

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOF MEETING

TOWN OF CHESTER, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING
Thursday, August 15, 2019
Community Meeting Room
Chester Town Hall

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Carmany called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. In attendance included: Chairman Carmany, Rick Nygard, Jon Joslow, Jennifer Rannestad, and Mike Joplin, (seated for Dave Cohen). Also in attendance were Joel Severance, Harbor Commission, Lon Seidman, Supervision District BOE Chairman, Brian White, Superintendent of Schools, First Selectwoman Gister, Selectman Grzybowski and Selectwoman Janecek, Susan Wright and 2 additional members of the Audience.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Rick Nygard made a motion to approve the minutes from the 7/18/19 BOF meeting. Jennifer Rannestad seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Rick Nygard made a motion to add to the agenda, after the First Selectwoman's Report, a discussion on a request from the Harbor Commission. Jon Joslow seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Michael Joplin made a motion to amend the order of the agenda to go into Executive Session after the Audience of Citizens portion of the meeting. Rick Nygard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Jon Joslow made a motion to add to the agenda, before the Executive Session, a discussion relative to community involvement on Boards/Commissions. Michael Joplin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Lon Seidman, Supervision District and Essex BOE Chairman and Brian White, Superintendent of Schools updated the BOF on Regionalization/Cooperative Agreement Initiatives. These gentlemen were also available for a Q&A session.

Highlights of Mr. Seidman's report included:

- Several proposals have been put forth in the Legislature to "force" small school systems into regional school systems. These proposals did not pass.
 - The State does not recognize our current school system, they see us as 3 towns and 4 school districts. At the present time, redundancy is necessary in order to comply with the State.
- Lon outlined the difficulty in regionalization being equitable for all 3 towns.

- The District has requested to the State that they be allowed to “self-declare” and continue to “share” services. If the legislation had passed, our system would no longer be allowed under State Statute.
- Lon outlined the history of the Supervision District’s formation, role and cost sharing innovations resulting from same (one Superintendent shared by all 3 towns, special education costs, pre-school etc.).
 - In reality, money is saved in all 3 towns because of our governance.

Mr. Seidman outlined the process relative to the Supervision District budget. The current Supervision District budget workshops begin in the fall, finishes in February and then is forwarded to the individual boards.

Lon is developing an idea for a smaller Board of Education; If the Supervision District’s budget could be done concurrently with the individual budgets, greater efficiencies could be realized. Because the Supervision District budget must be completed prior to the individual elementary school and Region 4 budgets, he suggested that Region 4 BOE members at 9 also be the local BOE members thus drastically reducing the number of BOE members (currently at 32) - (note that some “tweaking” may be necessary to allow for minority representation on the Board). This would allow the same individuals Pre-K through 12, to develop and be fully versed in all aspects of all of the region’s budgets. Note that presently, only BOE members may vote on the Supervision District budget. This budget at \$7M is then allocated to the 3 Elementary Schools and Region 4.

Any changes to BOE representation/governance would require each town to change their ordinance, which would need to be voted on by each town’s taxpayers.

Jon Joslow cautioned against developing a plan (starting with a specific number of Board of Education members – rather than a coherent plan) until the BOE gets a consensus from the 3 towns to proceed with any Regionalization/Cooperative Agreement.

All meetings are open to the public and as a result of public input via the public hearing on the Supervision District budget, changes were made to the Supervision District budget.

Jennifer Rannestad stressed the importance of local control over budgets and noted that in reality, the towns only have control over approximately 1/3 of the town’s budget because 2/3 of the budget is the responsibility of the BOE(s).

Virginia suggested that perhaps a mechanism allowing BOF and or BOS members voting on the Supervision District budget would be well received by the towns.

Jon Joslow understood Lon’s concept of a Pre-K through 12 methodology and the challenges resulting from having 32 BOE members. However, he stressed the

difficulties in comparing budgets on a year to year basis, as staffing gets moved into the Supervision District Budget and strongly urged the Administration to listen to the BOF and BOS and respond accordingly to requests for information, clarification etc. He stressed the importance of communication between the school system and the 3 towns.

The effects of “dramatic swings” in ADM and the ramifications for towns as a result was discussed. Typically, the town most adversely affected by ADM turns down the budget at Referendum.

Virginia suggested that the BOE discuss the financials at each BOE meeting; not just during the budget season. Actuals to Budget need to get a higher priority with BOE members. The BOF has previously discussed the possibility of including BOF members on the BOE to allow for greater financial oversight.

Lon reported that it is highly unlikely that the Legislature would allow BOF members to be a part of the BOE.

Mr. Seidman and Mr. White were fully versed on the letter developed by the BOF and forwarded to the Administration regarding the BOF’s significant concerns relative to communication, requests for information, requests for clarification etc.

Lon reported that the Legislature has agreed to study the implications of allowing school districts to self-define.

Lon reported that the next steps include the reformation of a Governance Committee that could include representatives from the BOF and BOS. This Committee would consider BOE membership. Mr. Seidman will keep the BOF and BOS updated on the progress of the reformation of a Governance Committee. He urged BOF members to attend the Supervision District meetings and provide input and feedback to the Supervision District BOE.

Lon encouraged individuals to testify at the Legislature and/or provide written testimony. Lon will keep the BOS and BOF updated on how the Legislative Committee regarding Education issues progresses.

Note that Mr. Siedman’s comments this evening were as an individual; he was not speaking on behalf of the Board of Education.

The BOF thanked Mr. Seidman and Mr. White for the participation in this evening’s meeting.

REPORTS

Monthly financials were included in the BOF packet.

Virginia reported that Liz continues to work with the Business Manager to clarify Education figures as they continue to be out of balance.

FIRST SELECTWOMAN'S REPORT

Lauren reported that the 75% (approximately \$91,000) reimbursement from FEMA has been received. A \$6,000 claim remains outstanding. Additional close out figures are still being developed; particularly in the beach areas.

The BOF will discuss, at a future meeting, to what account the reimbursement funds should be placed. Lauren is expecting a status reported from Federal Highway relative to additional reimbursements.

Lauren reported that the Tree Budget is very quickly being depleted; however, large groupings of dead trees are being addressed. Discussion continues regarding appropriate disposal of the "chippings" of the dead trees as they are diseased.

A \$250,000 liability is anticipated to address the trees over the next couple of years. The diseased trees pose a safety concern as dead trees/limbs may fall at any time.

Jon Joslow suggested that due to safety concerns, funds be allocated as soon as possible to address trees. Lauren responded that she is working on an assessment report and may request a special appropriation to address same.

HARBOR COMMISSION REQUEST

Joel Severance distributed information relative to the dredging of the mouth of Chester Creek. He reported on the need for dredging as follows:

- Periodic dredging of the creek is necessary to ensure access to marinas and to prevent boats running aground in the channel. Public safety will also be enhanced as a result of the dredging.
 - Significant revenue (restaurants, merchants, etc.) is realized from the many out of town boaters visiting Chester.
 - Dredging was last done in 2000.
- In the past grants have paid 100% for dredging projects; however, the new grant, unexpectedly, includes a 20% share from the municipality.
 - The BOS has recommended that dredging be included in the 10-year Capital Plan.
- The Harbor Commission is in the process of obtaining 2 environmental reports from DEEP and getting permits and review from appropriate Boards/Commissions. It is anticipated that all permits, etc. will be received within 60 days.
- All grant requests will be reevaluated by the CT Port Authority in September. Funds are not needed by that time; however, the Harbor Commission requests that the funding be approved by the BOS and BOF prior to Port Authority review.
- A Town Meeting is necessary for final approval of funding.

Jennifer Rannestad made a motion to approve a special appropriation in the amount of \$25,000 as the required cost share of 20% of \$125,000 to dredge the mouth of

Chester Creek; provided the Harbor Commission receives all permits and reports and final grant approval for the dredging. At that time, the BoF will determine funding; contingency, general fund or unassigned fund balance. Rick Nygard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OPEN ITEMS IN OLD BUSINESS

POCD – no report.

Main Street Project Update

A Special Main Street Committee is scheduled on 8/20/19. Jacobson representatives will provide a status report on the design. Full approval has been received from SHIPPO relative to the “void” areas. The Water Company has marked the street for the water main replacement project anticipated to begin in the Fall.

Lauren forwarded to the Merchants a survey requesting information regarding their businesses; i.e. hours of operation, number of employees, areas of concern relative to the Main Street Project, etc. All feedback will be collected and a spreadsheet will be developed on same.

Lauren has researched options to assist the Merchants during construction; i.e. marketing programs, event planning, parking shuttle. A “survival plan” will be developed and a town-wide email including a timeline of the project will be forwarded.

Presently, the proposed phasing of the project and plan includes keeping one lane of Main Street open, going one way, for the entire project. The goal is to not close the road completely unless absolutely necessary.

A meeting is being scheduled with property owners relative to necessary work in the voids on walls supporting some of the buildings e.g. Simons, Laurie Warner’s and the Villager. The owner of most of the property with the voids will undertake the cost of the wall structures necessary prior to filling the voids.

Region 4 and CES Reporting Improvements

The auditor has met with the cafeteria director and business office to review information. It is anticipated that an analysis and report will be completed within the next week.

Year-end Transfers

Rick Nygard made a motion to approve, at the BOS’s request, the following year end transfers:

From	10-01-20-1000-270	P&Z – General Legal	\$126
To	10-01-21-1000-106	Inland Wetland – Outside Clerical	\$126
From	10-01-20-1000-270	P&Z – General Legal	\$3,684

To	10-02-30-1081-365	Highway – Tree Maint – Outside Con	\$600
To	10-02-30-1130-265	Highway – General Engineering	\$2,172
To	10-02-30-1130-445	Highway – Road Maintenance	\$912

Jennifer Rannestad seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

AUDIENCE

Susan Wright expressed appreciation for Mr. Seidman’s and Mr. Wright’s participation in this evening’s meeting. She offered the EDC’s assistance during the Main Street Project and reported that a “survival guide” was developed during the bridge project.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Community Involvement on Boards/Commissions.

Jon Joslow expressed concern regarding vacancies on the BOF (and other boards) and the need for new “faces” on Boards/Commissions.

Lauren responded that the ballot relative to the BOF and several other boards/commissions is quite full and contested. This means there are more people on the ballot than in recent years.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Jon Joslow made a motion to go into Executive Session at 10:05 p.m. for the purpose of a discussion regarding the consideration of negotiating amounts to assist merchants who may be damaged as a result of the Main Street Project. Michael Joplin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Lauren Gister, Charlene Janecek and James Grzybowski were invited into the Executive Session.

Regular session resumed at 10:25 p.m.

No action taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Jon Joslow made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:26 p.m. Rick Nygard seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski, Clerk

Reviewed by Virginia Carmany, Chair