

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOS MEETING

TOWN OF CHESTER, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, March 25, 2020
Chester Town Hall
Community Meeting Room/ZOOM Meeting

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman Gister called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. In attendance included First Selectwoman Gister, Selectwoman Janecek, Selectman Englert, Scott Martinson, CRAHD, Sherry Carlson, CRAHD and several members of the audience (via ZOOM, including but not limited to Virginia Carmany, James Grzybowski, Elizabeth Reinhard, Richard Strauss, John O'Hare, Deborah Vilcheck, Trisha Brookhart, Terri Englert, and Susan Wright.

Charlene Janecek made a motion to add to the agenda "Selectmen's Report" (between items 4 and 5). Tom Englert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

COVID 19 UPDATE

Scott Martinson and Sherry Carlson, CRAHD, provided an update on the COVID 19 pandemic. Highlights from the frequent conference calls with the State DPH include:

- Volatile situation, changes daily, extremely contagious
- Spring duration – 8 to 10 weeks
- Aggressive in elderly patients
- Anticipates virus will return in the Fall and Spring 2021
- Social Distancing is "flattening the curve"
- Goals is to not overwhelm the healthcare

If/when a case is confirmed in Chester (it is assumed there are cases in Chester), Scott will notify the First Selectwoman, Emergency Management, and local law enforcement. State Police requested that information be sent to Valley Shore dispatch. No personal information on a patient will be made public.

Area nursing homes are a priority for the Health District. Cherie reported that she has been in contact with Aaron Manor and has been addressing their concerns relative to staff and residents. She has also sent information to Chesterfields and has talked with their Director several times. Cherie will reach out to the nursing homes again regarding any symptomatic patients/staff.

Lauren asked if Scott/Cherie expect that if/when the virus comes back in the Fall and Spring 2021, will it have less of an impact and will there have been immunity gained from the current outbreak. Scott responded that the data is still be analyzed relative to this "first wave" and transmission. The CDC will not yet release modeling data. Also, vaccines are being developed. Cherie expressed optimism that similar to the Spanish Flu in 1918 and H1NA in 2009, immunity may be possible relative to COVID.

Scott reported that the New York area is a breeding ground for commuters. Currently, the State is providing town by town data of confirmed cases; however, it is anticipated that after several weeks, the State will only be reporting on total deaths throughout the entire state. He urged Chester residents to continue social distancing as the main line of defense against the virus.

Scott reported that the State of Connecticut's electronic system for the reporting of any infectious disease (not just COVID) is old and outdated. In Rhode Island, laboratories have the ability to disseminate information electronically, in Connecticut, the state waits for paper reports. The Health District is notifying state agencies as cases are confirmed.

Cherie reported on the protocol for testing. Individuals should call their primary care physician or hospital's COVID number if they suspect COVID19. The symptoms will be reviewed and if appropriate, the physician will write a prescription for the COVID test. You cannot be tested without a prescription. The hospital will call the individual to schedule an appointment for the test. Health care workers and nursing home residents are prioritized for testing.

Susan Wright expressed concern that individuals with symptoms and a prescription for the COVID test are not being tested in a timely manner. They are screened further and if they are not having difficulty breathing, they are not being tested. Also, individuals traveling from other states via airports are not being tested. Cherie responded that even as individuals show symptoms, persons with the most severe symptoms are prioritized for testing. If you are sick with anything, assume you have COVID and act accordingly.

Scott continued that as the virus progresses and expands, little to no contact tracing will be done.

The status of testing sites at various hospitals was discussed. Again, if you are sick (fever, cough, etc.) assume you have COVID and act accordingly.

20/21 BUDGET

Lauren updated the BOS on Executive Orders issued by the Governor; specifically, those associated with budgets and extension of deadlines for same. In addition, the requirements for in person voting on budgets has been exempted as we are not permitted to "gather". A system has been put in place that allows for the Region 4 BOE to pass the regional school budget and for the BOF to adopt the Town's budget (including CES) without going to a Town Meeting or Referendum vote. There will; however, be a requirement for a public posting of the budget and an opportunity for public input via teleconference/video (similar to this evening's ZOOM BOS meeting). Lauren is pursuing with the Town Attorney advice on appropriate protocol and process regarding same.

Other items requiring a Town Meeting (i.e. acceptance of grant awards, contract approvals, Ordinances, etc.) have not yet been addressed via an Executive Order. It is anticipated that these items will be addressed in the near future.

Lauren reported that she and Peter have been developing additional information i.e. history of prior "crisis situations" (2008 housing crisis, 8 day shut-down due to Hurricane Irene) and the budgetary impacts of same (tax collection rates, etc.).

When the BOS began the budget process, a list of "highlights" and department requests was developed and included funding for the Deputy Treasurer, additional hours for the Library Director, a Medical

Officer for Summer Camp, and additional part-time staff for Public Works. At the time none of these items were particularly controversial. The request for funds for increased hours for the Town's 3rd Constable was substantial. Lauren has asked the Resident State Trooper for a breakdown of the request including several shift scenarios.

Lauren asked if the BOS would wish to modify the budget requests as a result of the Covid crisis. Lauren encouraged BOS members to forward their comments relative to the draft budget to her. Lauren will develop a list of priorities in the budget requests that have been submitted. Charlene Janecek reported that the BOS needs to be cognizant of individuals currently out of work and the BOS may need to re-visit some budget requests. Note that health insurance numbers reflected in the draft budget are just estimates at this time.

Tom Englert reported that as Acting First Selectman and a Selectman during the hurricane and 2008 financial crisis, the BOS endeavored to keep mill increases to a minimum. Also, during the 2008 crisis, Chester experienced a drop in ADM and the education budget actually decreased. The tax collection rates during these times remained constant.

Lauren reported that it is unknown what, if any affect, the "shutdown" will have on the anticipated budget surplus. While the town hall is closed to the public, outside contractors and the Public Works staff are still working on outdoor projects. The Town Clerk continues to process conveyance taxes, real estate recordings, etc.

Lauren recommended keeping the current budget schedule as posted and as consistent as possible (public meetings via ZOOM, etc.).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Tom Englert made a motion to approve the 3/11/20 BOS minutes. Charlene Janecek seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

SELECTMEN REPORTS

Charlene reported that a "call tree" has been established to reach out to residents with known health issues, living alone etc. The calls were well received by residents.

Lauren reported:

- Bob Blair passed away on Saturday evening. The Annual Report was dedicated to Mr. Blair and Mr. Blair was able to see a recording of the Annual Report Dedication prior to his death. A Celebration of his life will be scheduled at a future date.
- The Meeting House floor project is nearing completion. Additional repairs were uncovered during the project and have been addressed.
- The new Resident State Trooper, Luke LuRue, will begin on Friday, March 27, 2020. Matt's last day was today; however, the luncheon honoring Matt will be rescheduled. Matt will be a part-time Constable in Deep River.
- Colonna Concrete and Asphalt Paving was awarded the Main Street project. They anticipate beginning the project within the next 3 weeks. Road construction projects are considered "essential" with no restrictions. A pre-construction meeting is scheduled Thursday, 3/26. Information on the project will be distributed via the town-wide email.

- The Goodspeed is updating their schedule as a result of Coronavirus. The first show in East Haddam has been cancelled. The entire Chester season has been cancelled. After the crisis, they will reconsider options for the Chester theatre.
- Town Hall operations during COVID:
 - Library closed – may be limited on-line programming
 - Public Works – operating as normal (outside work)
 - Town Hall – closed to public, open by appointment only (some items may be able to wait until crisis is over).
 - Many staff members working from home
 - CT Comp facilitating “work from home”
 - Well checks/telephone calls to residents (as reported above)
 - Human Service Dept – packing pre-prepared bags from Food Pantry for pick-up
 - Elementary schools providing “grab and go” breakfast and lunch

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

John O’Hare questioned if the proposed Federal Bill would that apply to municipal employees. Lauren responded and outlined the actions being taken at the State level vis a vis bridge loans for small businesses. Many details of the Federal Bill are still unknown. The Lt. Governor will be scheduling 2 to 3 tele town meetings specifically aimed at FMLA and unemployment. If municipal employees were laid off, they would qualify for unemployment. At this time town employees are catching up on work and to date, layoffs are not being considered.

Larry asked if the current rate of unemployment is available to gauge the impact of families who may not be able to pay their taxes. Lauren responded that most property taxes, not all, are paid by the banks. Car taxes are not and Lauren will research those percentages.

Virginia Carmany reported that the Governor’s Executive Order allowed for school budgets to be pushed out 30 days. The R4 Referendum was scheduled before 5/15. The Town’s budget was scheduled on 5/27. Currently, we can only push out the budget for any date that was to fall on or before 5/15; therefore, at the moment, we cannot push our budget out. If the school changes the vote on their budget, the Town’s date will have to change.

Virginia reported that additional unknowns in the budget include health insurance, Valley Shore, hazardous waste and final numbers from the school. Lauren responded that some of these numbers are now available. Lauren is working with Peter to fine tune the budget reports.

Virginia commented that the Tax Collector may have a list of “at risk” residents; i.e. property taxes. She agreed that the collection of car taxes may be affected by the level of testing for COVID19. Lauren responded that there is a shortage of swabs and the reagent. The State is working to address testing and supply issues.

Have cases in this area been from the community or have the patients been traveling before testing positive? Lauren responded that this information is unknown. To date, there are no confirmed cases in Chester.

Susan Wright expressed concern that the R4 BOE would be approving their own budget and that other than the ability to make a comment, residents will not have the opportunity to vote on the R4 budget

(80% of the entire budget). Lauren agreed that this was unfortunate but due to the circumstances, there are not many options.

Ms. Wright suggested that perhaps absentee voting may be an option and she also suggested that perhaps wage freezes for teachers and other related employees would be appropriate. Lauren responded there are several Unions involved and the cost of living increases are built into the contracts.

Ms. Wright encouraged the BOS/BOF to consider not increasing the mill rate.

ADJOURNMENT

Charlene Janecek made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Tom Englert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski, Clerk