

1 **TOWN OF Chester**
2 **SELECT BOARD**

3 **November 17, 2021 Draft Minutes**

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

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

7 **Visitors Present:** Chester Telegraph, Sharon Huntley, and Lee and Beth via Zoom; and Richard
8 Jewitt and SAPA TV at Town Hall.

9 **Call to Order**

10 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. with the pledge of allegiance. He
11 welcomed everyone to the meeting.

12 **Agenda Item 1, Approve Minutes of November 3, 2021**

13 Lee moved to accept the minutes from the November 3, 2021, meeting, and Jeff seconded. Leigh
14 called attention to line 104 of the minutes and said she thought the motion was made by Lee
15 Gustafson and not Leigh Dakin because she was the one who seconded the motion. A vote was
16 taken, and the minutes were approved unanimously with the correction on line 104.

17 **Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments**

18 There were no comments.

19 **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

20 Julie reported on old business:

21 Brookside Bridge:

22 All has been done for this year. The crew has gotten the beams and substructure to the bridge in
23 place. The decking and railing will be installed in the spring. Chester is merging through Okemo
24 Valley Chamber with Ludlow and Weathersfield on VOREC, the Vermont Outdoor Recreation
25 and Education Community Grant program. It includes a boardwalk for Chester which continues
26 the bridge over to the stone wall so that it's ADA accessible. They hope to receive that next year
27 so it will be done in addition to the decking and the railing. Arne thanked the town's highway crew
28 and said Chester was lucky they were able to do that versus putting it out for bid or through other
29 means, it would have cost a lot more.

30 Salvage Yard Update:

31 Preston Bristow has sent out enforcement letters to what he deemed the 10 most egregious
32 properties in town and has heard back from 7 of them who are working toward compliance with
33 him. 2 have not responded and Preston will take them to the next step. The town will help the third
34 one, under the enforcement budget, along with some other community organizations, to help clean
35 up some elements of the property they are able to do without liability to the town. They are testing
36 the waters with processing of the 2 as it is new territory for the town. Leigh asked the status of the
37 property located on 103 South that has campers and cars. Julie thought Preston had reached out to
38 the owners but would check with him. Julie wasn't sure if that property was one of the 10. Some
39 properties only got a letter and not an N.O.V. Jeff thought the property may have changed owners

1 recently. Julie said if so, it could pose an issue.

2 Town Garage:

3 Work is proceeding, and the new work is on. The Water/Sewer Department got the sprinkler line
4 to the building inside and ready to be connected by the company. Jeff said the grid separator and
5 the manhole are in the ground and they finished putting them together. Jeff said first thing in the
6 morning they would fill them with water for testing. The engineer would pressure test the sprinkler
7 line and the waste line and the grid separator. Julie said they were able to do it themselves by
8 having the town guys do it which saved some money.

9 Popple Dungeon Bridge:

10 It went out to the second round of bids which are being analyzed before they announce the lowest
11 bidder. The bids are about \$100,000 over what was allocated, so Julie is looking at capital to
12 determine where the \$100,000 can come from. The original total was \$900,000, which includes
13 engineering, and \$750,000 is coming from the 3 grants funding it. Julie said they pay rental on the
14 temporary bridge and it's a pain to plow, so they want it completed next year.

15 Yosemite Firehouse Grant:

16 There are individuals in town who have stepped forward and expressed serious interest in the
17 Yosemite Firehouse project with some financial backing. One of them has offered to setup the
18 501(c)(3). Before they setup the corporation, bylaws need to be written. Julie has seen a draft of
19 the mission statement. She was feeling it may be easier to have a few board members, Lillian, the
20 individuals, and Julie work together to talk through the operational pieces of how the two entities
21 will work together on the municipal building and project. She thought it may be easier than the
22 entire board. Leigh and Heather volunteered to work on the project. There was some discussion
23 about the water and sewer that will be necessary for the museum. Julie said Jeff Metcalf had done
24 drawings. She thought they were a couple of years away from opening.

25 Arne asked for any other old business and there was none.

26 **Agenda Item 4, Chester Snowmobile Club; Landowner Permission**

27 Their yearly landowner permission request to use town property i.e., the Chester Town Forest and
28 town roads including various roads from a prepared list that Arne read from.

29 Richard Jewitt from the snowmobile club responded to a question from Arne about whether there
30 were less or more roads this year and Richard said it was the same amount.

31 Arne asked for a motion to approve permission and appoint him to sign. Lee moved to approve,
32 and Jeff seconded. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved unanimously. Arne signed.
33 Leigh said she thought it was fabulous the town was generous with the snowmobile club. Arne
34 said it helps Chester in many ways and has brought positivity and tourist dollars.

35 **Agenda Item 5, SRDC Working Challenges Presentation**

36 Bob Flint and Amanda Sidler from the Springfield Regional Development Corporation gave a
37 presentation on working challenges. Bob echoed the comments about the snowmobile club and
38 said they were a regional asset.

39 Workforce participation nationally had been declining pre-pandemic and this area, specifically,
40 was on a steep decline. Our region is one of the first four to receive a grant from the Federal

1 Reserve of Boston for what is called the Springfield Area Working Communities Challenge. It is
2 something they have done in urban areas and Vermont is the first time they've attempted to do it
3 in a rural state. It is a 3-year project to try to move the needle on helping low and moderate-income
4 people address barriers to getting into the workforce and staying there.

5 The labor force is down 1,249 people since the start of pandemic, which is almost 12%. Workforce
6 participation rate in this area is 56%. The state percentage is 62%, so this region is still trailing the
7 state. The goal is to help more people be productive members of the workforce which will have a
8 positive impact on the area economy and helpful to area employers.

9 Amanda gave a PowerPoint presentation.

- 10 • The 3-year grant is roughly \$300,000.
- 11 • The Springfield Region consists of 16 towns.
- 12 • Challenges identified were access to childcare, transportation, housing, technology,
13 education, and being in recovery or substance abuse.
- 14 • Their strategy for addressing these challenges is to bring together employers and social
15 service stakeholders to create a wraparound holistic approach.
- 16 • There is a core team consisting of the Vermont Department of Labor, the River Valley
17 Tech Center, Springfield Restorative Justice Center, Vermont Agency of Human Services,
18 Springfield Regional Development Corporation, Vermont Packinghouse, and the Reach
19 Up Program. They also have a large extended network of partners who have joined them,
20 including but not limited to Vermont 2-1-1, Springfield Area Parent Child Center, and Mt.
21 Ascutney Regional Commission.
- 22 • There are currently 2 subcommittees addressing the challenges of transportation and
23 childcare: the Transportation Taskforce and the Childcare Counts Coalition.
- 24 • The Employment Research Study will collect data-driven information from employers and
25 residents to identify barriers that prevent individuals from engaging in the workforce. A
26 local data analyst has volunteered his knowledge and time to help create this research study.
- 27 • They hope to be able to use this as they move through and recover from COVID. Every
28 two months they survey employers and residents with similar questions. Individuals who
29 participate will receive a \$40 stipend after every survey they complete. They plan that it
30 will run until the summer of 2023. So far, over 150 people are registered to participate.
31 Any sized employer can join, as well as any individual regardless of employment status,
32 including retired people. It is open to anyone.
- 33 • Childcare Assistance Fund has been one of their responses to the COVID crisis. Families,
34 regardless of income status, can receive this one-time grant to help cover childcare costs.
- 35 • There are eligibility requirements, but income is not one of them. The intention is to help
36 parents, who are often women, re-engage in the workforce and/or keep their jobs.
- 37 • Free Laptop Program is an initiative in response to the COVID crisis. When the world
38 transitioned to virtual, many people were left behind. They relied mostly on their phones
39 to access digital information. The program is designed for low-income individuals who
40 reside in the region to access that technology, remove that barrier, and help achieve

- 1 employment goals. The program is still operating.
- 2 • Another offering is their Employer Resource Group, which is currently on hiatus. They
3 will be reoffering it in 2022. It is a monthly group for employers of any size to get together.
4 It is an informative group to understand all HR topics. It is a networking opportunity but
5 also for employers who don't have a designated HR person.
 - 6 • They are always open to hearing from the community. Anyone may contact them via
7 802.885.3005 or Facebook or by visiting their webpage.

8 Amanda left some packets for the board members.

9 Bob said one of the programs they introduced to the region was Working Fields, an organization
10 that acts as a temp agency for people trying to re-enter the workforce dealing with substance issues.
11 To date, they have placed a dozen people in the region. Some employers, out of necessity, are more
12 flexible and even utilizing parent hours.

13 Arne asked if it was an issue specific to Vermont or everywhere. Bob said it was national.
14 Workforce participation was an issue before the pandemic. There are not enough people in the
15 workforce, as well as an aging population.

16 Amanda said access to childcare has been an issue. In March of 2021, Vermont had the highest
17 rate of unemployment for women at 74%. Prior to the pandemic, lack of childcare and the cost
18 were a huge problem that has only gotten worse. Employers see challenges daily with staff. People
19 underestimated the impact regarding childcare. Bob said they hadn't even addressed housing.

20 Arne thought the services offered were important. and thanked them for the information.

21 **Agenda Item 5, General Fund Budget; First Review**

22 Arne announced the first review of the General Fund Budget and Julie took them through it.

23 As far as expenses for 2021, they were not in a bad condition. Going into 2022, department heads
24 have done a good job in knowing what is necessary keeping costs under control. Costs have risen
25 and they have sought grants to help. The costs of culverts have doubled, but grants have opened to
26 assist with the cost. They are looking at different programs.

27 Homeland communication grants will help with communication costs including the repeater, base
28 stations, and mobile radios costing over \$100,000. They have applied for grants.

29 There wasn't a lot added to capital last year, as they paid cash. Kirby feels they can wait to replace
30 the dump truck but need to replace a pickup truck. Amanda will try to get another year out of the
31 ambulance.

32 Lee asked if what delaying expenses by a year will do. If the dump truck and ambulance are not
33 replaced until 2023, the first payment would be 2024. 2023 is the last tough year, so the advantage
34 to waiting will be helpful. Vehicle maintenance lines in both budgets have been increased to cover
35 any necessary repairs.

36 Julie said Kirby has had the truck looked at and they thought it would be fine. Arne said it would
37 be a tough year with fuel costs doubling and other items.

38 The department heads will be coming in to talk about their budgets in detail and by the next budget
39 review, they should have all the numbers.

1 Arne saw the explanation about how much they spend for maintenance. It is less expensive to have
2 it done inhouse. Lee said it made sense to have the inhouse capabilities and use the extra hands
3 elsewhere when there isn't a specific need. In the long run, it will save money. Julie said being
4 proactive and not reactive always saves money. Lee asked where they would find someone for
5 maintenance because they would have to have many qualifications. Julie said they already have
6 someone in mind and hoped they would be available. They found qualified people when they were
7 interviewing for the sewer position. It would be good to have the position in 2022. In the long run,
8 it would save money. Arne said asset management and staying on top of things saves money.

9 She said they are also asking to transition the zoning administrator position to more of a planner.
10 It would increase to 30 or 32 hours making it full-time. Preston would want a stipend for the
11 medical insurance he had in lieu of the town's plan. It would help Chester to make him a planner.
12 He has grant writing experience and has economic development and marketing experience. Julie
13 has the time to get the town to the next level but doesn't have the time or the experience to educate
14 herself to get there. Preston already has the experience. It would be a win for Chester for not much
15 more money. It would be helpful to have a full-time planner now but possibly not in ten years.

16 Jeff asked the difference between a zoning administrator and planner. Julie said a zoning
17 administrator issues permits, a planner does that but also works to develop the economics of the
18 town. Heather said they have had issues with enforcement and wondered if being full time would
19 provide more hours for that. Julie said it would give him 6 to 8 more hours per week, so yes.
20 Enforcement takes a lot of time. Julie and Jeff both had good words to say about the job that
21 Preston is doing and the tremendous asset he is.

22 Julie said a lot of things are status quo, except for the pricing increases due to COVID but she
23 wasn't concerned the budget would have a huge increase.

24 Arne asked if there were any questions or concerns about the first review of the budget.

25 Jeff said the weekly meetings have been very helpful for everyone. Arne also thought having
26 communications avenues open where people feel free to speak was important.

27 Julie thought they would need 3 meetings in December because the second meeting was only
28 December 15th, so it is earlier in the month. The final numbers come in at the end of December.
29 She said they would be seeing the actual numbers in real time as they would be continuously
30 updated. She said as they get closer to the final budget, she would show the impact to the tax rate.

31 **Agenda Item 6,**

32 **Agenda Item 6, New Business and Future Agenda Items and Set Date for Next Meeting**

33 Arne asked if there were any questions or requests for future agenda items.

34 Leigh said she has been approached in the last 2 weeks by people wondering if there was any
35 possibility to have a dog park in town. Julie said she had a good conversation with a woman who
36 came into the office about having one and left with the intention of gathering a group who have
37 been to multiple dog parks. They will put together a modest proposal. They talked about potential
38 funding ideas. Julie provided a list of town land that may be available. They will research and
39 come back to Julie, and then fine tune it and come to the board with a proposal. Arne was curious
40 about what a dog park entailed. Julie said it was a fenced area where people can come and let their
41 dogs play while they sit and visit. One was just installed one in Ludlow. Arne liked citizen-initiated
42 projects.

1 Arne said he would entertain a motion to adjourn the Select Board meeting and then continue with
2 the water and sewer commissioners meeting. Leigh moved to adjourn, and Jeff seconded it. The
3 motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:09 p.m.

4 5 **WATER/SEWER COMMISSIONERS MEETING**

6 **Call to Order**

7 Chair Arne Jonynas called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

8 **Agenda Item 1, Citizen Comments**

9 Arne asked for citizens comments on items not on the agenda and there were none.

10 **Agenda Item 2, Water Budget Review**

11 Julie said there wasn't a huge change in revenue, but expenses were up. The only missing numbers
12 in the budget were workers' compensation and the property liability insurance. The numbers were
13 not in yet and Julie would be filling them in once she had them.

14 Jeff has been happy over the last ten years that he's been able to stay within the budget, but he
15 wasn't sure it would happen this year given what has happened. They hired someone to work into
16 Jeff's position within the next 2 years and his salary and benefits are the largest additional cost.
17 Jeff dropped as many line items as he could. Some costs they will be reimbursed for because they
18 invested a lot of money in pipe at the town garage installing sprinkler and service lines and will
19 also invest a lot in the tanks for wastewater. He had an estimate of \$15,000 but it may be up to
20 \$16,000. It has taken longer than anticipated but the engineer will test the systems tomorrow and
21 they can wrap up. They cut a ditch and installed a new drain; they installed the pipes and poured
22 the concrete yesterday; and started setting the forms for the walls. Jeff said when the project was
23 completed, he would get an itemized list to Julie, including man hours, for water and wastewater.

24 Julie said water was through third quarter i.e., September 30th. She said one big increase was the
25 addition of Wayne as part-time water and part-time sewer, and the water truck.

26 Jeff said they are giving more money for trade-ins, so he was expecting to get more when he traded
27 the water truck in. He wants to purchase a crew cab since they have more people. He was able to
28 make the last two trucks last 13 years. One had a utility box which was handy for tools but didn't
29 hold up. He will have a toolbox in the bed and more cab room. The prices for a Dodge or Ford
30 crew cab have been about \$32,000. He hopes to find a good deal during President's Day and is
31 hoping to get \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the truck. It's only 10 years old but isn't what is needed.
32 They were trading the trucks out every 5 to 7 years but he's been able to make them last longer.

33 Jeff said Wayne has been a huge asset and is a master electrician. He has saved them money with
34 his knowledge and abilities and saved them money with light fixtures and his connections.

35 Jeff was thankful it hasn't snowed as they have been trying to catch things up. They have done
36 many projects this year and it's why their spending is up, but they will save money in the long run.
37 On the wastewater end, they need to get new probes for next year to put into the tanks which help
38 with processes. They cost \$5,000 each. They need a new controller and new probes. Wayne will
39 be able to install them which will save a lot of money.

40 Julie said Wayne's wages, benefits and retirement are divided between water and sewer. He is the

1 only big increase in the sewer budget. Jeff and Julie said they have been very lucky with Wayne
2 as an addition. Jeff said Wayne has saved them lots of money between his knowledge and
3 connections.

4 Arne said water and sewer are two expensive but necessary utilities. Like everything else, prices
5 are going up and there have been delays on parts needed. Jeff said they would be in trouble if he
6 hadn't started years ago having backup parts. Arne said eventually an increase in rates will need
7 to be discussed.

8 Julie said they had raised rates over the three years where they needed to be for repayment of the
9 water bonds. They were good, but in 2022 they could look at them again. By 2023, they will need
10 to look at the design and upgrades to the sewer plant. The bonds are paid off in 2027.

11 Jeff said the best thing they did was start the base rate because it stabilized the budgets.

12 Arne asked if anyone had questions or concerns for Jeff regarding the water or sewer budgets.
13 There were none.

14 Arne asked if anyone would like to make a motion to adjourn. Leigh moved to adjourn. Lee
15 seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

16 The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.