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**TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECTBOARD MEETING
February 7, 2023, Minutes**

14 **Board Members Present:** Lee Gustafson, Arne Jonynas, Arianna Knapp, and Peter Hudkins at
15 Town Hall. Heather Chase via Zoom.

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

18 **Visitors Present:** Ian Montgomery, Polly Montgomery, Paul Bidgood, Barre Pinske, Bill Lindsay,
19 Sean Cunningham, Lauren Ingersoll, Mike Kenworthy, at Town Hall; and John Velit, Tim Roper,
20 Steve Mancuso via Zoom.

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Call to Order

33 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. Arne noted that Heather may be
34 joining them by Zoom later.

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Agenda Item 1, Additions or Deletions to the Agenda

There were no changes to the agenda.

**Agenda Item 2, Approve Minutes from the January 17, 2024, Selectboard Meeting and
January 19, 2024, Special Selectboard Meeting**

Lee moved and Arianna seconded a motion to approve the January 17, 2024, Selectboard meeting
minutes. There were no changes, and the minutes were approved, as written. Arne noted it was a
lengthy meeting, the minutes were long, and that Susan had done a good job with them.

Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to approve the January 19, 2024, Special Selectboard
meeting minutes. There were no changes, and the minutes were approved, as written.

Agenda Item 3, Citizens Comments/Answers from Previous Meeting

(It was noted that Heather had joined the meeting by Zoom.)

Ian Montgomery said he was unavoidably absent from the last meeting when so much was talked
about and decided regarding short-term rentals. He thought \$600 was an irritant for the unhosted
people and lives next to a neighbor who runs an unhosted Airbnb and Ian thought the increase was
overkill and should remain at \$300. Ian said it was just one more thing to make his neighbor mad
at the town. Ian wanted clarification on 60 or 55 STRs referring to unhosted rentals and wanted it
written in the ordinance as he would hate for it to be a misunderstanding because it was important.
Ian thought second homeowners shouldn't be alienated. He is one of the people who purchased his
home before retirement and thought they should help the second homeowners and not alienate
them as they are a significant part of the economy. Ian thought they should limit the number of
STRs unhosted and thought 60 was a wonderful number to begin with and allow some people to
come in and find a way to have a short-term rental. Ian said his neighbors, who purchased the
Waters' house, had major legal issues with the conveyancing and had to wait for a lien to be

1 vacated. He wanted to know if the ordinance would be backdated or from the date issued and
2 should be made clear. Arne noted they would cover it again at the next meeting. Ian volunteers in
3 South America and it can be tricky attending meetings, even from Zoom, so he apologized for
4 being late.

5
6 Barre Pinske, of the Planning Commission, said they had addressed short-term rentals. He is
7 looking at an adventure stay and building a bear house in town. They won an Airbnb prize to build
8 a bear house, but it went awry and they're struggling to get it done. Barre still has a desire to do it
9 and it would be culturally interesting. It would be built for the purpose of short-term renting and
10 not taking away current housing. Barre wanted the ordinance language to allow something like
11 that. Barre said it would take some investment and vision to make it happen and hoped to do that
12 after he got his place cleaned up.

13
14 Steve Mancuso had heard about an infrastructure study in town for almost a year and was curious
15 how it was coming and if something would be published for citizens to read. Julie asked Steve to
16 specify what he was referring to and he said he asked the Planning Commission the same question
17 and they deferred him. Steve understood they were investigating water/sewer and power was
18 probably relevant because infrastructure is all inclusive and everything that is going on in town
19 regarding development and growth is predicated on the well-being or status of infrastructure. Steve
20 heard there are entities in town investigating the infrastructure and doing studies on it and as a
21 taxpayer, he wanted to know if the study would be published. Arne said they just finished mapping
22 the sewer lines throughout town and expected Naomi from the engineering group to present to the
23 board soon regarding sewer plans and the water lines that were done a couple years ago. Julie said
24 there were three studies done regarding water and wastewater. One was the lead line inventory
25 which had just been completed; the second was the wastewater asset management plan which is in
26 draft form and had just been accepted by the state so Naomi would present it at the second meeting
27 in March to the new full board; and the third was the study by Jeff Hauffer for the secondary well
28 required by the state. Jeff issued a report and there was feedback so they are waiting on the final
29 which will be submitted to the state and Naomi will present that. Julie said stemming from the
30 wastewater asset management plan, an application has been filed to be on the priority list for the
31 Depot Street forest main which will include the First Avenue pump station. That project they are
32 hoping will get funded to be constructed in 2025. The other project is the actual work to the
33 secondary well. Steve thanked Julie and asked when it would come to fruition, when the public
34 would be privy to their studies, and when they could read up and be educated and understand where
35 they are as a town concerning infrastructure. Julie said they would become public after she receives
36 them, and the board has seen them and accepted by the state. Julie invited Steve to view drafts
37 until the report is published, which isn't published until it's been accepted by the state as there can
38 be changes. Steve appreciated it and thanked Julie. Arne thanked Steve and noted the process
39 started years ago and Julie agreed and said the process takes time if you want it funded.

40 41 **Agenda Item 4, Old Business**

42
43 Report given by the Town Manager, Julie Hance:

44 45 Legislative Updates Proposed by Heather

46 Heather has offered to give legislative updates at Selectboard meetings monthly and asked Julie to

1 poll the board and they thought monthly would be good. Heather said it was one of her last
2 meetings as a Selectboard member and was appreciative for the experience which benefited her in
3 her legislative role. Heather thought it would be good to give a report and have continued
4 communication when she's no longer a board member and Arne agreed. Julie suggested the second
5 meeting of the month. Heather asked them to decide what they wanted, and she would
6 accommodate them. Arianna clarified that it would only when Montpelier was in session. Heather
7 suggested attending quarterly when they were off session so there was continued communication,
8 even if it was a 10- or 15-minute update and thought that would be good for everyone.

9
10 Green Mountain Rail

11 Okemo Chamber is working with them to bring a holiday train to the region two weekends in
12 December. They would load in Chester and typically the trains are very busy and sell out so it
13 would bring quite a bit of traffic. Preston, who has a passion for trains, is on the committee. Julie
14 is working with some non-profit groups and thought it would be a great time to have an event in
15 the Depo those weekends whether it's a small fair or something with food options because it would
16 overwhelm Smitty's. Lee thought parking would be a big issue. Julie said because it was a rail
17 project, there would be parking by Erskine's which would help, and they are considering parking
18 by Cobleigh with a shuttle.

19
20 Julian Quarry

21 The notice of violation was issued, and Julie was expecting an appeal to the notice. Jim Carroll
22 will attend the next meeting to discuss the strategy and position of the town and that is all that can
23 be said at this point because the appeal has not been filed yet.

24
25 Grant Update

26 They were awarded the Municipal Planning Grant to study the 139 acres the town owns that houses
27 the water tank and gravel pit for a potential housing development project there. They were also
28 awarded the Urban and Community Forestry Grant which was a collaborative effort and will
29 include a lot of removal of dead trees and ash trees in the Village area and some plantings of newer
30 ones. That grant will also purchase a trailer that houses a water tank with small pump so that it will
31 be easier to water rather than ladies lugging around milk jugs full of water and the Chester
32 Townscape will be able to use it to water the flower boxes on the bridges. Julie has tried to defer
33 all public safety grants to Alisha, the new admin in the police department, who was awarded her
34 very first grant of \$37,000 to pay for two portable digital signs that could be used for road closures,
35 bridge work, major events, and is programable and solar powered. Julie will apply for a downtown
36 transportation grant fund which is on the current agenda. The library capital grants have finally
37 opened, and Julie has met with the librarian, and they will have another meeting with all the
38 players, including the architect, Scott Wunderlee, and a few others. They plan to use the grant for
39 ADA improvements to the building and improve access to the building for internet usage. They
40 are looking at creating soundproof booths in the library for telehealth meetings, confidential
41 meetings, and providing better equipment and space for any kind of internet usage. The downstairs
42 bathroom, kitchen, and front ramp are not ADA compliant so it will improve those as well. It is a
43 no match grant funding between \$300,000 and \$1.5 million projects. Alisha and Julie have been
44 discussing CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams) they are looking to set up for major
45 events and a Homeland Security Grant would potentially be a funding source for it. The sustainable
46 energy grant Julie and Lee have worked on would put a solar array on top of the town garage and

1 generate enough power for the garage itself. Lee asked Heather about HB 289 to eliminate group
2 net metering which would mean they couldn't install the solar array on the garage and use the
3 electricity that's credited to that account anywhere else for the town and the same would happen
4 if they expanded the existing solar array or bought that one and it would eliminate all the benefits
5 of community solar projects. Heather will research and follow-up. Lee said it would be a disaster
6 and Heather agreed. Lee said some utility companies were for it and he would discuss it with his
7 contacts at Green Mountain Power because it would go directly against their stated goals to be
8 energy efficient and going off fossil fuels. Julie said she would go ahead but there were several
9 steps if they got funding so she would apply. Heather said this was a perfect example of why
10 regular legislative updates from her at meetings were a good idea.

11
12 Julie said there were assistance to firefighter training grants and others that had no match
13 requirements. There were grants that can fund staff in EMS and there are things they are working
14 on to better run the three departments and she would be back with more details and to get approval
15 from the board before she applied. Alisha will help Julie with the public safety grants.

16
17 Arne asked if Preston had discussed passenger rail service being implemented. Julie understood
18 there was a desire to do that, but they had sold some of their nice passenger cars and wanted to see
19 what revenue the two holiday trains generate first. Julie said the station is starting to deteriorate
20 and would be nice to see it used.

21

22 **Agenda Item 5, Black River Area Community Coalition**

23

24 Lauren Ingersoll from Black River Community Coalition is a collaboration of individuals and
25 organizations supporting youth in Chester and Mount Holly and wanted to speak about the
26 organization. Lauren was present with the support of Barre Pinske, who was representing her
27 coalition team of volunteers. Lauren is the Projects Coordinator for BRCC, which is a substance
28 misuse prevention coalition. They mobilize individuals from different sectors of the community
29 under a shared mission for positive youth development. They provide youth, parents, schools, and
30 community-serving organizations with educational resources that increase awareness around
31 substance use issues. They look at local and regional data to identify trends in substance use. They
32 compare that data with their assessments to understand what the issues look like at the community
33 level. She is the only employee of BRACC and was hired to bring BRACC back to life because it
34 was at an operational standstill since Ludlow High School closed in 2019, then COVID hit, and
35 leadership disbanded. 20 years ago, BRACC began in Ludlow and worked closely with their high
36 school. Since their students are now part of Green Mountain, it made sense for BRACC to focus
37 their work in Chester. She spent the past year working closely with key players from GMU and
38 building an awesome team of local people. Her coalition advisory team has over 20 individuals
39 who gather monthly in person in Chester to discuss prevention strategies. When they look at the
40 data, which includes the 2021 youth risk behavior survey, the discussions at the Vermont youth
41 opportunity forums held in Rutland and Springfield, and qualitative feedback from the Chester
42 community has provided a consensus for youth third spaces being a huge asset for kids in the area.
43 From a prevention lens, they see this place as an opportunity to address root cause of substance
44 use and reduce risk factors in teens who feel isolated or like they don't matter in the community,
45 or teens who can benefit from having a place to socialize, be creative, start clubs, decompress, or
46 socialize outside of home and school and is why they call it a third place. She has reached out to

1 youth centers in Vermont and found a lot of role model organizations who have been successful.
2 There is support for the project from local school leaders and Chester residents who remember The
3 Underground. Lauren had posted on Chester Helping Hands' Facebook page looking for intel on
4 The Underground which received over 60 comments from people who only had positive things to
5 say, and the huge impact it had on families at that time. They are exploring the idea of bringing a
6 space like that back to Chester and are putting together a focus group of students from Green
7 Mountain and a loose list of potential building spaces. They are at a point where they wanted to
8 update the town on what they're doing. BRACC received a Prevention Lead Grant in November
9 covers their work for the next 18 months, so she plans to focus on assessment, capacity, and
10 planning phases of the third space idea. Assuming they move forward, she plans to spend
11 BRACC's next round of funding on the implementation phase and told the board they could refer
12 to the strategic prevention framework she included in the materials, which breaks it down into five
13 steps: assessment, planning, capacity, implementation, and evaluation. They are excited and open
14 to guidance. She invited town members to join the coalition meetings. Lauren told Heather she
15 recalled meeting her years ago when she worked with Scott Wunderlee and camped at her house
16 at one time. Heather said it was nice seeing her again and thanked her for her work.

17 Barre had stopped drinking and drugging in his early 20s and had struggled with addition his whole
18 life. When he was a kid, they could experiment but today it was scarier because they experiment
19 with Fentanyl and end up dead. It is partly why he got involved and recognized Lauren's
20 competency and was excited about what they were doing. Barre had spoken with Garrison about
21 the Jiffy Mart building he owns and staffing it for him with his original vision and he is open to
22 the possibility of using his building. Barre said the church and Academy Building were also
23 options. Lauren said Barre has been a great support and helped her network and is grateful for the
24 team she has. Arne asked when their meetings are. Lauren said they try to meet monthly, but the
25 meetings aren't on a set date/time. Because a lot of people want to be part of the conversation,
26 she's tried to schedule a variety of days/times for meetings. Lauren offered to include the board
27 on the poll for meeting times so they could receive an invite. Their next meeting is Sunday at 3:30
28 at Barre's studio. Having four kids, Arne fondly remembered The Underground from when they
29 were younger and said it had a positive effect and was a good memory for his kids. Lauren hadn't
30 heard one negative memory about it.

31 Tim Roper thanked Barre and Lauren for bringing it to the town and echoed what Arne said
32 regarding his own kids and it being a positive experience. Tim asked how to get on the email list
33 and Lauren said to email her his contact information. Her email address is lauren@braccvt.org.
34 Arne added her website was informational which Lauren said was www.braccvt.org.

35 Arne thought the town would be more than willing to help BRACC with their project. Lauren said
36 similar organizations have said their only barrier is getting community buy-in, but she hasn't seen
37 that issue here. Her only challenge she faced was getting the kids to be involved. She made another
38 post on Chester Helping Hands' Facebook page asking for 5 to 6 middle or highschoolers to speak
39 with them about their interests, ways to approach the project, and whether they would use it. She
40 had purchased gift cards to give the kids to compensate them for their time.

41 Heather agreed that her kids loved The Underground, and she loved dropping them off at a safe
42 place with responsible people, so she benefited from it too.

43 Barre said things may have changed for kids with respect to their interests and they are trying to
44 find out what those are to create a space oriented toward that and create a new history for them.

1 Lauren said they don't want to assume The Underground would be another music hub and wanted
2 to learn their interests first. Arne thought providing an opportunity for kids to socialize in person
3 rather than on their tablets or phones would be helpful. Lauren said that was the idea to break the
4 isolation. She said across the board for Vermont, 50% of all high school and middle school students
5 feel like they don't matter in their community. It's been a crazy past few years and they want to
6 provide a space where kids can see each other in person and do stuff together. Arne told Lauren
7 he appreciated it and was sure the board and town did. The board thanked her for coming.

8 **Agenda Item 6, 2024 Certificate of Highway Mileage**

9 Arne said annually they affirm Class 1, 2, 3, 4 roads and the trails in town. Class 1, 2, and 3 are
10 associated with financing from the state and Class 4 doesn't have any play as far as monetary
11 value. This year there was an addendum because there was a section of Bailey Hill Road,
12 approximately 1.09 miles being contested that it is not a Class 4 highway and was discontinued a
13 while ago. All the material brought about by the contention that it is not a Class 4 has been turned
14 over to the town's legal counsel and they are reviewing it but had recommended an addendum,
15 which Arne read and was part of the meeting packet.

16 Arne allowed public comment to speak to the issue.

17 Paul Bidgood stated that he was the one who had brought the matter to the board. He said he had
18 read the documents, which took about 15 minutes, knew the area, and the road had been
19 discontinued. Paul said he would appreciate it if the board members took 15 minutes and apprised
20 themselves of the situation. Paul stated that since it was a discontinued road, it was private
21 property. He had provided all the background which he said the Chairman did not want him to get
22 into. Paul said he had seen the addendum for the first time a few hours before the meeting when
23 the town manager provided him with it and had tried to put his thoughts together. Paul said it was
24 a one-page, simple document that referenced under oath and Title 19, Section 305. He had provided
25 the information to the board with his documentation. That section of the law is definitive, and he
26 thought they had the obligation to fix the record, once it was noted there was an error in it. Public
27 highways could only go on the Certificate of Highway Mileage and there was no authority for the
28 board to include private property, which Paul thought it was. Paul told the board they could read
29 the documents in 15 minutes and discuss them with Peter Farrar who was the road researcher. Paul
30 said it was mistakenly put on the map in 2010. Across the state, towns run into this issue all the
31 time where a mistake is observed, and the records get fixed. Paul had provided a sample of how
32 he would fix it. He re-stated it was a mandatory obligation for the board only to include town
33 highways and not private property. Paul thought the amendment was a mockery and not worth the
34 price of the paper it was written on and was ridiculous. Paul thought the board was lucky to have
35 Heather and asked them to send the document to her and go into the legislature. He wondered
36 where the legislative authority was to circumvent the law. Paul wondered who in their right mind
37 would put private property on the public highway map and asked them not to sign the document
38 at this meeting and to have Heather or someone else review it because he thought it was garbage.
39 Arne thanked him for his comments. Arne noted the town attorney was reviewing the documents
40 and recommended they go this route, and they would stay with the route as it was.

41 Arne entertained a motion to sign the Certificate of Mileage for the year ending February 10, 2024,
42 with the addendum attached. Peter moved and Lee seconded the motion. Lee commented that Paul
43 had been looking at it for decades and the board had only been given a couple of weeks. Lee didn't
44 know him and whether he could trust him but did know that Paul had a vested interest in his side

1 of the story and had not given Lee the benefit of looking into himself and was asking him to do
2 something that he didn't know if he should do or not. The point was upon the recommendation of
3 their attorney, they would proceed as normal with the opportunity to make corrections as stated.
4 Lee needed to make sure he understood both sides of the argument and an investigation done so
5 that he could make up his own mind and not have his arm twisted, which was what it felt like.
6 While Lee respected Paul's opinion and gave him the opportunity to express it, he didn't want to
7 delay and it was something that needed to be done before the 10th and with the addendum, they
8 were allowing an opportunity to fix it, if needed. Lee was happy to read the documentation but
9 contrary to Paul's assertion, it would take much longer than 15 minutes. Lee appreciated his
10 patience and said they would try to be as fair and understanding as they could but needed to make
11 up their own minds. Arne thanked Lee and said it was well put. A vote was taken, and the motion
12 passed unanimously. The members signed the Certificate.

13 **Agenda Item 7, Approve Resolution for Downtown Transportation Funds**

14 Julie said it would go before the Planning Commission for a quick special meeting they would
15 hold next week. Julie originally wasn't going to apply for the funds, but Gary Holloway suggested
16 she do so. In the Master Plan, they discussed several improvements for the Village Green, some
17 of those being the crossings, new curbing around the Green, better pedestrian access in front of the
18 shops, and several things identified in that Master Plan. There must be a transportation component,
19 which can be pedestrian traffic, and Julie wanted to use the funds to work on the path from
20 Cobleigh to the Green which would be paved this summer, access from the road to the Brookside
21 Trail and define that access, the crossings, and the electrification of the Green, which they've
22 discussed. Julie would have them look at the electrification of both sides of the Green, in front of
23 the information booth, including the Green, itself, which will be quite an undertaking. Currently,
24 in the winter, there are extension cords running all over for Christmas lights which is frowned
25 upon. While things are torn up, they can add conduit to deal with pedestrian lighting in that area.
26 All of this said, Phase I is design. Before Julie proposed all these changes, she suggested a design
27 phase, which they hadn't been quite ready for yet, but Gary from the program encouraged her to
28 apply. Jason Rasmussen and Scott Wunderlee are working with Julie to identify key components
29 they know they want, such as improving crossing and access to Cobleigh and Brookside, and start
30 attaching construction costs to it. Gary advised that once the design piece was done, they would
31 know actual construction costs. There is some flexibility within the award amount, but you can
32 always have two DTF funds open at the same time. The Wayfinding Grant will be closed out this
33 year. If they are awarded the transportation funds this year, they would start the design over the
34 winter in 2024/2025, in which case would open in February for downtown transportation funds for
35 the next round. Julie could apply for additional funds and design work would be completed at that
36 point and would know costs and could apply for more funds. It would be a great way to get the
37 improvements needed on the Green. Julie said it required community involvement discussion
38 around the design. Julie said the application was due February 19th and would require their
39 signature and signature of the Planning Commission next week. The grants are up to \$200,000
40 with a 20% match. Julie anticipated part of the match would be the funds the board had already
41 allocated from the Economic Development fund for the electrification and the other half would
42 come from the grant fund and wouldn't hit the tax base. Arne thought it was a worthy cause and
43 amazing that when they have studies and designations which was the groundwork for this. Not all
44 towns have gone through these steps and qualify to bid on funds like this, but Chester is prepared
45 to because they have taken these steps. Arne noted it has helped in the past to the tune of \$1 million
46 if not more. Arne said \$40,000 to get \$200,000 was money well spent and asked for the consensus

1 of the board. Lee and Peter thought it was a good idea. Arianna had availability and offered Julie
2 help in writing the grant. Heather said, “Go, Julie, go!” Julie said Downtown Transportation Funds
3 are only open to municipalities designated downtowns or village centers who have completed a
4 master plan through the Better Connections Grant, so only around 15 towns who can apply.
5 Peter said they needed to update the Master Plan and Julie responded that she and Arne had
6 discussed it today. When Better Connections opens next year, which funded the Master Plan, so it
7 would be the time to do an update.

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

9 Jim Carroll will be at the next meeting for an executive session on Julian Quarry. Arne mentioned
10 after the elections when the new board is established at the second meeting in March, they would
11 have a discussion on the Class 4 roads in general to go over the maps and to try to avoid a situation
12 like this again. Lee will be away on vacation during Town Meeting Day and will not be present.
13 Heather will be late for Town Meeting because she will attend the one in Athens first.

14 Bill Lindsay thought the Downtown Transportation Grant sounded good as laid out. He wanted an
15 update about the Economic Development Funds. He said there was a discussion about the
16 Economic Development Funds in the past and recommended paving in front of The Fullerton and
17 his constituents, at that time, didn’t think it was an appropriate use of the funds. Bill stood by his
18 push to get it done and was good for the town. Bill didn’t want to lose sight of the Economic
19 Development Funds which were established for a purpose and there should be growth in those
20 funds and the interest can help the fund and push it further for people down the road long after we
21 are gone. Bill wanted to know if there were loans out, if anyone had applied, and the growth of
22 that fund for the past five years. The fund may be able to help a new employer come to town. Arne
23 said they could include the funds and policy on a future agenda. Arne thought it was \$250,000 and
24 Julie said it was over \$300,000. Bill knew because of COVID, there had been a regular committee
25 for Economic Development meeting but had not been. Julie thought they may have disbanded.
26 Peter asked if the committee was the town and Julie said it was a corporation. The seed money
27 was from the state years ago. Julie clarified the corporation was not connected to the funds, but a
28 group made up of business owners that had not been meeting. Peter asked Julie for their contact
29 information, and she said it was Bill Dakin.

30 Lee asked about solar, and Julie said she got an email from Mike Curtis who was reviewing
31 everything and wanted to schedule a meeting and thought he was close. Julie said Greenbacker
32 was waiting for Chester, but she needed the ROI first to know if it was the step they wanted to
33 take. Peter asked Julie if she had called the Public Service Board about the fence and she had not
34 yet.

35 **Agenda Item 9, Executive Session: Town Manager Review**

36 Arianna moved and Lee seconded a motion to enter executive session for the purposes of the Town
37 Manager review. The motion carried unanimously.

38 (Executive Session – 7:51 p.m. to 8:19 p.m.)

39 Lee moved and Peter seconded a motion to exit the executive session. The motion carried
40 unanimously.

41 **Agenda Item 10, Adjourn**

42 Lee moved to adjourn, and Arianna seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion passed

1 unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

DRAFT