

**Town of Chester
Selectboard’s Meeting
Thursday, February 15, 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)
Solar Working Group
Budget Review
Warrant Article Review
Hiring Policy 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:

Aaron Berube, Police Chief
Paul Cavanaugh, Maintenance Director
Patrick Connelly, Solar Working Group
Phil Gladu, Fire Chief
David LaVita
Stacy Manfrates, Transfer Station Foreman
Nancy Myette

James Piper, Supervisor of Roads (SOR)
Brent Richardson, Solar Working Group
Maria Veale, Solar Working Group

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 has one nonpublic on reputation.

1.5 Public Comment

Mr. LaVita, 235 Raymond Road, is against a solar farm in Chester. Mr. LaVita asked a series of questions: who it benefits, what price the Town is going to pay, is there a power purchase agreement, what happens at the end of contract, who owns the panels, maintenance, and information on the company. Mr. LaVita opined that solar panels are an eyesore, and dangerous to wildlife and ecosystems.

As no other Members of the Public wished to be heard, Public Comment was closed at 6:03pm.

II. Appointments

2.1 Solar Working Group

Ms. Veale thought the group would be updating the board on the Warrant Article proposal. The group gave the board updates on the financials and answers to questions that came from the last meeting.

Mr. Connelly stated the solar would be placed on about three acres of land. In the packet is a detailed listing of the savings to the Town on energy generated by the solar panels and the lease payments. The solar array will generate \$2.5M in revenue for the Town over the next 35 years. Ms. Veale mentioned there are two options at the end of the agreement: end the agreement and ReVision will decommission the panels, or the Town can take ownership of the panels at a fair value.

Mr. Richardson mentioned that as the agreement phases out, the panels will still produce 86% of the original output from the panels. They lose a half percent of efficiency a year.

Mr. Richardson asked for permission to address a few of the comments made by Mr. LaVita in public comment. A lot of the questions are answered in the document. Mr. Richardson stated that currently the panels are manufactured in South Korea and assembled in Georgia. The company that is producing the panels is looking to procure the panels in the United States.

Mr. Richardson stated the company the Town would be using is an energy company out of Brentwood, NH. Ms. Veale pointed out the first-year revenue is approximately \$30K and goes up from there with no upfront costs. The reason this parcel was chosen is the close proximity to three phase power.

Mr. Connelly stated the Solar Working Group is at the meeting this evening to recommend the Warrant Article be presented to the Town. The role of the group would be to get information out to the community and answer questions.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned that the Selectboard support the Solar Working Group’s recommendation and place it on the Warrant Articles for consideration and authorize the Solar Working Group to conduct outreach and education to the Town. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – nay, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – abstained. With three in favor, the motion passed.

Selectwoman Theokas thanked the group for all their work.

III. New Business

3.1 Budget Review

3.1.1 Ambulance, Fire, Forest Fire, Emergency Management

Fire Chief Gladu presented the Fire Department budget with a 2.58% increase.

Chief Gladu mentioned the Lieutenant’s line increased now that there is a Lieutenant in the Department. Selectwoman Theokas wanted clarification on the line item and asked for more criteria on what it is given for. Chief Gladu advised this is a discretionary amount given to the lieutenant for going above and beyond. It is not a stipend.

Granite State increased their pricing for the phone lines. The line was increased based on the new rates.

Inspections increased as there are more materials needed for Fire Week. Selectman Trask asked if schools other than Chester Academy participated. Chief Gladu answered yes, they visit local daycares and other schools in Town along with the 4-6 events per day at Chester Academy. Selectwoman Theokas asked if the items were tangible. Chief Gladu passes out bags filled with items to the kids.

Chairman Myette pointed out that last year \$29K was spent from the on-call budget and the line was not decreased. Chairman Myette asked how much has been spent so far this year. Town Administrator Doda stated \$14K has been spent. Chairman Myette feels that line is heavy. Chief Gladu does not feel that line is heavy, everything is based off how many calls come in, hours spent on a call, etc. Vice Chairman Couture suggested a decrease of \$15K unless Chief Gladu brings back justification to the board.

Chief Gladu mentioned the salary line for the Office Manager was reduced from what was submitted. Town Administrator explained the salary increase from last year is one step and the COLA increase approved by the Board. She was promoted to Office Manager/ EMT within the last three years and is not eligible for the longevity increase. Chief Gladu advised it was not a promotion; she was taking on additional responsibilities and also attended 160 hours of education for the position. Chairman Myette asked if it was paid training and if it was approved in advance. Chief Gladu pointed out most of the training was done in addition to her work schedule and not paid. Chairman Myette stated the salary line on the budget sheet is according to the policy and needs to be consistent in all the Departments in Town.

Selectwoman Theokas asked for clarification on what maintenance vs repairs are in the budget. Chief Gladu stated maintenance is oil changes, and repairs are when something breaks.

Chief Gladu mentioned the oil line decreased; currently there is 65% left in the budget. Chairman Myette felt this was an appropriate reduction.

Chief Gladu presented the Ambulance budget with a 3% increase. This is a contract with Derry.

Chief Gladu presented the Forest Fire Budget with a 0% increase. Town Administrator Doda pointed out there has been zero expenditures from the current budget. Chief Gladu just turned in an invoice for \$800.00.

Chairman Myette asked if the fireworks should be under the Fire Department. Chief Gladu stated he only applies for the permit and signs when it comes in.

Chief Gladu presented the Emergency Management budget with a 5.99% decrease. There is one electronic sign that needs to be fixed.

3.1.2 Government Buildings

Maintenance Director Cavanaugh presented the General Buildings budget with a 15.25% increase. It is a 2.8% increase without salaries. The salary increase for part-timers is due to hiring a new part time employee working 30 hours per week. The water line services all the Town buildings. There was discussion on whether the water bubblers should be discontinued. Water in the buildings is tested and usually comes back safe to drink.

The heating line increased due to more maintenance needed on the systems. The average boiler is 25-30 years old. The replacement of the boilers is on the CIP in future years.

The Dam Maintenance line increase is due to increased requirements by the state for the spillways, and general cleanup by a vendor with specialized equipment.

3.1.3 Highway Department

SOR Piper presented the Highway budget with a 9.86% increase. SOR Piper will be coming to the board at some point to ask for an increase for the contracted plow drivers. Rates have yet to be determined. Selectman Trask mentioned the transition plan. If more work is done in house vs contracted plow drivers, the increase would be significantly higher. Vice Chairman Couture suggested flat lining the salt line with the understanding there is the \$105K for Winter Road Maintenance. Selectman Landau asked how many contractors the Town has for plowing. SOR Piper stated there are five contractors and some have more than one vehicle. Selectman Landau asked if we had our own trucks what would we do with them in the summer. Chairman Myette pointed out the best deal for the Town is to have contracts with plow drivers.

SOR Piper explained there are many dead/dying trees that need to be dealt with around Town. He is asking for the roadside cleanup line to be brought back to what it was before the Board cut it last year. Selectman Trask mentioned with the tree trimming a bucket truck and sometimes a crane are needed for the tree removal. There are multiple emails every week about unsafe trees in the right of way.

Chairman Myette asked about projects for next year. Town Administrator Doda stated the Warrant Article review is after budgets.

3.1.4 Police Department & Animal Control

Chief Berube mentioned Sgt. DiPerri will be joining the Chief tonight to gain some experience this evening.

Chief Berube presented the Police Department budget with a 7.30% increase. As most know, Chief Berube is frugal with his budget. He tries not to overspend but he needs to get the job done. There is a hiring crisis in all aspects of public safety. It is cheaper to retain than to train. Chief Berube pointed out 99% of his budget is salary based.

Chief Berube pointed out the Police Department works 24/7 and we need to pay appropriately and let them know we appreciate them. Chief Berube explained the new shift differential pay scale and how it works. The scale was worked on with collaboration from the patrol staff.

Chief Berube explained the holiday coverage was calculated with the increased salary and coverage on holidays. In the past earned time was used but that was taken away. There is 22% left in the budget for this year. There are still a couple more holidays.

There is an increase in the phone bill and the increase is due to an additional MDT in use.

Chief Berube mentioned he put in a new line for post-secondary education. The board has discussed this in the past. It will be for hourly employees only. This stipend would be given out twice a year. It is to let the employees know we appreciate what they are doing and entice others to get an education. Chief Berube had it broken down by post-secondary degrees. Vice Chairman Couture asked if it was a yearly stipend. Chief Berube replied yes. Selectwoman Theokas asked how many employees would be getting the stipend in the department. Chief Berube has five employees that would be eligible.

Chairman Myette asked if it would be a conflict with the pay matrix. The Town pays more for having a degree. Chief Berube stated an education degree is not built into the matrix. Selectman Landau is in favor, but would like the degree to be relevant to their position. This line item will not go forward on this year’s budget. A policy will be developed, and it will be Town-wide, not just for one Department. Vice Chairman Couture was asked to make the Budget Committee aware that this is being discussed for future budgets.

Chief Berube mentioned some of his lines have zero spent so far because he purchases everything when they have sales closer to the end of the fiscal year.

Chief Berube presented the Animal Control budget. The ACO bi-weekly amount is going up \$25.00 or 4%. Selectwoman Theokas asked how many hours this covers. Chief Berube explained it could be anywhere from 2-30 hours. ACO Wright takes care of all the calls involving horses, cats, dogs, and ferrets. Having ACO Wright in Town saves the Town kennel fees and time spent traveling to and from Deerfield Vet.

The Park Ranger line increased due to the salary increase. It’s 24 hours for 28 weeks, but Chief Berube mentioned Mr. Wright is active all year round.

Vice Chairman Couture thanked Chief Berube for all his work and providing supporting documents for the budget.

3.1.5 Zoning Board of Adjustments (moved to later in the meeting)

3.1.6 Transfer Station & Landfill

TS Foreman Manfrates presented the Transfer Station budget with a 17.49% increase. She was asked for justification on any line with more than a 3% increase.

Chairman Myette asked why the salaries line was overspent: are there more people working, or if it was higher rates. Chairman Myette would like clarification on the salary line.

Chairman Myette asked what the increase is on site work. Ms. Manfrates wants to have the mold power washed on the barn doors and siding. She has reached out to a local company and received a quote. Selectwoman Theokas asked if this would be needed every year. Ms. Manfrates feels it will be an expenditure every few years. Selectman Landau suggested purchasing a power washer. Vice Chairman Couture suggested the line be cut to \$1000.00 and purchase a power washer.

Selectman Trask asked the reason for the increase in the supplies and equipment line. Ms. Manfrates mentioned the increase is due to the pump repairs, wood wall installation, skid steer repairs, tires for the golf cart, yearly service for the skid steer, cleaning supplies, safety equipment, office supplies and uniforms. Selectman Trask suggested \$150.00 for sitework and \$4800.00 for supplies and equipment.

Household Hazardous waste days are costing the Town roughly \$9K for both spring and summer.

Ms. Manfrates mentioned she would like to paint the buildings this year. This would be done every few years, and Ms. Manfrates can do the work.

Chairman Myette pointed out the Diesel line has no expenditures for the year. Ms. Manfrates stated the diesel tank is 300 gallons and it is shared between Maintenance and Transfer Station. The tank is filled up once per year. As of December, 135 gallons have been used, and the skid steer has been out of service. The line will be dropped to \$800.00.

Ms. Manfrates explained the mileage line is for use of her personal vehicle to run and grab supplies for the Transfer Station.

Ms. Manfrates mentioned the signs at the Transfer Station are out of date and/or broken, and need replacing.

With the changes to the budget, it is now 16.82% or 12% without salaries. Selectman Landau pointed out that some residents might question why the Town spends so much on trash when there are more and more dumpsters around Town.

3.1.5 Zoning Board of Adjustments (moved from earlier in the meeting)

Town Administrator Doda presented the Zoning budget with a 28% increase.

The ZBA Admin has been asked to add more hours to her schedule, which accounts for the increase in the salary line. They must post in the newspaper for their public hearings and the Union Leader is more expensive. They tried Derry News but some of the pertinent information was being left out of the ads. The office supply line was cut last year, and they do have expenses for the line.

Office Equipment is for a color printer. Selectman Landau asked when the contract is up for the large printer - should that printer be changed to color? The Board decided to flatline the office equipment line.

3.2 Warrant Review

Selectman Landau inquired if a Warrant Article could be created and funded with \$10K to \$15K for vacation carryover for the employees. This would be limited per employee to either 80 hours or 120 hours. Chairman Myette mentioned the carryover the past few years for vacation were by exception only. The actual policy is to use it or lose it. This will be moved to a separate agenda item at a future meeting.

Chairman Myette asked SOR Piper about the plans for roads in the next budget. SOR Piper went through the list on Table 10. Some items were already pushed out. SOR Piper mentioned the permits for Cole Road are almost finished.

They discussed the list on the Warrant Article. Items moved from the list include Road & Gun Club Road, Twin Fawn Run, and Cole Road Culvert. Selectman Landau asked that Dump Road not be done until the other projects are completed.

Charman Myette asked for a follow up on the grant submitted for Halls Village Road. Vice Chairman Myette mentioned there are annual grants from FEMA. Projects need to be under \$1M and can qualify on an annual basis.

Chief Gladu updated the Board on the pumper. In early March, Chief Gladu has asked a few of the members to check one out at another station for reference. Selectman Landau asked if he could go as well. Chairman Myette asked for updated numbers for the Warrant based on what will be needed for the purchase and by when.

3.3 Hiring Policy Review

The Board had no edits for the policy and thanked Ms. Jalbert for creating the policy.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned approve the Hiring Policy as written. Selectman Trask 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.

IV. Consent Agenda

None

V. Selectmen’s Business

5.1 Chairman’s Announcements

Chairman Myette announced the following meetings:

348
349 Monday February 19, 2024 Winter Fest Working Group Meeting at 6:00pm (Rangeway)
350 Spring Hill Farm Advisory Committee Meeting at 7:00pm
351 (Rangeway)
352 Budget Committee Meeting at 7:00pm (Meeting Room)
353
354 Tuesday February 20, 2024 ZBA Meeting at 7:00pm
355
356 Wednesday February 21, 2024 Planning Board Meeting at 7:00pm
357
358 Thursday February 22, 2024 Selectboard Meeting at 6:00pm
359
360 Chairman Myette announced the following events:
361
362 Monday February 19, 2024 Town Offices closed for Presidents’ Day.
363
364 Saturday February 24, 2024 Winter Fest 12pm-5pm.
365
366 Thursday February 29th Register to Vote by this date in order to participate and vote
367 at the School District Meeting
368
369 Wednesday March 6th, 2024 School District Meeting at 6:00pm in the Chester Academy
370 Cafeteria.
371 *5.2 Roundtable*
372
373 Selectman Landau mentioned the Boy Scouts would like to use the MPR and the outside grounds to
374 work with the Cub Scouts. They will be using a contained archery/ BB unit. Town Administrator Doda
375 will check with Primex if it is allowable on Town property; Selectman Landau noted that the Boy
376 Scouts carry their own insurance as well.
377
378 Selectwoman Theokas stated the Town Fair Committee met and they have some great ideas to build
379 on past successes. Reach out to Recreation Director Reishus for more information on the Town Fair.
380 Selectwoman Theokas mentioned more volunteers are needed if anyone is interested.
381
382 Selectman Trask congratulated the girls’ basketball team on winning the Tri County Championship.
383 This is their first time in Division 3, and they won. Thank you to the Police Department for the escort
384 from the Town line to Chester Academy.
385
386 Vice Chairman Couture
387 *Nothing to report.*
388
389 Chairman Myette has two nonpublic on reputation. Vice Chairman Couture has one on personnel.
390
391 *5.3 Town Administrator’s Report*
392 *Nothing to report.*
393
394 *5.4 Action Items*
395 *None*
396
397 *5.5 Non-Public Session(s)*

Chairman Myette announced non-public sessions on reputation and employment.

Selectman Landau motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to 91-A:3(II) (b) 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.

The meeting was closed to the public at 9:23PM. Fire Chief Gladu remained in the Meeting Room.

Fire Chief Gladu departed the Meeting Room at 9:56 PM.

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 10:38 PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the first non-public session, on Public Employees. 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the second non-public session, on Public Employees. 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the third 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the fourth 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the fifth non-public session, on Public Employees. 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the sixth non-public session, on Public Employees. 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the seventh non-public session, on Employment. 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the eight 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the ninth 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.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the tenth non-public session, on Property. 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

Selectman Landau moved to adjourn the meeting. 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 adjourned at 10:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Janis A. Jalbert
Recording Secretary