

**Town of Chester
Selectboard’s Meeting
Thursday, February 29, 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)
Great Hill Cemetery
Highway Department Candidate
Budget Review
Warrant Article Review
PACT Review
Elderly/ Disabled Exemption Adjustments
Consent Agenda
Chairman’s Announcements
Roundtable
TA Report
Action Items
Potential Non-Public Sessions
Adjournment

1.1 Call to Order

Selectman Landau called the meeting of the Chester Selectboard to order at 6:00pm.

1.2 Roll Call

Selectboard Present:

Chuck Myette (via Zoom)
Stephen Landau
Dana Theokas
Dick Trask

Selectboard absent:
Steve Couture

Town Administrator Debra Doda

Members of the Public Present at various times:

Rich Bellemore, Cemetery Trustee
Aaron Berube, Police Chief
Victor Chouinard, Conservation Commission

Chris Hadik, Wason Pond Commission
Tyler Hollinrake
David LaVita, Seniors
Aaron Mansur, Village Cemetery Trustee
James Piper, Supervisor of Roads (SOR)

and other persons unknown to the Recording Secretary.

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

Selectman Landau led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.4 Chairman’s Additions or Deletions

Selectman Landau added 2.2 Highway Department Candidate.

1.5 Public Comment

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

II. Appointments

2.1 Great Hill Cemetery

Town Administrator Doda explained the fund discrepancy has been resolved with a journal entry from Three Bearings. Money was taken from the incorrect account for Great Hill Cemetery. With the issue being resolved the Great Hill Cemetery Trustees would like the Board to reconsider the motion for the paving.

Selectman Trask motioned to approve the paving project at Great Hill Cemetery. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion.

Selectwoman Theokas has concerns with the project not going out to bid. Town Administrator Doda stated the vendor has been doing the work spreading the project out over a few years. Selectman Landau explained the vendor also helps with other projects in the cemetery.

A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –absent, Landau – aye. With four in favor, the motion passed with Couture absent.

2.2 Highway Department Candidate

SOR Piper introduced Mr. Hollinrake, the candidate for the vacant highway position. SOR James mentioned Mr. Hollinrake will bring a lot of experience to the department. Selectman Trask has no questions as he has already interviewed Mr. Hollinrake.

Selectwoman Theokas asked about his experience and why he chose to work in Chester. Mr. Hollinrake likes Chester, what SOR Piper has done with the department, and where the department is going in the future. Mr. Hollinrake has experience with many different pieces of equipment.

Chairman Myette asked about supervisory skills. Mr. Hollinrake mentioned he has supervised anywhere from one to eight people and also had his own business.

SOR Piper mentioned salary has already been discussed, benefits paperwork will be given to him, and Mr. Hollinrake has requested to start with two weeks of vacation time. The Selectboard will discuss this in nonpublic.

The Board thanked Mr. Hollinrake for meeting with the Board.

III. New Business

3.1 Budget Review

3.1.1 IT

Ms. Jalbert has researched the IT budget and has found some savings for the IT budget. More information will be given to the Board at the next meeting.

Ms. Jalbert suggested the workstation replacements stay in the budget with a set replacement amount each year. Six computers and or laptops per year would total to \$5950.00.

Ms. Jalbert thanked Town Administrator Doda and Finance Director Smith for helping with the project.

3.1.2 Budget Committee

This will be moved to the next meeting.

3.1.3 Conservation Commission

Mr. Chouinard presented the Conservation Budget with a 2% decrease. Selectman Landau mentioned the budget was decreased and the Conservation Commission is also paying for the repairs of the Wason Pond causeway bridge. Mr. Chouinard advised the funding is coming from the Conservation Fund and not the budget. Selectman Landau asked about the seminars. Mr. Chouinard mentioned the seminars are well attended.

3.1.4 PACT

Town Administrator Doda presented the PACT budget with \$1.00. There is a warrant article in which they are asking for \$38K from the *PACT Fund* SRF. Selectwoman Theokas mentioned that at the recent PACT meeting, the contract with Comcast was reviewed and provides the same percentage with no changes.

3.1.5 Spring Hill Farm

No one was available this week, so this is being moved to the next meeting.

3.1.6 Trustees of the Trust Funds

Town Administrator Doda mentioned the requested funding is for the quarterly charges and it is based on what is invested. Selectwoman Theokas asked what the percentage the town is being charged. Town Administrator Doda will ask the question. Later in the meeting, Town Administrator Doda stated the town is being charged 0.41% on investments.

3.1.7 Wason Pond Commission, Bath House, and Cottage

Mr. Hadik presented the budget for the Wason Pond Commission with a 62.59% decrease. Selectwoman Theokas asked why the cottage electricity is so much more than the bath house. Mr. Hadik explained the cottage is used by the summer program and the bath house is just the meter charges.

The beach maintenance line is used for sand that is needed every six years. This project was done in the current budget, so the line was decreased for the upcoming year.

3.1.8 Cemeteries

Mr. Mansur and Mr. Bellemore presented the revised budget to the Selectboard with a 391.84% increase.

Mr. Mansur pointed out there are five trees to be removed, headstones to be repaired, fencing to be replaced, and general cleanup of the cemeteries. For a long time, it was just Mr. Mansur trying to get all the work done. Now that he has help, projects will be able to get done.

Selectman Landau asked if all five trees were to be taken down at the same time or spread out over a couple of years. Mr. Mansur stated the job would be split; the vendor has to rent a larger crane for one of the trees. Selectwoman Theokas suggested prioritizing the trees and splitting the cost over a few years. Mr. Bellemore will contact the tree company and ask what is feasible for tree removal.

Mr. Mansur mentioned he has been working at the cemeteries for 17 years. People forget all the work that has been done and there is more work that still needs to be done.

Mr. Mansur pointed out Mr. Bellemore walked the cemeteries and there are 64 headstones in need of repair. The average cost per stone for repair is \$1200.00. They are asking for funding for five headstone repairs in the budget.

Mr. Bellemore mentioned he is working with an individual to look for grants for the cemeteries.

Selectman Landau asked how much work will actually be done in the next fiscal year. Mr. Bellmore stated if they are asking for the funding all the work will be done. Selectwoman Theokas asked for additional bids for the tree work. Mr. Mansur pointed out the vendor has been doing all the tree work in the cemeteries and is familiar with where he can access with machinery, and where he cannot.

Selectman Trask suggested taking the increase and spreading the projects out over the next three years. The new requested budget for Trees would be \$11K, Stone Repair \$2K , and Fencing \$3.3K. This would be an increase of 160% over last year.

Mr. Bellemore feels there may be enough in the budget this fiscal year for one tree to be taken down.

199
200 *3.1.9 Welfare- General Assistance, Government, Other Health*
201

202 Town Administrator Doda mentioned the General Assistance budget is one dollar; the town is
203 mandated to assist when asked. The Governmental and Other Health lines are budgeted by
204 including whoever continues to ask for funding. If they have not asked, they are taken off the
205 budget.

206
207 *3.1.10 Executive & Administration*
208

209 Town Administrator Doda presented the Executive budget with a 0.53% increase. This increase is
210 based on actual expenditure for dues, subscriptions, and seminars.

211
212 Town Administrator Doda pointed out the salary pool is always being scrutinized. This is used for
213 spot bonuses, Christmas gift cards, and hiring / retention bonuses for police hires. Chief Berube
214 mentioned the hiring/ retention bonus is paid out in increments over a few budget years.

215
216 Town Administrator Doda presented the Administrative budget. The only increase that is not a
217 fixed increase is the Town Report, which has yet to go out to bid. She used the actual expenditure
218 from the previous fiscal year, and added 3% to that number for inflation.

219
220 *3.2 Warrant Review*
221

222 Town Administrator Doda mentioned there are four new warrants articles that the Conservation
223 Commission has asked for.

224
225 Mr. Chouinard explained article Y1 is an administrative correction. The Selectboard at the time
226 agreed with the easement, but a warrant article was never created for a Town Meeting vote.
227 Selectman Trask asked if the town could dig a well on a property with an easement. Mr. Chouinard
228 answered unless it is written in the easement it cannot be done.

229
230 Selectwoman Theokas asked what the conservation plan is for the area. Mr. Chouinard pointed out
231 it is to protect the wetlands and natural resources.

232
233 Mr. Chouinard explained Y2 is where the area the kiosk is located on North Pond Road. This lot is
234 mostly underwater. Y3 is the pond on Candia Road, and the easement is being asked for to protect
235 the water. Mr. Chouinard advised Y4 will most likely not be ready for Town Meeting and might be
236 removed.

237
238 Chairman Myette asked if SOR Piper had the final numbers for the highway projects and an update
239 on grants. SOR Piper has some information on pricing, but nothing yet on grants. The numbers for
240 shimming and reclaiming one mile of roadwork are being reworked with the newest rates.
241 Selectman Landau feels Dump Road is not a necessity and can be taken off the list. He also asked to
242 change the wording on the warrant, as Hart Robert Road is no longer a Town road, and the warrant
243 should state the physical address where the paving project ends. Chairman Myette reminded the
244 Board that there are services being provided for the Dump Road project and it will never be less
245 expensive.

246
247 Selectman Trask pointed out there is additional funding from this fiscal budget that can be used for
248 some work this year. The Board also made some suggestions as to what funding can be taken from

the unassigned fund balance for the different articles. Selectwoman Theokas asked for a spreadsheet with what is being taken from the unassigned fund balance.

3.3 Pact Agreement

The Board will review and discuss at the next meeting.

3.4 Elderly / Disabled Exemption Adjustments

Town Administrator Doda mentioned with the upcoming revaluation the elderly and disabled exemptions should be revisited. Any changes require a warrant article and majority vote at Town Meeting.

Town Administrator Doda was requested to draft a warrant article.

IV. Consent Agenda

None

V. Selectmen’s Business

5.1 Chairman’s Announcements

Selectman Landau announced the following meetings:

Monday March 4, 2024	Budget Committee Meeting at 7:00pm
----------------------	------------------------------------

Monday March 4, 2024	Spring Hill Farm Advisory Committee Meeting at 6:00pm
----------------------	---

Wednesday March 6, 2024	Planning Board Meeting at 7:00pm
-------------------------	----------------------------------

Thursday March 7, 2024	Selectboard Meeting at 6:00pm
------------------------	-------------------------------

Selectman Landau announced the following events:

Wednesday March 6th, 2024	School District Meeting to vote on the school budget and warrant articles at 6:00pm in the Chester Academy Cafeteria.
---------------------------	---

5.2 Roundtable

Selectman Landau asked how many Budget Committee members attend the seminars. Town Administrator Doda will consult with their Chair.

Chairman Myette announced Ms. Millie Bennett is turning 100 years young on March 1st. This past Tuesday morning the Seniors celebrated with cake at coffee hour.

Selectman Trask mentioned a resident has asked if he could have the large amount of dirt the Highway Department has acquired. Chairman Myette asked for the dirt to be analyzed to protect the Town before allowing the dirt to be taken.

Selectwoman Theokas mentioned the Spring Hill Farm Winter Fest was well attended. The Conservation Commission held the first ecological walk. The next walk will be held on Earth Day at Wason Pond. The Recreation Department held an event for kids to watch Busche Academy basketball team play and then join them on the court for drills and practice. This event was well attended, and the kids really enjoyed it.

Selectman Landau pointed out the letter from Waste Management increasing their fees for the compactors and transportation.

5.3 Town Administrator’s Report

Nothing to report.

5.4 Action Items

Selectwoman Theokas would like to have a policy drafted for driving and mileage policy.

5.5 Non-Public Session(s)

Selectman Landau announced non-public sessions on reputation.

Selectman Trask 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 –absent, Landau – aye. With four in favor, the motion passed with Couture absent.

The meeting was closed to the public at 8:39PM.

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

The meeting was reopened to the public at 9:22 PM.

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

Selectman Trask motioned to seal the minutes of the second non-public session, on Employment. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –absent, Landau – aye. With four in favor, the motion passed with Couture absent.

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

VI. Adjournment

348 ***Selectman Trask moved to adjourn the meeting. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll***
349 ***call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –absent, Landau – aye.***
350 ***With four in favor, the motion passed with Couture absent.***

351

352

353 The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 PM.

354

355 Respectfully submitted,

356

357 Janis A. Jalbert

358 Recording Secretary