

SPECIAL MEETING
CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTWOMAN
JULY 6, 2017 4:00PM TOWN HALL
203 MIDDLESEX AVENUE
COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM

ROLL CALL

First Selectwoman Gister called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. In attendance included: Lauren Gister, Charlene Janecek, Carolyn Linn, Caryn Davis, Carol Carpenter, and Leif Nilsson.

REFERENDUM REQUEST

The purpose of this afternoon's meeting is to discuss a potential issue with the decision made by the BOS at the 6/28/17 BOS meeting. At that meeting, the BOS made the following motion: "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."

Charlene Janecek made a motion to adjust our vote from the 6/28/17 meeting to recommend to the BOF that the NQP Revitalization and Library Proposal be sent to town for Referendum in early September for a decision by Chester tax payers. Carolyn Linn seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

In an effort to save money, the BOS recommended that the Referendum on NQP be included on the ballot at the general election. Subsequent to the 6/28/17 BOS meeting, it was discovered that, because the potential voters for the election (registered voters) are different than the potential voters (any taxpayers) for the Referendum, two separate ballots would be necessary along with two distinct scanners and additional election staff would need to be hired. Although it could potentially bring out a high voter turnout, it could also be disruptive and confusing on election day and would not save the town money.

After discussions with the Deputy Secretary of State, Registrar's Office and Town Clerk, it was recommended that the Referendum regarding the NQP Proposal not be held in conjunction with the general election.

The format of the Chester ballot was discussed briefly. Chester has the longest ballot in the state. It was determined that an additional item on the ballot (NQP) is not allowed and a separate ballot for that question would be necessary potentially causing confusion/disruption during the general election.

Lauren reported that if the BOF does not take action to move NQP to Referendum at their July meeting, it may be too late to get the item on the November ballot. There is an ability in the Statute for submitting local questions in conjunction with the general election. However, because of Chester's lengthy ballot, this may not be the best solution. Also, the purpose of sending this question to Referendum at the time of the general election was to save money and it has been determined that doing so probably would not save the town money.

Leif Nilsson asks for clarification on the language of the question. Lauren Gister explains that the exact language of the question has not yet been determined; however, it is to decide on whether or not the town wants the NQP and Library project to go forward as it is currently designed. Anytime funding is at issue for a project such as this, the BOF determines if the project can be responsibly funded and whether or not it will go forward to vote by the residents.

Leif Nilsson asked why this decision has to be made so quickly. Lauren responded that the project has been on-going for many years and also, if it is to move forward, the current \$1 million-dollar grant expires in November. The Library Building Committee completed their task and it is time for the Town to make a decision on the matter.

Caryn Davis commented that there were plans developed by John Schroeder that were dismissed by a prior BOS. Individuals on the Library Board have been "pushing their own agenda" for a long time. They make it sound like this is the only choice and it never should have gotten this far without input all along the way from the public. The architect recommended input from the public but these people took it and ran with it and it is not right.

Carolyn Linn commented that the referendum is only on one particular item, the current NQP proposal; however, if that does not pass, other options could be pursued. Lauren explained that it is not binding to have more than one option on a Referendum, multiple "either-or" questions turn it into a survey instead of a mandate.

Lauren reported that other options, such as use of the current bank space, have been explored and rejected over the years for a variety of reasons.

Carol Carpenter reported concerns with the delay in BOS action on this matter. She commented that this could place undue pressure on the BOF, and potentially place the blame of possibly losing a valuable grant onto them. If bid proposals come in higher than expected, then we have a project that is not what we voted on. Lauren explained that we are nowhere near going out to bid; Chester cannot go out to bid or raise funds until a project is approved by the Town.

Lauren Gister explained that, at the time of the original vote, the issues that could come with including the Referendum on the general election ballot were not known, and therefore were not discussed.

An audience member expressed concern regarding the timing of today's meeting and potential Referendums; i.e. during holiday weeks and the agenda item lists "Referendum" only. Lauren explained that today's special meeting was called in order to allow any amendments to be sent to the Board of Finance in time for its July 20th meeting, as the Board of Selectmen will not meet again until July 19th due to the July 12th meeting being rescheduled. Timeline requirements for posting minutes and agendas were discussed.

A woman questioned if any grant extension has been requested in the past. Lauren responded no. She continued that the State Library Board strongly suggested requesting any extension at the State Library's September meeting.

Charlene Janecek reported that many individuals do not flip over the ballot card, and that a Referendum question may be skipped. The Audience stated they did not think having two ballots would be confusing to voters. Though it may not be confusing for voters, it could also cause disruption to the people staffing the election (checking and re-checking voters) and a delay in voting.

Audience members suggested that the Town is being held "hostage" by the grant. The process has been going on for over a year and now there is a push to have a vote. Charlene Janecek commented that there have been multiple Library presentations that have been attended by the BOF. Also, the BOS is only recommending that the BOF hold a Referendum in September but the BOF is not bound by that recommendation.

Carol Carpenter said: "I don't think the library in NQP is a bad idea. I think it is far too big and far too expensive. I think the process at times has been absolutely absurd, but more than anything, as a taxpayer, I want my BOF to tear apart the numbers, make sure they are legitimate and best estimates. They're the ones dotting Ts and crossing Is and I want to be sure that, just like I come here to these meetings and other meetings, Main Street Committee, I want to be sure that as a taxpayer, my best interests are being kept in the forefront of this process. So, I am going to do the same to the BOF. I am going to go to them and hold their feet to the fire. A lot of people are going to do that and they expect to be afforded the time to do that like we have been afforded 15 years to talk about a library. To expect the BOF in one meeting to say 'ok' that's unrealistic."

Lauren Gister explained that the BOF does not have to decide in one meeting. The BOS's vote today was only to recommend the Referendum not be held during the election.

Carolyn Linn states that she still believes the Referendum should still be held during the general election and sees no reason it must be changed.

Leif Nilsson suggested that the BOS make a motion without specifying a date or time for the Referendum. As a result, Charlene Janecek amended the above motion to adjust our vote from the 6/28/17 meeting to recommend to the BOF that the NQP Revitalization and Library Proposal be sent to town for Referendum for a decision by Chester tax payers with no set date. Lauren Gister seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Charlene Janecek made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:42 p.m. Lauren Gister seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Jo Helchowski
Clerk