

Call to Order

The Chester Board of Finance held its regular meeting on Thursday, January 15, 2015, at the Chester Town Hall, 203 Middlesex Avenue, Chester, Connecticut. In attendance and seated were Virginia Carmany, Bob Gorman, Charlie Park, Jennifer Rannestad, Lori Ann Clymas (seated for D. Cohen) and Alex Strekel (seated for J. Aley). Chairman Carmany called the meeting to order at 7:32 PM.

Approval of Minutes – December 18, 2014

Motion made and seconded to approve December 18, 2014 Minutes as written. Unanimously approved. Motion Carried.

New Business

Request from Board of Selectmen for \$100,000 for Library Board's preparation of preliminary site and schematic building plans at North Quarter Park – Q&A

Chairman Carmany noted First Selectman Meehan will speak first and introduce Denny Tovey. First Selectman Meehan noted he was reporting the unanimous recommendation from the Board of Selectman to the Board of Finance to approve \$100,000 request from the Library Board of Trustees and to move it to Town Meeting for discussion and action by the voters. He indicated the important questions for this Board were financial. This will have a long significant impact on our community both as to what we say to future generations about the quality of life in Chester as well as fiscally going forward. Most projects such as this are bonded over 15 or 20 years.

First Selectman Meehan reviewed the background of this project. He noted the Board of Selectmen felt this project should be advanced because it believed the Library Board of Trustees have done their homework. They have researched the existing site at West Main Street. The Town had a \$20,000 Preservation Planning Grant. The Board of Trustees retained architectural assistance and fully looked at that property. The alternatives at West Main Street for expansion were limited. There were pro and con community conversations. In conclusion it was felt the building and site relative to the cost would not accommodate the vision of the future Library needs. The Friends did an addendum study for an underground concept. The Board of Trustees came to the BOS about a year ago and asked the Board to consider the site at North Quarter Park. The BOS discussed this and felt it was appropriate to look at the NQP option because its in

our long range plan. It was a vision the community has talked about from 2005 to 2009 for the long range Plan of Conservation & Development. Workshops were held, questionnaires were sent out and it was on the list for possible use at NQP.

Meehan noted NQP has been on the list of the Town's community buildings for about 30 to 40 years. There was a lot of information about NQP. The position of the BOS is that NQP is unique because even though it is 22 acres, there's only about 3 acres that is usable. There are strong environmental reasons to look at NQP as a place to be preserved. They felt the Master Plan was appropriate to set the table as to what should and shouldn't be developed there. Bob Gorman chaired that NQP Master Plan Committee and they were under a very compressed time schedule because of the goal of the Library Building Committee/Library Board of Trustees targeting a State Grant opportunity which had a submittal deadline at the end of August. Meehan noted the Master Plan process went well. The group was made up of Planning & Zoning, Board of Finance, Park & Rec, Resident-at-Large and Ed Meehan working together at public meetings and several workshops. A plan was produced that divided the Park into components of where a building should occur up close to the street, possible multi-purpose parking area that would accommodate a library/community center, retaining the playscape, addressing protection of inland wetlands and trail systems through the back of the Park. That provided a guideline for a vision for the Library Building Committee which Denny Tovey has chaired starting last spring. That Committee followed on with the work of the Master Plan Committee. The Board of Finance transferred funds out of last year's budget to fund the Park's Master Plan in the amount of \$20,000. This year's budget another \$20,000 was appropriated to retain professional architectural help to work with the Building Committee and some members of the NQP Committee who had joined together. This also was to address the design requirements and the criteria for the State Library Board Grant. Thanks to Library staff (Linda Fox), Pat Holloway and LBC members who worked very hard, the Grant application was submitted on time, scored very high and in return the Town has the opportunity to receive the award of \$1 million. The Town has a lot of things to meet before the award can be achieved. Meehan indicated going in the BOS knew the cost estimate was much too high and the building probably much too large. The BOS feel the community should be given an opportunity through the next phase of producing schematic drawings to arrive at a building size acceptable to our community both functionally and cost wise. If that process is allowed to continue, there will be other costs incurred. If the Town can agree

that this is the site where the Town thinks the future Library and Community Center should be, the next step of the process is the discussion for tonight. The BOS feel this meets the vision of the community, it is the right location given the opportunity to combine a building with open space, adequate parking and infrastructure. The Town has been talking about Library needs for at least 20 years.

First Selectman Meehan acknowledged the North Quarter Park Master Plan Committee and the Library Building Committee members who volunteered their time to work on this project.

Denny Tovey introduced himself as the Chairman of the Library Building Committee and member of the Library Board of Trustees. Tovey noted the Building Committee was formed last May and then later joined by 4 members of the North Quarter Park Master Plan Committee. It then advertised and hired an architect which was put under contract as of July 1st. There were a lot of meetings last July and August. The architect prepared drawings of each space in the library. Four options were then prepared which the Committee discussed in detail. A conceptual plan was decided on which was a one and a half story building. Tovey noted having a community space was important to townspeople as well as a building at street level. Tovey reviewed the first and second floor plans designed by LLB Architects. He indicated a lot of thought was put into what has been proposed. Library staff has spent hours coming up with space requirements, etc. Tovey noted the \$100,000 would enable preparation of schematic plans in order to have a better idea of cost, size impact, etc.

Chairman Carmany asked to have Messrs. Meehan and Tovey review the itemized Fee Proposal. Mr. Tovey explained a schematic design is the process where major building decisions are made. At the end of this phase there should be a clear idea of the scope and cost of the project. He reviewed the difference between schematic and design phases. Chairman Carmany asked what point the square footage is determined. Tovey noted that would be the current phase. It was asked if extra costs would be determined at this time, such as additional staff and equipment. Lori Ann Clymas noted the purpose of the schematic drawings is to scale the building back as much as possible, not to lose the \$1 million Grant, and work with the plan and site to see what's viable coming up with best opportunities. There may be drafts of other options but no schematics of those options. Bob Gorman reviewed library staffing.

Denny Tovey noted one of the first things the Building Committee was told was that the playscape would have to be torn down as its in the way. The next thing would be to replace 500 feet of drainage pipe. Now the project is not only the library, but a North Quarter Park development project. He indicated it doesn't make sense to now just build a building and five years later go back and replace the drainage pipe. The playscape should also be replaced. The thought now is to incorporate more things into this project and the schematic design. Tovey noted the architect has brought on Richter and Cegan who did the NQP Master Plan as a consultant along with Nathan Jacobson & Associates as Civil Engineer.

Chairman Carmany asked where in the process would the building size be determined. Tovey replied during the schematic design. It will take about 4 to 5 months to complete the schematic phase. There was discussion as to where the proposed 8,100 square footage figure came from. It was noted there is some flexibility in the State Library Grant if changes are made after the Grant application submittal. The State will work with the Town.

The question was asked what happens if this is voted down. Tovey noted this process would stop and the Library Board of Trustees would have to discuss this matter further. BOF member noted it is this Board's job to look at the numbers and decide if they make sense. She further noted it is a consensus the building size is too big. First Selectman Meehan noted the schematic phase will produce a site plan along with building location, either one or two story building. The topography and borings will be reviewed to determine quality of the soil and structural capacity. There is the question as to whether the soil is removed or filled with new soil. Meehan reiterated the first step is to go back to the Master Plan and develop a schematic plan including drainage, protection of wetlands, location of the parking area. The process starts with the land and then location of the building on the land. The Committee will look at a couple options and discuss size and functionality of the building as far as what the community can use. That hopefully will drive the cost down.

Chairman Carmany asked at what point during this process the public will have an opportunity to state their views. Meehan noted the whole process is public and meetings are all open to the public. There was discussion regarding the process for the

\$100,000 request and whether this part of the process could be done for less than \$100,000. There was a brief discussion about replacing the meeting room that was lost to the collapse of the old Community Center. Carmany asked if enough was being done to understand the environmental impact of the old high school being buried at North Quarter Park and whether that would be a full stop of the project. If so, that should be known up front. Meehan reviewed prior test pit data. He noted none of the borings uncovered asbestos, oil, shingles, etc. Carmany reiterated she thought environmental testing of the soil should be done up front.

Lori Ann Clymas asked if the Town approves this request, will the Library Board immediately start fund raising. Tovey noted the Board of Trustees has already met with a professional fund raiser. Tovey did note, however, that if further environmental studies are required, the Board of Trustees doesn't have those kinds of funds.

Another BOF member noted there is declining enrollment in the school system and the Elementary School will be available. There possibly may be a project to unite the 3 towns and maybe CES might be an available site. Tovey noted he has heard these concerns and reached out to the Superintendent who indicated its up to each town to decide what to do with their building. The Superintendent also indicated there is no plan to do anything at this time with that building. Even if that building is closed, the town still has to pay for its children's education. There was further discussion regarding declining enrollment, future taxes and future use of the Library and technology.

Chairman Carmany noted the Board of Finance needs to also look at the \$4.4 million Main Street Project which is happening at the same time. Her biggest concern was juggling all these projects and the impact on taxpayers all at once.

Bob Gorman noted the cost of maintaining the school is several hundred thousand a year and the Library would only use a small part of it. He also noted he sat in on a lot of Main Street Project (MSP) meetings where the issue of 3 trees side lined that part of the project by a few neighbors. He indicated if Chester Elementary was closed, Chester's children would have to be bused to Deep River where they would probably have to put an addition on its school.

Lori Ann Clymas noted she has been in town for 22 years and there's been talk of

regionalizing the Library for 22 years. She has talked to a lot of Chester residents who are not interested in busing their kids out of town. The BOF briefly discussed regionalization. First Selection Meehan noted he has talked with the first selectmen from Deep River and Essex and no one is interested in closing an elementary school or library. Meehan noted these projects are all quality of life for this town. The Town has to have a vision and a plan, and it needs to start implementing the plan or real estate values will not appreciate.

Alex Strekel noted libraries are not just books, they are community centers and that should be stressed.

Lori Ann Clymas reviewed pros and cons as noted below-

Cons

1. could upset supporters that advocate for expansion of current library site.
2. could inconvenience people who use NQP during building phase.
3. building is too large.
4. cost.
5. MSP cost coming up.

Pros

1. need to have handicap accessibility and bathroom as current library does not meet residents' needs.
2. major capital project having long term effect on the rest of the town moving forward.
3. POCD had a vision for recreation and playground facilities, library, community center and trail system to Laurel Hill Cemetery.
4. existing bond on town hall is down to 3 payments and will be complete in 2017 so there could be a rebond at a great rate.
5. 15% unassigned fund balance because the town has been planning for the MSP and been discussing the library project. The town has been trying to be fiscally responsible so not to burden the residents during the next 2 to 3 years.
6. more cost effective and will have improved library and services to town residents at NQP. Maybe this could be done in stages or bonded.
7. no interruption of library services if it goes at NQP.
8. meets community needs, has great programs. Library staff does a great job which has been challenging. Meeting room in basement is not handicap accessible.

9. it is an anchor for downtown community. The town is going to be seriously impacted when the MSP is done. Merchants are going to be hurting. This is a great opportunity to bring people back into this community that live here.
10. helps the values of our homes.

At this time the Board of Finance took questions from the audience:

Audience of Citizens

Review request from Board of Selectmen to release \$100,000 for Library Board's preparation of preliminary site and schematic building plans at North Quarter Park and vote to send to Town Meeting

Martin Nadel asked if anyone involved in developing this project believes this will be a 8100 square foot library. He felt it was unfair to present this if it is not going to happen. Its misleading. Chairman Carmany noted she was at a meeting on Saturday where it was clearly stated the 8100 square foot library was what was being talked about. Denny Tovey stated he was in favor of the 8100 SF library and this was done with a lot of thought. He indicated there have been a lot of comments about being transparent and he believed presenting this was the right thing to do. He also noted the \$100,000 was for the schematics to design a library the right size for Chester. Bob Gorman noted the majority of the people on the Committee would like to see this somewhat smaller and less expensive. The reason for showing the 8100 SF was because that was what we have as of today.

Chairman Carmany asked if a space study had been done looking at the West Main Street site before coming up with the 3 plans. Was there a starting place? Linda Fox noted a space study was done and it was more in the range of 6000 SF. The actual concepts developed by the architect were more than 4000 because it was questionable as to whether that site could even be expanded. The most important thing is to define what the community wants the library to be able to do and what it will cost. Just to say it has to be smaller and less expensive will not end up to be a library that Chester needs, wants or deserves. Carmany noted she didn't disagree, but her biggest fear is to spend \$300,000 or \$400,000 and have it go to Town Meeting for a vote and be turned down. There needs to be consensus and support. The people in charge of creating the vision must keep in mind there is a limit in terms of how much money there is to spend. It is a

balancing act. The decision should not be made only on a money choice. All the information should be put out there. She also noted in general she has been to many meetings where citizen concerns are not heard or incorporated well.

Ed Ward noted he was chair of the sewer committee. They listened to the citizens and then took a step back looking at options. Given that, they then came up with a sewer system that fit the town's needs for a cost of \$2 million. Part of that process was to evaluate and reduce the size of the system. What he's hearing here with the \$100,000, is that this is a process taking the concerns and needs of the town into consideration. He felt there was a need to spend the \$100,000.

It was noted about 20 to 25% of that 8100 SF is non-assignable space and currently there is none of that.

Carol Carpenter noted she has heard a lot about challenges at the NQP site. Do we know with the existing challenges this is the most cost effective site and will this \$100,000 tell us not only the cost of the 8100 SF but all of the other costs involved in doing everything that has been talked about on that site. Will that \$100,000 give a full picture?

Bob Gorman noted he was Chairman of the North Quarter Park Master Plan Committee which gave its input to the Library Building Committee (LBC) in July and then stopped meeting. The NQPMPC was reactivated and met last Monday. It was agreed the LBC will look at the library itself, the parking lot and the drainage problem. The NQPMPC will look at the play scape and ball field, etc. Funds will also be raised through fund raising and/or STEAP Grants, etc. The 2 committees will work together.

Denny Tovey noted the \$100,000 will not cover everything. They are not looking at the trails, the T Ball area or the picnic area. He also noted this is the only site he knows of that the town owns. First Selectman Meehan noted there is 16,000 SF at the Town Hall. The Library was the first thing discussed when the former bank left. The response through informational meetings was no. They didn't want kids walking on Middlesex Avenue. They wanted the income from a bank.

First Selectman Meehan noted the most important thing is to do the borings and

determine the quality of the soil. Professional staff (civil engineer or landscape architect) should address that question. It has to be a good building site. The site is fully available to utilities. The Town needs to start with what it has with the land.

Error Horner asked if the \$100,000 would include the parking lot. Denny Tovey replied yes.

Citizen asked what happens if the Town spends the \$1 million Grant and there is no money left. Chairman Carmany noted it would have to go back to a vote at that point.

Tovey asked the Board of Finance if it would be willing to sit with the Library Building Committee to come up with a number that the Town can afford and is willing to pay. Lori Ann Clymas noted the BOF has the option to put limitations on any vote that the LBC report back to the BOF as to its progress, etc. Carmany noted she would like to see a spreadsheet covering all the projects that are being contemplated including maintenance and operating costs.

Tovey noted making it a one story building eliminates the elevator, stairs and 2 lobbys.

Citizen noted he was unclear if the vote was to spend \$100,000. Chairman Carmany replied yes. The citizen noted most residents live on a budget and to downplay that is disrespectful.

Henry Krempel asked if it would be possible to break down the \$100,000 to something less and have an actual size of the Library. Carmany noted that would be taken into consideration. Tovey noted the location of the building is the first thing. The borings need to be done to locate the building.

BOF member noted there is a disconnect. There needs to be reassurance the process will be flexible enough to come up with an end plan. First Selectman Meehan noted the Call of the meeting will be to accept the recommendation of the BOF to send \$100,000 to a Town vote. This is about the land and the sequence of steps to validate the property as to suitability and that's part of the \$100,000. Only a certain amount of that \$100,000 will be released until that validation is obtained. Meehan felt the building should go where the plan shows it and test borings should be done. The question of suitability of

that corner of the site has never been answered. If the money is approved, there needs to be an understanding that if for some reason the borings and the characteristics of the soil don't give the option to build at that site, that is a game changer. Bob Gorman also noted there should be a better recommendation from the LBC regarding size, location and cost of the building. Jennifer Rannestad noted after determination of the site, the budget should be addressed and built into the process early on.

Tovey noted he would like to sit with the BOF and hear about everything that is upcoming on the BOF's plate.

Chairman Carmany asked for comments :

Terry Schreiber noted she was Chairman of the Library Board of Trustees and a member of the Library Building Committee. She indicated everything has to be brought up to code (bathrooms and doorways have to be wider for wheelchairs, etc.). When all that was taken into consideration, it doubled the size for handicap accessibility but nothing else.

Richard Harrall noted the knowns are that the current library is not adequate and there is a \$1 million Grant.

There was discussion regarding the meeting room. Some felt that was overkill. Linda Fox noted the Library needs program space. The room would hold about 70 people. Currently programs are farmed out to other spaces in town (Church, Town Hall, Meeting House). There needs to be a place to do programming. Fox also noted they get a surprising number of calls from people who would like to do things in Town and can't accommodate them. Examples are State Representatives who would like to do a mini Town Hall type of meeting. Tudoring is also done at the Library.

Cary Hull noted there are dates when the Town Hall meeting room is booked. The Meeting House is being de-emphasized as a meeting place due to its condition. Its an old building. There are some programs not suitable for children to be held at the Town Hall.

Margie Warner noted she has visited every library in the State and reviewed various

libraries and programs.

There was a brief discussion regarding having private space for tutoring.

Joe Cohen noted if the Town is going to do this, it needs to be done right. This needs to bring the Town together including children, elderly, high school students, etc. He felt 8000 SF was a bare minimum for a library.

Lori Ann Clymas noted the \$100,000 will get the Town to a point to know what the vision will be and where it goes in the future.

Peter Harding noted the Town will not write a blank check for \$100,000. The environmental study is a priority. The architect will not design a building if the site is not suitable.

Joe Cohen noted there has never been an inventory of available sites. Perhaps there should be a search committee to look for other properties.

Tim Morse noted having a great library is an essential part of the community.

Lori Ann Clymas noted Planning & Zoning spent 4 to 5 years planning out everything for the Town (Plan of Conservation & Development). This has been part of the process for years. A lot of work has already been done that the public doesn't realize or know about. She noted past surveys were done. Meehan noted there is a map in the POCD that lists replacing the library, the community center, the playscape, connection to Main Street, the trail system, etc. Clymas reiterated doing the schematic is first and then it can go to the Town to see what the pulse is for the process.

Cary Hull noted it is worth noting the Library Board of Trustees has gone to the Board of Finance for several years to ask for more staff hours at the Library so the Librarian isn't alone. She noted the Library is 1% of the Town's budget.

Joe Cohen noted the Library is something that goes to the core of the community and is as important as the school system.

Henry Krempel noted it has never been discussed as a town where the library should be. It would benefit the Town to have a discussion to figure out the location – existing library, Chester Elementary School, or North Quarter Park.

It was noted senior citizens have been left out of the library.

Ed Ward noted he thought there was data available and that surveys had been done. Linda Fox stated those surveys indicated people wanted it to stay at 21 West Main Street and that's what prompted the Library Board to look at that site originally.

Denny Tovey noted as a taxpayer he would urge the Board of Finance to support this effort and send this request for \$100,000 to a Town Meeting vote.

Motion made and seconded to close the Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting. Unanimously Approved. Motion Carried.

Chairman Carmany read letters/emails from the following residents into the record – Sally Murray, Errol Horner, Caryn Davis, Francine Curto, Patricia Wainwright and Rick Nygard. (it is noted for the record these letters and others that were not read are attached to these minutes.)

There was much discussion regarding the language and what should be included in the motion for this item. Ed Meehan reiterated the Town needs to know the environmental status of the site before doing anything else. That question was never answered 20 years ago.

Another question is bonding, financing, etc. and where does that enter into the conversation. There should be some parameters. Denny Tovey noted he would like to know what is being paid right now for bonding. Ed Meehan reviewed the existing bonding situation.

Chairman Carmany noted a \$3 million project would increase taxes by \$100 annually and a \$6 million project would increase taxes by \$200 annually.

It was noted the Town should continue to pursue any and all STEAP Grants.

There was discussion regarding all the Town projects currently in the pipe line.

There was discussion as to how this should be presented for a vote at Town Meeting. It was noted as much information as possible should be given.

Clymas moved, Strekel seconded, that the Board of Finance send the \$100,000 request from the Board of Selectmen to Town Meeting vote for Library Board's preparation of preliminary site and schematic plans at North Quarter Park and report back to the BOF on soil suitability and building location, and then report back as important steps occur going forward. Unanimously Approved with Gorman and Park abstaining. Motion Carried.

The schedule for holding a Town Meeting was reviewed. First Selectman Meehan noted he would also like to put on that Call of the Meeting the release of capital funds for the Main Street Project with the change in scope so they can proceed with the bid documents. He explained the change in scope reduces the request to \$100,000.

Motion made and seconded to add the release of \$100,000 from capital funds to the Agenda. Unanimously Approved. Motion Carried. Date for the Town Meeting was discussed. Meehan further reviewed the scaled back scope of the Main Street Project, hard costs, soft costs, bid alternates and STEAP Grants. He reiterated he would like to include the release of \$100,000 from capital funds for the Main Street Project on the Town Meeting Call.

Annual Report Dedication

There was a brief discussion regarding the Annual Report Dedication.

Determine Budget Schedule for 2015 for 2015/16 Budget

First Selectman Meehan suggested following the same process as in past years. The Boards of Finance and Selectmen would hold joint meetings. The public hearing would be held in April with a Town Meeting in May. Departments have to have their budgets in by the end of January. The full budget will be available at the next Board of Finance meeting. Operating and capital budgets will be looked at. The BOF liaison to the Board of Education will be discussed at the next meeting as well.

Other

Park moved, Clymas seconded, to send to Town Meeting the release of \$100,000 from Capital for additional costs associated with the Main Street East Project. Voting in favor – Park, Clymas, Strekel, Gorman, Rannestad. Opposed – Carmany. Motion Carried.

Strekel moved, Clymas seconded, to accept the list from the Tax Collector and add those names to the Suspense List. Unanimously approved. Motion Carried.

Reports

Monthly Financials

Chairman Carmany noted the Monthly Financials are looking good.

Consideration and Approval of Bills – none.

First Selectman's Report – none.

Old Business

Other

It was noted the next Agenda should include review of the Town's Policy Manual to make sure it is consistent with State Statutes in each of the departments.

Audience of Citizens – none.

Adjournment

Motion made and seconded to adjourn at 11:04 PM. Unanimously Approved. Motion Carried.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith R. Brown".

Judith R. Brown, Recording Secretary

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Attachments:

16 Pages of letters/emails read and/or submitted to BOF at its meeting of January 15, 2015