

CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTWOMEN

REGULAR MEETING

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2017

CHESTER TOWN HALL

203 MIDDLESEX AVENUE

CHESTER, CONNECTICUT

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman Gister called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. In attendance included First Selectwoman Gister, Selectwoman Janecek, Selectwoman Linn and approximately 40 audience members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Charlene Janecek made a motion to approve the minutes from the 6/14/17 BOS meeting as amended. Carolyn Linn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Corrections: Page 1 – regarding the Gwendolyn Orton Jones Trust - “Karen Badger stated that \$452,000 had been paid out of the trust over 20 years, which could have been the beginning of a sizable endowment for the library expansion.” Should read: “Karen Badger stated that \$452,000 had been paid out of the trust over 20 years, which could have been the beginning of any sizable endowment for any library expansion or renovation.”

Page 1 - regarding the Gwendolyn Orton Jones Trust – note that funds had been paid out previously to supplement librarian salaries per the terms of the Trust. That is no longer the case. The funds are now being paid to the Library Board of Trustees to manage as intended and in accordance with the Town's Ethics Policy.

Page 1 – Under Audience of Citizens - “Susan Wright expressed concern for the amount of detail included in the previous meeting minutes. Lauren Gister assured her that more detail would be included in the future.” Lauren clarified that she has discussed with the Board Clerk with regard to leaving items out that she knew had already been discussed at prior meetings. Even if it had been discussed prior, if it was discussed again, it should be included in the minutes.

Lauren reported that this evening's meeting is not a Public Hearing and there is a limited amount of time for the meeting because there is another meeting scheduled at 7:30 regarding the Streetlight Project.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Peggy Carter Ward, Library Board, commented that the flyer distributed included mis-information regarding options for the library. Lauren responded that this flyer was not distributed by the Town and she was not familiar with the information included in the document.

Lauren clarified that at this time, the BOS intends to determine the next steps on the proposed project.

Lauren Gister read several letters/e-mails into the minutes as follows:

Leif Nilsson – “Hi Lauren, Please allow this to be read into the minutes of the Selectman Meeting on 6/28/17: I urge the selectmen to consider the possibility of using a major portion of the current Town Hall Building to house an expanded Library. It has enough square footage, is handicapped accessible and is centrally located with plenty of parking, and could even have a small drive thru bank. Developing North Quarter park as a park is still a worthwhile idea, but I believe if the library needs to be expanded there is a more affordable option. And if it does not need to be expanded please leave it where it is.”

Bryan Knudsen – “I am writing you in reference to the library meeting tonight that I will not be able to attend. I feel that a new 8000 square foot library is a little excessive for Chester. Not only is the price tag enormous, the future maintenance of the facility would be a constant drag on the taxpayers. We already struggle to get young families into this town partly due to our tax cost. I feel that a smaller addition or renovations to the existing library would be sufficient. In terms of meeting space, the town hall has the conference rooms that we could use. I feel that the money could be put elsewhere in town from sidewalks and road repairs to baseball field and park renovations. Thank you for your time.”

Kris Pollack – “I am not able to attend tonight’s meeting; but given the importance of the library decision I wanted to share my point of view. While I love the idea of a brand new community building at North Quarter Park, I can not support the cost benefit of such a large undertaking at this time. I struggle both with the long term debt the town will be burdened with to finance the project and the extra-large footprint of the structure. Does Chester need additional community space? Are the current options full to capacity within town? Regionally?

But the current structure is not serving Chester citizen’s either. It is old in both structure, limiting accessibility, and technology. The fact that the building is of historical significance cannot cloud our

decision. We have an increasing number of children and families moving into town, as well as a large elderly population which would benefit from unhindered access to the public building and modern technological access points. In the end, I'd like to see a more moderate proposal for a new library, one which would not cause undo burden to the town or a major face lift to our current structure. Though, given the limitation of what can be done while maintaining the historical integrity of the building, I am doubtful this option provides much savings long-term.

Finally, on the play-ground. I am happy to hear upgrades are built into all proposals; I wasn't aware of that. For a family who visits weekly (at times daily) this is welcomed news. While my son and niece love hearing how their parents played on the same playscape growing up; it seems a reasonable goal to be able to provide them with something slightly safer and in less disrepair. Thank you and the committee for all the time and effort put into the proposal and evaluation of the project so far, it is no small undertaking."

Nicole Costanzo in an email to Susan Wright– "Hi Susan, I can not come to this meeting tonight because we have dinner plans, but maybe you could speak on my behalf? I am someone who uses the library service all the time, taking out books, dvd's, and museum passes, using the computer to print something out or make copies and have brought my kids to various programs at the library through out their lives. I think that the current library meets the needs of our town and I support the minor renovation idea because of the bathroom issue and making the library handicapped accessible. It just seems crazy to spend all that money building a new library when there is one that just needs some updates. Other than size and "being new" I do not know what services people are looking for in a brand new library that justifies spending all those dollars on for a town the size of Chester. I also feel that Deep River, Essex, Killingworth and Haddam are all with-in reasonable distance if there is something that someone really needs that the current Chester library can not provide. I do agree with updating North Quarter park though, that equipment is pretty old. I think that could be a really nice park, plus with all that land back there and those walking trails incorporated into it. Sorry I can not make it tonight as I would have liked to go."

OLD BUSINESS

Library Proposal/NQP

Lauren Gister reported that after discussion with the Town Attorney sending a question to Referendum with more than one question on the ballot would be considered an "opinion poll" and not enforceable and no vehicle exists to allow the Town to send a question to Referendum contingent upon the ability to raise funds. The Town may take a series of questions to Referendum (opinion poll) but would still have to evaluate those results and go back to Referendum for a final vote on a specific question.

Lauren Gister outlined the Library project over the past 10 years including:

Putting the library in the new Town Hall was discussed when Bank of America decided to vacate the space currently occupied by Essex Savings Bank. The decision was made in 2005/06 to pursue a lease

that space to Essex Saving Bank as a paying tenant instead. Essex Savings Bank is the current tenant with a lease through 2022 plus two five year options. Essex Savings Bank may stay until 2032 and they have no plans to vacate the premises.

In 2007, the Library hired a Library Consultant to evaluate the library; including furnishings, accessibility etc. In the final report, the consultant recommended the town explore buying or building a new library.

From 2011 through 2014, the Town did a series of surveys and public discussions regarding the library resulting in a clear majority of residents wishing to keep the library in its current location. At that time, the Library's long range plan had 3 elements, explore expansion at current location which was completed and rejected, explore an alternate location "in a way that is financially prudent", and to begin fundraising efforts. Architects, engineers, etc. were tasked with exploring options to expand the current library. Several plans were prepared at that time. This option was rejected by the then BOS for several reasons, including the \$3.1 million price tag for a gain of approximately 500 usable square feet. Although the addition would add more space than that, most of it would be used just to bring the library in line with ADA requirements (stacks spaced widely, accessible bathroom, elevator, etc). There were also concerns with the aesthetics of the design and uncertainty of the structural effect of opening one or more of the existing stone walls of the building.

In 2014, the Committee decided to pursue a Master Plan for North Quarter Park to revitalize the park and include a new library building in a "campus" like setting. When this was complete, the North Quarter Park Committee transitioned to the Library Building Committee which was charged with developing a design for NQP including a new playground, fields, drainage, and a library. One Hundred Thousand Dollars was allocated by the Town to hire an architect for the preparation of a design and schematic plan overview. The Library Board of Trustees applied for and was awarded a \$1 million grant (site specific) for a building in NQP.

The Library Committee developed a plan for an 8,000 sq. ft. library building, including community space, necessity site improvements, a playground, parking, and drainage. The cost estimate is \$7.4 million excluding bonding. It is anticipated that fundraising and the \$1 million grant would lower the cost estimate.

Assumptions and facts regarding the current library include:

Too small and not designed for a town the size of Chester.

There is no room for books/equipment

No study, conference, programming, office or storage space.

Not ADA accessible

Environmental issues (mold and asbestos in basement)

Not energy efficient

On the plus side, Town residents love the current building; it is walkable, beautiful, historic, and a gateway to the Town Center.

The BOS's role in this process was discussed. The financial condition of the State is a major concern.

Lauren Gister commented that the decision on the proposed plan should be made by the residents of the town; not the BOS or the BOF. If residents/taxpayers want the proposed project to move forward, the BOS and BOF will be charged with fulfilling the wishes of the residents. If residents/taxpayers do not wish the proposed plan to move forward, the BOS will need to rethink the way forward.

Carolyn Linn reported on the importance of the BOS providing guidance on the proposed plan as soon as possible.

Charlene Janecek commented that the next steps include BOF involvement since any appropriation of funds must be approved by the BOF.

Charlene Janecek made a motion to forward the NQP/Library Revitalization Project to BOF with a recommendation from the BOS that the BOF forward to Referendum the current design and budget prior to mid September, 2017 and if approved by residents at the Referendum, the BOS would request a grant extension from the State Library Board in September. Carolyn Linn seconded the motion.

Discussion followed:

Pat Holloway reported that the State Library Board would not vote on any extension request until November. She suggested, to save the expense of a separate Referendum on this question, that any Referendum on the project be held in conjunction with the general election in November.

Errol Horner commented that as a tax payer, the numbers presented are concerning.

Lauren Gister reported that the BOF will need to make the decision to forward the project to a Referendum. The proposed plan includes the library, site work, playground, engineering, drainage and construction costs (including soft costs). If the project moves forward to a Referendum, public hearings and information sessions will be scheduled to address questions and concerns.

Caryn Davis commented that the project should go to a Referendum.

Karin Badger asked if this means the BOS is endorsing the project even though they feel it is not fiscally sound. Lauren Gister responded that the BOS is not specifically endorsing the project; they feel the decision should be made by the Town via a Referendum vote. It is now the BOF's responsibility to evaluate the proposal and forward to a Referendum.

Gillian Belnap commented that the BOF can choose to not move forward to a Referendum, thus "dropping" the project.

Charlene Janecek amended the previous motion to forward the NQP/Library Revitalization Project to BOF with a recommendation from the BOS that the BOF forward to Referendum the current design and

budget. The Referendum on the project should be scheduled on November 7, 2017 (at the general election) and if approved by residents at the Referendum, the BOS would request grant extension from the State Library Board. Carolyn Linn seconded the amended motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Cary Hull, Library Building Committee member, stated it is the responsibility for the Town, through a Referendum, to decide; not for the BOF or BOS to decide. She thanked the BOS for making the right decision.

NEW BUSINESS

Appointments

Lauren Gister made a motion to appoint Adam Scott Perl to the Economic Development Commission with a term to expire in November 2019. Carolyn Linn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

SELECTWOMAN'S REPORT

Lauren Gister reported that the Bid Opening for the Prospect Street Culvert Replacement Project is tomorrow, 6/29 @ 3:00 p.m. at the Town Hall.

The new constable, retired Clinton constable Craig Lee, will complete appropriate testing soon and may be able to start work next week.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Allison Bartholomew reported that the Town may risk the \$1 million grant from the State due to budget cuts. Lauren Gister replied that there is always that risk; however, the State Library Board's opinion is that the money will be available. We have been told that as long as progress on the project is being made, we can apply to extend the grant.

Gene Bartholomew asked if the proposed plan is just a concept plan or if we are "going with that design". Lauren responded that the proposed plan has been approved by the Library Committee in its current design form. Gene Bartholomew also reported that the taxpayers should have access to the Trust Fund language. Lauren responded that said information is available in the Selectwoman's office, along with the attorney's opinion on same.

Ed Ward, prior WPCC Chairman, reported that there is a lot of misinformation out there and emphasized the importance of factual information prior to moving forward with the proposed project.

An audience member stressed the importance of detailed, reliable meeting minutes.

Lauren Gister reported that per FOI requirements, meeting minutes are not intended to be a transcript of the meeting. Caryn Davis will forward to Lauren information regarding a correction to previous meeting minutes.

Virginia Carmany requested that all BOS meetings be audiotaped.

ADJOURNMENT

Charlene Janecek made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m. Carolyn Linn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully,

Mary Jo Helchowski

Clerk