yearly review and suggested
15 the same for the Community Gardens. It would fall under committee expectations. Lee noted under
16 composition that members that miss 3 meetings may be considered to have vacated their position
17 and wondered if it was 3 consecutive meetings or any. Julie said it would be a committee that
18 meets monthly and if someone misses 3, they will have missed a quarter of the meetings. Other
19 town managers have used the language and including it was a way to get others involved. Julie
20 said it was up to the board. They agreed using the word "may" would allow for leeway if something
21 came up. Lee liked that extenuating circumstances would be considered. Lee liked the committee
22 expectations list and asked if the town had its own conflict of interest policy. Julie said it does. Lee
23 thought the whole expectation of the committee should be coming from a standpoint of how to
24 improve the policing community and the community interaction with the police and the police
25 with the community. He thought that was critical to have the entire list. Lee did question the ride
26 along and if it set them up for liabilities. Julie said there would be waiver forms to sign. Tom felt
27 members should ride along so there are perspectives of the daily life of a police officer in Chester.
28 Arne thought it would be valuable insight.

29 Arne wondered why the language of committee members not utilizing meetings to facilitate their
30 personal agendas was included. Julie said it came from another town and could be removed. Arne
31 thought it almost seemed like they were expecting it to be an issue. Julie thought it was added to
32 someone's policy based on something that happened. Heather thought a conflict-of-interest policy
33 would cover it. Lee liked the personal agenda and said it made it clear as conflict of interest could
34 be subject to interpretation. Heather thought the personal agenda was very objective. Lee thought
35 conflict of interest was unless someone had a clear conflict they don't recognize or do but they're
36 ignoring it. Lee was okay with removing personal agenda but didn't think it hurt to include it.
37 Heather wanted to take it out but said it was a living document. She preferred to start out without
38 it. Arne asked for the consensus of the board. Lee was for leaving it in but was okay with removing
39 it if the others wanted to. Heather and Leigh wanted it removed. They decided to take it out.

40 Julie would present a final copy at the next meeting and had received letters of interest from several
41 people so there was interest in being on the committee, which was great.

42 Leslie Thorsen asked who would make up the committee and if it was representatives from certain
43 professions or just five interested community members. Lee said it was in the document and listed
44 that the members would represent a range of interests and experiences such as business owners,
45 education, non-profits, public safety, community, faith community, youth representation and more

1 and saw it being as inclusive as possible. Leslie wondered why it wouldn't be all community
2 members rather than listing specifics. Lee said it was an example. Leslie didn't see the list as
3 inclusionary and thought it was exclusionary if you didn't fall into one of those groups. Arne
4 suggested adding community members. Lee said it was already in there and was fine with the
5 language and didn't see it as problematic. Lee noted it said active community members and then
6 gave examples of who it might include. Leslie thought it should just say all community members.
7 Arne said they could just say a cross section of community members. Leslie questioned the
8 definition of active and thought instead of active it should say all community members who live
9 in the town of Chester. The board members were fine with the wording. Julie would make the other
10 changes and bring the final document to the next meeting. Julie said they will do interviews on
11 March 15th and could either appoint members that night or at the next meeting. Arne noted any
12 community members were welcome to give a letter of interest to the town to be on committee.

13 Arianna Knapp asked if the document would be made available to members of the public who
14 were considering being on the community. Julie said now that the board has seen the document
15 and the changes are made, it will be posted to the website. The meetings will be public, warned,
16 have minutes, and follow the open meeting law. Arne said it had taken a while to get there but they
17 had to hire a police chief first.

18 **Agenda Item 7, Set New Ambulance Rates**

19 Arne noted the rates were below average. Julie said the last time rates were raised was in 2021 and
20 they were not raised in 2022. It was time given the cost increases across the area. Amie and Mike
21 Randzio put together a list of what the average was of ambulance services in the area are billing.
22 Chester averages, in some cases, almost a \$400 difference. The non-transport charge is something
23 new. Julie said Chester is the only one that doesn't charge and every time the ambulance leaves
24 the station it's at least \$100 in labor. As a result, Chester is spending a lot of money. In the past
25 three years, it would have totaled about \$34,000. They aren't looking to be a for-profit ambulance
26 service but they need to at least cover their labor cost. The \$100 refusal fee is the standard fee that
27 most municipalities charge. Julie recommended they charge the average rate and asked that they
28 approve the \$100 charge for non-transport refusal.

29 Lee moved and Leigh seconded to increase rates to the average rates and the non-transport refusal
30 fee of \$100. Heather suggested they review it every 2 years. Julie said that is what their practice
31 has been. A vote was taken, and the motion passed.

32 Lee said his son used to live in East Wallingford and the ambulance service from Mount Holly
33 that covered East Wallingford sent out a letter every year to the community that if you paid a \$50
34 fee, you receive free services. Julie said Ludlow also does that. Lee wasn't sure what the advantage
35 would be. Arne could see a lot of seniors benefitting.

36 Heather said the difficulty was they pay taxes for the ambulance service so people who receive a
37 bill are upset because they pay for it in their taxes. Arne hoped most of the time that insurance paid
38 for it. Julie said when people don't have insurance, they don't aggressively go after them, and they
39 have a write-off line in the budget. Heather thought that was great they weren't super aggressive
40 because it was difficult if you don't have insurance. Arne thought it was sad that the U.S., the
41 richest country in the world, doesn't provide equal healthcare.

42 **Agenda Item 9, Certificate of Highway Mileage**

43 The Certificate of Highway Miles is a document that is signed yearly. In Chester, Class 1 roads

1 are 2 ½ miles, Class 2, which are mostly paved roads, are 12.6 miles, Class 3 is mostly dirt roads
2 and there are 75 miles of them, and there are 19.1 miles of state highway for a total of 109 miles.
3 Chester is the second largest in miles of dirt roads in the state per capita. Lee offered kudos to the
4 highway department for the job they do. The members signed the certificate.

5 **Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda**

6 Arne noted the Academy building and the solar field would be on the agenda whenever
7 Greenbacker gets back to them. Lee asked when they would hear from the finance guy. Arne spoke
8 with a guy who has a second home in Chester on Lovers Lane. Until they have the answers to a
9 lot of those financial questions, he doesn't know if it's a good idea. The gentleman, who does a lot
10 of this work, thinks it is a good idea but would need that information to give an accurate response.
11 Arne said he is not charging for his services. Lee wondered about the logistics and if they should
12 attempt to get some of the information while they are waiting for Greenbacker. Julie thought if
13 they weren't paying for it, she would dig out what information she could find. It would help to
14 know at what point it wasn't a good return on investment. Julie thought the analysis would help
15 them come up with a number to counter back with. Lee thought it was worth gathering the
16 information and thanked Arne for connecting with the gentleman.

17 **Agenda Item 11, Executive Session; Town Manager Review**

18 Lee made a motion and Leigh seconded it to go into executive session to continue the yearly town
19 manager review. A vote was taken, and it passed unanimously, and they entered executive session
20 at 7:51 p.m.

21 (Executive Session)

22 Lee moved and Leigh seconded a motion to leave the executive session. The motion passed, and
23 the executive session ended at 8:13 p.m.

24 **Agenda Item 12, Adjourn**

25 Lee moved and Leigh seconded to adjourn the regular meeting. A vote was taken, and the meeting
26 was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.