

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOS MEETING

TOWN OF CHESTER, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, April 23, 2024
Chester Town Hall and via TEAMS

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman Lignar called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

ATTENDEES

In attendance included: First Selectwoman Lignar, Selectman Radicchi

GUESTS

Ray Vergati, Homeland Towers Cellular Infrastructure Builders, Laura Tabacca, Joe Cohen, Nancy Tripler, Richard Strauss

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS - None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Cindy Lignar made a motion to approve the minutes from the 4/5/24 BOS meeting as presented. Paul Radicchi seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Paul Radicchi made a motion to approve the minutes from the 4/9/24 as amended. Cindy Lignar seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Amendments:

Page 1 – proper spelling “Lignar”, not “Ligar” as reported.

Page 2 – top of page - add the word “Regulations” after “P&Z meetings on Thursday and will discuss the Work Live Art spaces”.

Page 2 – bottom of page – Note that the cell tower contractor will be invited to the 4/23 BOS meeting, not 4/24 meeting as reported.

Page 3 – second paragraph – should read: “Paul reported that he “walked” the Mill Pond Dam and “flash boards”. He will continue to review the reports on dams that Jacobson has on file, including DEEP’s inspections and has met and will continue to meet with the property owners to discuss remediation with Jacobson and DEEP.

The status of PFAS in Water Street was discussed. Paul plans to meet with CT Water to discuss extending the water line on Water Street. A Special BOS meeting will be planned.

Approval of the meeting minutes from the 4/11/24 and 4/15/24 will be deferred until all BOS members are present.

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS - None.

HOMELAND TOWERS CELLULAR INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDERS

Ray Vergati, Homeland Towers Cellular Infrastructure Builders, a cell tower developer providing network needs assessments and collaborative site searches and evaluations reported on cell tower projects underway and proposed in Haddam. A Haddam site is currently being reviewed by the Connecticut Siting Council. If approved, this tower will provide coverage along Rte. 154 from Higganum to River Road. A second location, if approved, will serve a portion of Haddam, the Tylerville area and Rte. 154 down to the Chester Fairgrounds.

Mr. Vergati has been working with Chester and reported that to date, carriers have identified the West side of Town as a priority, understanding the challenges in the downtown area. A tower located in the Cedar Lake vicinity would not propagate to the downtown area. Options for “flagpole” and “steeple” and “stealth” antenna/towers were briefly discussed.

Due to the topography of the area and the steep slopes to the Connecticut River, areas in Chester pose service challenges. The strongest need is along Rte. 148, from Camp Hazen, west to the Killingworth line.

The importance of public safety departments/first responders having reliable cell service was stressed. Typically, there is no charge for public safety/emergency services antenna being placed on towers.

Homeland partners with municipalities to find a site, either town owned or privately owned, with the least impact to the community. Homeland builds the infrastructure but does not guarantee when a carrier (Verizon, ATT, T-Mobile, Dish etc.) signs on. There is \$0 cost to the owner of the property where a tower is placed. The property owner is paid rent from Homeland as well as rent from any carrier on the tower. In addition, Homeland would pay property taxes as assessed by the Assessor. There may be a request for a tax waiver in exchange for allowing emergency services access to the tower at no cost.

Mr. Vergati outlined the parameters for cell tower placement (approximate 1.5 to 2 miles apart, not necessarily at a high elevation). Propagation studies will determine the ideal location for a tower. Mr. Vergati outlined the process for tower construction including leases, applications to appropriate Boards/Commissions, in particular P&Z for an 8-24 referral, public information sessions and the Siting Council. From start to finish, the process usually takes approximately 2 years.

Laura Tabacca expressed concern about health (radiation) and safety vis a vis a tower’s proximity to homes. Mr. Vergati reported that the carriers are required to follow FCC guidelines. The emissions produced by the towers are at very low frequencies and well under the FCC requirements. The carriers are required to provide health and safety reports to the Siting Council who has the authority to approve or deny applications.

Ms. Tabacca requested that the Town consider hiring an independent contractor to review potential tower sites. Cindy responded that Mr. Vergati has done due diligence and will continue to work with carriers to determine the best site for a tower. Cindy has talked with the First Selectman in Haddam who highly recommended Homeland Towers. Ultimately construction

would go through P&Z and the Town Meeting process. Also, it was unknown if independent contractors provide such a service and if so, the Town would have to pay that individual for their services.

In addition, the Siting Council will vet the site and look at alternate site analyses.

Nancy Tripler asked if a tower could be placed on State property. Mr. Vergati replied that the State has never responded to their proposals for placement on State property.

Joe Cohen asked why the town went through the process of a tower to service the downtown area, but Homeland Towers and the carriers have identified the West side of Town as a priority.

Mr. Vergati responded that he cannot speak for the other developer. While the East side of Town is not a priority it is not “off the table”. Perhaps the prior developer was not aware of the Haddam/Tylerville project and how it would affect Chester.

Cindy Lignar reported that the process with the prior developer was started with the prior First Selectwoman and BOS and the negotiation with the prior BOS and developer did not move forward. Cindy followed-up with the First Selectman in Haddam who highly recommended Homeland Towers.

Mr. Vergati will continue to review ariel maps, town properties, private properties, and request input from carriers to determine the best location for a tower. He will report back to the BOS with a proposal for consideration.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR POSITION OPENING

The Emergency Management Director position has been posted. A job description is being developed at this time and will be discussed further at the next BOS meeting.

ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE

Reports have been submitted. Cindy will proofread the document prior to sending it to the printer.

DRAFT CHARTER PROCESS UPDATE

Cindy will be meeting with Richard Strauss on Thursday, 4/25 to review the next steps in the process, per State Statute.

RETIREMENT PLAN EMPLOYEE DEFINITION UPDATE

The definition of an “employee”, as developed by the Town Attorney, will be discussed at the 5/14 BOS meeting.

SELECTMEN REPORTS

Cindy reported:

- Individuals have expressed an interest in renting the 20 Water Street property for a global mental health program (Access Navigation). They will be invited to the 5/14 BOS

meeting to provide an overview of their program.

- An Ad Hoc Housing Committee resolution will be reviewed and possibly approved at the next BOS meeting.
- Snack Shack – renovations are nearing completion and should be done by 4/26. When the appropriate insurance documents are received from the contractor, an agreement can be signed.
- The Hose Company Tax Ordinance has been forwarded to the Town Attorney for updates. This will be sent to a Town Meeting prior to July 1.
- Animal Control Officer – Cindy met with the First Selectmen of Deep River and Essex regarding an Interlocal Agreement for Animal Control. Carolyn Fountain, ACO, Trooper Roberts and appropriate finance and administrative personnel were also in attendance to discuss the addition of the Town of Westbrook to the agreement. All were comfortable adding Westbrook to the agreement and the document is currently being revised to reflect same.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS – None.

ADJOURNMENT

Paul Radicchi made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m. Cindy Lignar seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowki
Clerk