

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING**

3 **January 28, 2022 Minutes**

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

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

8 **Visitors Present:** Scott Blair, Tim Roper, Robert Nied, Jesse Bailey, Chester Telegraph, and SAPA
9 TV via Zoom.

10 **Call to Order**

11 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He
12 welcomed everyone to the special meeting regarding the petition for the cannabis opt-in vote.

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14 **Agenda Item 1, Citizens Comments**

15 Arne asked for comments on anything that was not on the agenda. Tim Roper made a request. He
16 wondered if the Selectboard could post their packet to the website like the Planning Commission
17 did with theirs. Julie and several members thought it was a great idea. Leigh asked if his request
18 was regarding the 4:00 p.m. email that was discussed at their last meeting. Tim said no that he was
19 able to access that email. It was regarding the 23-page packet. Arne thought it was a great idea to
20 get the information out to the public.

21 **Agenda Item 2, Petition for Cannabis Opt In vote being added to the Town Warning**

22 Today they received the petition at the Town Hall, and it was verified with the proper number of
23 signatures. When something like that happens, the Selectboard has within 60 days to warn the
24 meeting. The way procedure works is when they receive a citizen's petition and it's verified, they
25 must warn it within 60 days. They could act immediately or sometime within the 60 days. Once
26 that happens, there's a 30-to-40-day period in which they must vote. If they waited the entire
27 amount of time, it could take 100 days. If they acted right away, they would have 30 to 40 days. It
28 needed to be warned at a minimum of 30 but no more than 40 days before the vote. There needed
29 to be an informational meeting within 10 days of the vote. Because they had received the petition
30 today and were having the special meeting, it would start the timeframe and they would be able to
31 have the vote on town meeting time. It's a special item that would be included with the rest of the
32 information, and they are allowed to do it that way. They confirmed the procedure with the
33 Secretary of State because some thought they were trying to push it through and bend the rules. If
34 the Selectboard didn't want to do it, they could wait the 60 days and then the 30 to 40 days, but
35 Arne thought because it was such an important issue, there would be more people engaged with it
36 on Town Meeting Day, than a special election.

37 Lee asked for clarification on the amount of time they had, that being up to 60 days to act. Julie
38 added the meeting had to be warned no less than 30 and no more than 40 days before the meeting.
39 An informational meeting must also be held within 10 days of the vote. Lee asked if the 30 days
40 was between now and March 1st and was told it was. Arne said if they wanted the vote at the town
41 meeting, they needed to do it by Sunday because that would start the clock. When they got closer,

1 they would have the informational meeting at the end of the town meeting. It would also be on the
2 agenda at the next Selectboard meeting to get more people involved and more input, so it didn't
3 appear like they are trying to rush things through.

4 Heather was aware the informational meeting would be after the town meeting, but she thought
5 there was misinformation circulating such as the town receiving revenue. She thought they should
6 have a clear presentation of what it would mean for zoning, etc. and they should have it on the
7 agendas for both meetings until town meeting to give people accurate information. She suggested
8 getting the information they knew out there in a factual way. Arne agreed and said that was why
9 it was on next week's agenda, and they could also include it on the second meeting's agenda to
10 continue the discussion and the sharing of information and address questions from the public or
11 anything that came up before the final vote. They wanted to make sure all the information out there
12 was correct.

13 Lee requested it was on the agendas for both meetings. There was a lot not known or decided yet.
14 It would require a lot of in-depth investigation and he thought the more they talked about it, the
15 better.

16 Leigh said the CCB hadn't completed their study, so it was very important when they received
17 new information to get it out to the public. She thought it was important it was acknowledged and
18 followed up on. She understood it would be a separate ballot and not on the Town Warning. Arne
19 agreed it would not be on the Town Warning and would be by separate ballot because the Town
20 Warning has a separate set of rules and regulations.

21 Arne thought at the next two meetings, possibly they could get the Planning Commission, or the
22 Development Review Board involved because they may be able to help them answer questions
23 regarding zoning. Lee said based on his research, he didn't believe they had any say in that because
24 the state would not allow them to regulate it any differently than any other business in town.

25 Arne agreed and just wanted them there for questions regarding retail.

26 Heather suggested a short PowerPoint presentation about the facts and maybe not the pros and
27 cons because it depended on who you were if you saw them as pros or cons. Lee said he didn't
28 think it was their role as Selectboard members. Heather thought it was their role to educate the
29 public. Lee thought they could have an opinion personally but didn't think as a board they should
30 state their opinions. Heather said not opinions and that's why she had stepped away from the pros
31 and cons but meant as to what the implications would be for zoning, revenue, retail, and other
32 details of information they received. She was thinking of a presentation about what would be
33 involved. Lee agreed.

34 Arne said it would be on the agendas for the next two meetings. He said there was one issue about
35 it being within 500 feet of a school. Lee said he had asked for clarification from the CCB regarding
36 that.

37 Heather asked Lee if that could be the outline of the discussion.

38 Lee recommended they come up with a list of questions and find answers, and if not, they reach
39 out to whoever could help understand that. He thought that would go a long way by getting a
40 decision or opinion from the people in control rather than finding answers online.

41 Arne thought they were all good ideas to get information out there and answers to help people in
42 deciding how to vote.

1 Lee understood having the vote as part of an already scheduled election would save them a
2 significant amount of money. Leigh agreed. Lee asked how much it would save them.

3 Debbie Aldrich said they could find out. She thought the cost of ballots, time, and people to work
4 would likely be around \$1,000. Julie's bigger concern was how to get people out to vote for a
5 special election.

6 Arne thought there would be a better representation of the town if it was done during a town
7 meeting vote.

8 Lee thought, from his perspective, he would rather have had more time to gather information and
9 have the CCB and state figure out exactly what they were doing. But it made sense to him to have
10 a vote when more people were engaged rather than wait for a special meeting. Heather agreed.
11 Arne said they had time. Lee didn't think they would have all the answers in time.

12 Arne said he has had a few questions, but it was all spelled out in detail. After he read through it,
13 he didn't have many questions.

14 Lee questioned how it would impact Chester regarding zoning issues and complaints, or other
15 issues. He said they had gotten the regulations from Massachusetts who tended to overregulate
16 everything. He wondered if they really had made the effort to make it specific to Vermont.

17 Robert Nied understood the votes would be separated but asked if it would be on the agenda for
18 Town Meeting and part of the virtual agenda.

19 Julie said the State Secretary gave them the opinion that they could have it as part of Town Meeting
20 but for clarity and to avoid confusion, she and Debbie were recommending having the Town
21 Meeting Warning and the moderator would take them through it. There is no voting on Town
22 Meeting this year, as it's all Australian Ballot. They would adjourn Town Meeting and go directly
23 into a special meeting that would deal with cannabis.

24 Julie said there was a bit of contradiction within statute about warning Town Meeting Warnings.
25 Just to keep it clean, they would do it as a special meeting that followed Town Meeting. Lee asked
26 what the typical voter participation was for Town Meeting versus special election.

27 Debbie said last year at the Town Meeting, 563 people voted. For a special meeting for one thing,
28 she thought half that number voted. Lee said that's what he guessed.

29 Arne asked for any other questions or concerns.

30 Arne read the warning. "Town of Chester Warning: Notice of Special Town Meeting. The legal
31 voters of the Town of Chester are hereby notified and warned to meet on Monday, February 28,
32 2022, at a time following the regular town meeting via Zoom and/or in person for a hybrid
33 informational meeting on the following article: voting on Article 1 will be by Australian ballot on
34 March 1, 2022, from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Chester Town Hall, second floor. And the article
35 reads: Article 1, Shall the Town of Chester authorize cannabis retailers in town pursuant to 7
36 V.S.A. § 863? Dated at Chester, Vermont this 28th day of January 2022." The motion would be to
37 adopt the notice of special town meeting warning that Arne had read. Arne said if nobody made
38 the motion, the time would start on the 60 days. He said they either accept it now or put it off for
39 a special election if they didn't move or vote it down. Lee was conflicted but said he also wanted
40 more participation, so from that perspective, he thought they should hold it when there was going
41 to be a lot of people participating. Even though his preference would be to wait, his thought was
42 to just get it over with. Lee moved and Heather seconded the motion. Heather agreed with Lee

1 about having more information and thought the most participation was good. Leigh also agreed.
2 Arne's advice was to get their questions down on paper and share them at the next meeting where
3 they could continue the discussion, as well as at the following meeting. They would also have the
4 final informational meeting. He hoped with the three meetings they could answer most questions
5 and concerns. A vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

6 **Agenda Item 3, Adjourn**

7 Lee moved to adjourn, and Leigh seconded. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was
8 adjourned at 3:33 p.m.