

**Town of Chester
Selectboard’s Meeting
Thursday, February 8, 2024
Municipal Complex
Approved Minutes**

I. Preliminaries

Call the Meeting to Order
Roll Call
Pledge of Allegiance
Chairman’s Additions or Deletions
Public Comment (10 minutes)
Budget Review
Warrant Article Review
Consent Agenda
Chairman’s Announcements
Roundtable
TA Report
Action Items
Potential Non-Public Sessions
Adjournment

1.1 Call to Order

Chairman Myette called the meeting of the Chester Selectboard to order at 6:00pm.

1.2 Roll Call

Selectboard Present:

Chuck Myette
Steve Couture
Stephen Landau
Dana Theokas
Dick Trask

Town Administrator Debra Doda

Members of the Public Present at various times:

Myrick Bunker, Building Inspector
Justine Celentano, Town Clerk / Tax Collector
Mike Ebbett, Block 5
Andrew Hadik, Town Planner
Nancy Myette
Jean Packard, Assessing
Leslie Packard, Supervisor of the Checklist
Corinna Reishus, Recreation Director
Evan Sederquest, Planning Board Member

Saul Shriber
Beth Swanson, Budget Committee Member
Eric Swanson
Rob Varsalone, Budget Committee Member
and other persons unknown to the Recording Secretary.

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Myette led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.4 Chairman’s Additions or Deletions

Chairman Myette moved the Elections budget to the beginning of the meeting.

1.5 Public Comment

As no Members of the Public wished to be heard, Public Comment was closed at 6:02pm.

II. Appointments

None

III. New Business

3.1 Budget Review

3.1.1 IT (moved to later in the meeting)

3.1.7 Elections (moved to from later in the meeting)

Ms. Leslie Packard, Chair of the Supervisors of the Checklist, presented the Elections budget with a 27.06% increase. The increase in the budget is due to having one more election than in the current year. After the budget was turned in there was a slight change: the salary line will decrease to \$3,761.20 from \$3,868.00. Chairman Myette inquired if there are enough people to cover the elections. Ms. Packard stated she has added three more ballot clerks.

3.1.2 Assessing

Assistant Assessor Jean Packard presented the Assessing budget with a 3.14% increase. The only lines in the budget that increased are the contractual lines and salary line. During a revaluation year the utility appraiser increases with a separate contract and is paid out of the revaluation capital reserve account. This is done so the budget does not spike on revaluation years.

Ms. Packard asked for the Warrant Article for the Revaluation Capital Reserve to continue with the \$15K to prepare for the next revaluation in 2029.

Chairman Myette mentioned the letter asking to control the budget and have written justification for any line over 3%. The salary line number increased but that number is provided by the finance office and Vice Chairman Couture pointed out the document in the book with the salary

100 explanation. Ms. Packard is receiving a step for a satisfactory review, a 4% COLA increase, and a
101 longevity bump.

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103 A conversation ensued about the tax maps; Ms. Packard currently orders eight to ten 8x14 tax maps
104 and only uses two. The Selectboard is fine in decreasing the amount ordered. An estimate will be
105 provided to Town Administrator Doda and the budget will be updated.

106 107 *3.1.3 Building Department*

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110 Building Inspector Bunker presented the Building Department budget with a 2.87% increase.

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112 Vice Chairman Couture asked what services beyond the Building Department would the new
113 administrative assistant be assisting with. Mr. Bunker mentioned she is currently learning the
114 Building Department but in time she may be able to help.

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116 Selectman Trask inquired how many new home permits were issued in the past year. Mr. Bunker
117 does not have that information readily available, but thought it was around 12-15. New homes are
118 about 40% of the department and renovations make up 60% of the workload.

119
120 Chairman Myette asked the estimate on the year-to-date revenues for the Building Department. Mr.
121 Bunker advised it is \$71K for the first six months of the fiscal year. The building permits essentially
122 cover the budget for the year.

123
124 Selectwoman Theokas asked what goes in the gas, fuel, diesel line, versus the mileage line. Mr.
125 Bunker explained that the fuel line is used for the maintenance and fuel for the town vehicle. The
126 mileage line is for milage for personal vehicles if the Building Department vehicle is not available. It
127 was noted that the Building Department vehicle had been out of service for some time previously,
128 leading to an increased usage of the mileage line, but it was back in service at this point, so the
129 mileage line was decreased which brings the Building Department budget to a 1.82% increase.

130 131 *3.1.4 Planning Department*

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133 Town Planner Hadik and Planning Board Member Sederquest presented the Planning Department
134 budget with a 7.39% increase. Mr. Hadik stated printing costs are up for the zoning amendments on
135 the ballot. Office supplies are going up \$100.00 dollars to \$400.00. Last year’s actual expenditure
136 for office supplies was \$425.00. The mileage line is used for traveling to meetings and going to the
137 Registry of Deeds to record mylars. Vice Chairman Couture pointed out the budget increased 2.9%
138 without the salary increases.

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140 Mr. Hadik mentioned the first meeting for the Master Plan update is scheduled on March 5th, 2024,
141 from 8am to 10am. He hopes for more public involvement for the update. The master plan takes
142 about 18 months to complete.

143
144 Charmain Myette questioned the Southern NH Planning line on the budget, as there were no
145 expenditures FY 22-23. Mr. Hadik explained this is used if the Town needs assistance from them.
146 This line will be decreased to \$5K.

147 148 *3.1.5 Recreation, Wason Pond Commission-Recreation, Town Fire Works*

Recreation Director Reishus presented the Recreation budget with a 7.01% increase. The training line is increased to the actual amount needed. Also, senior fitness programs are increasing. This was one of the lines that was cut last year. Selectwoman Theokas asked if the senior programs were well attended. Ms. Reishus replied yes, and this is the only program that is not self-funded.

Vice Chairman pointed out the actual dollar amount on the increase is \$225.00. The Budget Committee will be looking at what budget items are fixed vs what items are not fixed. Salaries are a fixed item.

Ms. Reishus presented the Wason Pond Commission – Recreation budget with a 23.56% increase. The contracted services budget was cut last year. She is asking for the amount to be increased to the actual expenditure. This is used for the fish drop for the fishing derby at Wason Pond. The Police Association usually helps with the cost of the fish drops; however, for the last few years she has not received money from the Association.

Ms. Reishus stated the playground mulch is needed. It was on a rotation and every other year new mulch would be brought in. This has not happened in a few years with budget cuts. Half the cost would be \$1300.00. Selectman Landau reminded the group that the playground was donated, and recreation has been doing the upkeep.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to increase the playground budget to \$3500.00 for the mulch. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

Selectwoman Theokas asked if the playground apparatus that was broken and removed will be replaced. Ms. Reishus stated there is no money in the budget to replace it. Ms. Swanson, 108 Chester Street, mentioned the broken seesaw was removed because it was a hazard. The hazard is still there with the metal piece sticking out of the ground with a cone on it. If it is not going to be replaced, then the metal piece should be removed. Selectman Landau asked for an estimate for a new seesaw, and he will solicit donations to cover the cost.

Selectwoman Theokas inquired about the fencing around the playground. Recreation pays for the repairs to the fencing.

Ms. Reishus presented the budget for Town Fireworks. She mentioned this item is handled by the Fire Department. Last year the fireworks cost the town \$8,500.00. The Board discussed the possibility of donations to help with the cost. Ms. Reishus mentioned the next Town Fair meeting is on Monday at 6:00pm and there are only two volunteers for the committee.

Chairman Myette asked the group if it should stay at the \$7,000.00 or increase to the \$8,500.00 that was spent last year.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to keep the fireworks budget at the \$8,500.00. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – abstained, Couture – aye, Landau – abstained. With three in favor, the motion passed with Theokas and Landau abstaining.

3.1.1 IT (moved from earlier in the meeting)

Vice Chairman Couture asked Mr. Ebbett about the 26% increase in the hardware management line. Mr. Ebbett needs to follow up, he is unsure where that increase comes from. His paperwork is different. He tries to keep the increases to minimal.

Vice Chairman Couture asked for the IT budget to be tabled. Mr. Ebbett will work with Town Administrator Doda and will come to the meeting on February 22nd.

3.1.6 Town Clerk/ Tax Collector

Town Clerk/Tax Collector Celentano presented the Town Clerk/Tax Collector Budget with an 8.10% increase. Ms. Celentano mentioned she did a wage analysis of surrounding towns and the Deputy’s salary is sufficient. Ms. Celentano’s salary is a little low in comparison and she was not given the COLA increase last year. Chairman Myette asked if the comparison included experience. It did not. The term for a Town Clerk/Tax Collector is three years and anyone can run for the position. The salary given to Ms. Celentano after being elected was for an experienced Town Clerk/Tax Collector. Ms. Celentano felt she has experience with the various jobs she has held. Ms. Celentano felt the salary line provided by the Finance Department is comparable to other Town Clerks/Tax Collectors in surrounding towns.

Based on the new rates from Granite State, the fax line was increased. Dog tags and postage also went up.

Ms. Celentano mentioned the voter equipment line is for maintenance on the ballot machines. The new ballot machines are on the CIP, and she suggested they can be purchased in 2025. The tax bill is based on the actual cost.

Selectman Landau asked if the leak above the vault caused any damage to the items inside. Ms. Celentano stated no water went inside.

Selectman Landau stated he felt Ms. Celentano has shown experience in the past year in the office and her salary should be left how it is. Ms. Celentano pointed out to run for the position you need to live in Chester, and it is not an inexpensive place to live.

3.1.7 Elections (moved to earlier in the meeting)

3.1.8 Finance, Insurance, Legal, Benefits, Ad & Regional Associations

Town Administrator Doda presented the Finance budget with a 3.75% increase. The salary line is one step, COLA, and longevity.

Town Administrator Doda presented the Legal budget as flat. There are no pending lawsuits, and the Legal Capital Reserve Fund can be utilized if necessary.

Town Administrator Doda presented the Benefits budget with a 4.76% increase. They have no control over the benefits budget.

Town Administrator Doda presented the Advertising and Regional Association budget with a .27% increase. These are fixed costs.

With the changes made this evening the total budget is at a 7.24% increase.

3.2 Warrant Review

The Selectboard reviewed the most current Warrant Articles.

Vice Chairman Couture mentioned Warrant Article – b has no tax impact; therefore, the Budget Committee will not be voting on this article. Town Administrator Doda will delete the recommendation for the Budget Committee.

Warrant Article -e is the CIP. The items listed are from Table 10. Town Administrator Doda asked if the pumper replacement should be a separate Warrant Article. Chairman Myette mentioned the Fire Chief is looking at alternatives for the replacement.

Town Administrator Doda mentioned the ballot machines can be moved to 2025 after the discussion with Ms. Celentano.

Chairman Myette mentioned the Town received a grant for the Wason Pond Causeway bridge. The Town will need to pay in full for the project and then submit the request for reimbursement.

The Highway CIP projects were discussed. Chairman Myette pointed out Town Planner Hadik and the Engineer have been talking and some of the projects listed will be moving to different years.

Chairman Myette asked if the Fire Department Apparatus Capital Reserve Fund should continue to be funded. With the new estimates for pumper trucks the board might want to set aside more for the purchase. Currently there is \$688,653.58 in the capital reserve fund.

Vice Chairman Couture asked for the Department Heads to explain what their plans are for the upcoming year and give their thoughts on the Warrant Articles. Table 10 is needed at the next meeting. Chairman Myette would like a breakdown of what grants the town has, what has been expended and how much is left.

Selectwoman Theokas mentioned if Warrant Article k - *Winter Road Maintenance Fund* - is not needed it will be tabled at Town Meeting.

Warrant Article m – *Complete Road Discontinuance* - is on the warrant to fix the previous discontinuance that was not done properly. The Board will only need to give their recommendation on it.

Selectman Landau inquired about the amount left from the 300th Anniversary fund. Town Administrator Doda replied \$1996.39 is in the account. Town Administrator Doda mentioned this article can either be renamed or it can lapse and go in the general fund. Vice Chairman Couture suggested letting it lapse and ask for \$5000.00 and the amount lapsed from the 300th fund for funding the Historical Building Capital Reserve Fund.

Selectwoman Theokas asked if the amount should be higher for Warrant Article p – *Funding Municipal Improvement Capital Reserve Funds*. Funds are needed for the post office foundation.

Warrant Article s – *Municipal Complex Roof Replacement* - is listed in the CIP projects and as a separate Warrant Article. If the CIP passes this article will be tabled.

Chairman Myette mentioned the Town needs a 20% match for the red listed bridge repair. The state will be matching with 80% of the repairs. The Town has the option of which one of the two red listed bridges can be repaired with the matching grant. Selectman Trask suggested asking for \$200K a year for the 20% match. Town Administrator Doda pointed out the Hanson Road Bridge is on the CIP in 29-30 and Shepard Home Road Bridge is in 30-31. Chairman Myette asked Town Administrator Doda to verify those dates and ask Town Planner Hadik to attend the next meeting to discuss the Bridge / CIP Discussion. Town Administrator Doda asked if the Selectboard should agents to expend on the *Bridge Repair Capital Reserve Fund* and the Selectboard agreed.

The Post Office lease is up for renewal. This is a five-year lease with two five-year renewal options. The Town will receive rent, but the Town will also have to pay a fee to the leasing company who handles the Post Office leases.

Town Administrator Doda explained the Warrant Article – t *Contingency Fund*. 1% of the Town’s budget could be placed in this fund for emergencies. If the funds are not spent, they lapse into the general fund. Vice Chairman Couture has concerns with this. The Budget Committee has had discussions about the spending of the left-over funds in the budget by the Selectboard. This fund is similar to that. Selectman Landau stated this is very similar to the Winter Road Maintenance Capital Reserve. Town Administrator Doda will tighten up on the verbiage of the article.

IV. Consent Agenda

4.1 Utility Revaluation Contract

4.2 Intent to Cut

Vice Chairman Couture motioned accept to consent agenda as presented. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas –aye, Couture – aye, Landau – abstained. With four in favor, the motion passed with Landau abstaining.

V. Selectmen’s Business

5.1 Chairman’s Announcements

Chairman Myette announced the following meetings:

Monday February 5, 2024	Town Fair Committee Meeting at 6:00pm Recreation Commission Meeting at 7:00pm
Tuesday February 13, 2024	Conservation Commission Meeting at 7:00pm
Wednesday February 14, 2024	Planning Board Meeting at 7:00pm
Thursday February 15, 2024	Selectboard Meeting at 6:00pm discussion continues on the 24-25-budget

Chairman Myette announced the following events:

Winter Fest at Spring Hill Farm is Saturday, February 24, 2024, from 12pm to 5pm. Lots of activities are planned.

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5.2 Roundtable

Selectman Landau has one nonpublic for reputation.

Selectwoman Theokas
Nothing to report.

Selectman Trask congratulated the girls’ basketball team; they are playing in the finals on Saturday.

Vice Chairman Couture
Nothing to report.

Chairman Myette
Nothing to report.

5.3 Town Administrator’s Report
Nothing to report.

5.4 Action Items
None

5.5 Non-Public Session(s)

Chairman Myette announced non-public sessions on reputation.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to 91-A:3(II) (c) Reputation. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was closed to the public at 8:40PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to come out of non-public session; Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was reopened to the public at 9:15 PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the non-public session on Reputation. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

VI. Adjournment

Vice Chairman Couture moved to adjourn the meeting. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 PM.

399 Respectfully submitted,
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401 Janis A. Jalbert
402 Recording Secretary