

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOF MEETING

TOWN OF CHESTER, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING
Thursday, September 17, 2020
Via ZOOM

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Carmany called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. In attendance included: Chairman Carmany, Jennifer Rannestad, Rick Nygard, Richard Strauss, Greg Merola and Andrew Gardner seated for Jon Joslowand John O'Hare, not seated. Also in attendance; Peter Evankow, Business Manager, Susan Wright, First Selectwoman Gister, and Selectwoman Janecek.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Rick Nygard made a motion to approve the 8/20/20 BOF minutes as amended. Jennifer Rannestad seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Corrections:

- Page 2 – Note that the BOF Contingency is currently at \$70,000; not \$75,000 as reported
- Page 3 – Change “Capital” to “Capital Asset Lives”
- Page 3 – Under “Tax Collector’s Report” add “Virginia reported on the following”
- Page 5 – Under “Budget Status Report” add “current and future years”
- Page 6 – Under “5-10 Year Roads Projects” change to “The BOF requested the report be further refined...”
- Page 7 – Under “Future Agenda Items” note – Lauren will reach out to CCM and COST and Peter will reach out to GFOA

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS – None.

NEW BUSINESS

BOF Attorney Discussion

Virginia reported that the attorney she has used for BOF business is Richard Roberts, Halloran & Sage. She added that she was not going to speculate as to why this issue and Board of Finance postage have been raised as ‘important’ concerns of the Board of Finance. Both have been tools utilized by the Board within State Statute. The current approved budget for legal expenses is \$500.

Richard Strauss questioned the process for BOF authorization of same. Virginia reported that the BOF did not vote on the selection of the BOF attorney; she selected him and will not be requesting that the BOF vote on the selection of a BOF attorney. Richard Strauss requested that the Town Attorney provide comment on the protocol for Board/Commission authorization of use of an attorney.

Virginia commented that BOF attorney fees and funds for postage have been minimal. The use of the BOF attorney was to ensure that state statutes are followed as the BOF oversees a \$13M+ budget during a pandemic.

Jennifer Rannestad made a motion to “close out” the BOF Attorney Discussion. Andrew Gardner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy Manual and Scrivener’s Edits – any updates to incorporate

Virginia indicated she had received edits from only one member, Rick Nygard which will be incorporated into the Policy Manual. BOF members had no further comments and the report will be submitted for publication.

10 Year Capital Projects – Potential Bonding – Research with GFOA/CCM/COST

Peter Evankow reported that the auditor noted that due to the current favorable interest rates, some towns are opting to bond for roads and other capital projects. GFOA members have not provided input as requested by Peter. The current rate for a 20-year bond is 1.58% and for a 10-year bond, 1%.

The Region 4 bond is due in 2023 and Virginia will follow-up with R4 relative to potential school projects vis a vis bonding.

The BOF discussed the Town’s Capital Plan. Many of the large expenses are 8 plus years out; i.e. vehicle purchases (fire dept., public works). BoF requested Peter expand the 10 year Capital Project list out the additional years to see how the funding for Public Works and Hose Company the vehicle expenditures could be met. The current Capital projects list does not go out enough years to be helpful.

Lauren provided a brief overview of road projects (non-emergency); Deep Hollow Road/Liberty Street. Jacobson is currently developing estimates on a project including moving a stream to facilitate work on the bank. Cost estimates could exceed \$1 million. There may be grants available for such a project. In addition, major drainage work (non-emergency) is needed at the intersection of Story Hill and Liberty Street and North Main Street and Goose Hill Road. It is anticipated that Connecticut Water Company will have projects in that area within the next few years. Also, upcoming projects include a new roof and furnace for the town hall. Lauren indicated none of these projects have been added to the Captial plan and are not on a critical path.

For informational purposes, a list of the above projects will be developed.

REPORTS

Monthly Financials

Monthly financial reports were included in the BOF packet.

Tax Collection and Revenue

Virginia reviewed the Tax Collector’s report which indicates an approximate 8% difference between tax collection from August 2019 and August 2020. Peter commented that after speaking with Madaline, through the end of September there is an approximate \$354,000 left to collect and Chester is “right on track” with two weeks remaining in September.

Virginia will update the Revenue Spreadsheet with all the revenue line items for the next BoF Meeting.

Virginia noticed there is a \$500 variance between the CES school surplus on Peter’s schedule vs. documentation from Brian White. Peter indicated the remaining CES funds to the town have not yet been finalized. He estimates the remaining balance to the town at \$140,589.00. Virginia will forward to

Peter the information she received from the Superintendent of Schools (less \$500 from Peter's estimate). Peter reported that the BOE has not yet been updated on the figures.

Annual Budget Status Report

Lauren updated the BOF on the status of FEMA reimbursements (Covid) as follows:

- FEMA has not yet accepted Chester's expenses as "covered". In the Spring, FEMA indicated that plexiglass, PPE, cleaning supplies would be eligible; however, FEMA has stated to Deep River that "no one said you had to re-open the Town Hall".
- From March 13 through June 30, a \$21,000 claim has been submitted to FEMA.
- Any funds not received from FEMA will be submitted to the State (OPM) under the CARES Act.

Status of Masioncare – Lauren reported that this is still at the "Discovery Phase" of the process.

The status of the Health/Welfare account was discussed as it shows nearly fully expended. The majority of these funds are budgeted for Tri-Town and the Estuary Council of Seniors and are paid at the beginning of the year.

A separate Human Services account is used for aid to the community. This account is funded via donations, not tax dollars.

Revenue accounts that will be followed throughout the year include: Ambulance, Conveyance Tax, and Town Clerk Fees.

As requested last month, Virginia reported that Deep River's collection rate is down by 2% and Essex's is higher by 2% from last year. Note that Chester offered the "grace period" due to Covid 19.

FIRST SELECTWOMAN'S REPORT

Lauren reported:

- Covid-19 – The Town continues to experience a very low infection rate; however, statewide, the percentage of infection is slowly increasing.
- Main Street:
 - 2 new crosswalks installed.
 - The road will be closed on 9/21 to mark out the line painting (parking spaces, etc.) Actual line painting will occur overnight (date to be determined).
 - Kiosk installed
 - French Hen stairs in process – waiting for handrails
 - Work on Wall across from Pattaconk on-going
 - Punch List items being addressed
 - Trees will be planted sometime in October
 - Spring Street guardrail – waiting for delivery
 - Final cost figures not yet available.
- The Merchants/Re-open Chester Committee have scheduled the Re-opening celebration on Saturday, 9/26 – all social distancing, masks, PPE protocol will be in place.

- Protocols are being developed to allow in-person Board/Commission meetings. Lauren will send out a communication to Chairmen as appropriate. In-person meetings must accommodate individuals wishing to access the meeting virtually.
- Judy Brown, ZEO, has resigned. Betty Perrault has been filling in temporarily. The Planning and Zoning Commission is tasked with finding a replacement.

OPEN ITEMS IN OLD BUSINESS

Update on Chester's Audit Report – Recommendations to Management Town Clerk App, Retirement Board and Asset Life Adjustments

Follow-up from last month's BOF meeting:

- Town Clerk App – remains on hold until after the election
- Retirement Board – information will be included in next month's BOF packet.
- Asset Life Adjustments – not yet reviewed. Peter received figures this week from the Auditor.

Covid Expenses – FEMA Reimbursement – Town, R4-CES

Town Covid expenses discussed above. Superintendent White reported that CES was at \$28,543.00 and R4 was at \$26,000 for last year. So far this year there have been no new Covid requested expenditures.

STEAP Grant – Estimate – Cost Share – On-going Annual Expense

Lauren reported that the BOS approved the submission of a grant in the amount of \$91,000. The intent is to request funding to install WIFI capabilities in the downtown area. The streetlights, that were purchased by the Town several years ago, have the capacity for enhancements such as WIFI. The E-Team purposely had streetlights installed that would accommodate expansion. When the grant was submitted, the on-going costs were unknown and would not be funded by the grant. Lauren is working with Comcast relative to on-going expenses (worst case scenario \$30,000 per year but expected to be much lower). Said project would go out to bid and it is anticipated that work would begin, if the grant is awarded, in Spring 2021.

Lauren listed the benefits of town center WIFI include:

- Enhanced communications; especially in emergency situations.
 - Currently many cell phone users have no connection in the town center
 - Note that if the power is out, the WIFI will also be out.
- Allow individuals to access town maps, restaurant menus, lists of businesses, local businesses' websites, etc.
- Reduces isolation in the "Covid-19" environment
- Allow for broader access to transit services (9TT app).
- Benefit property values
- The Main Street Project includes a kiosk with information on businesses website, maps, etc. without WIFI, this information will not be accessible to visitors with WIFI.

If the Town is awarded the grant, a vote to expend the grant monies is required. Note that the grant is a "reimbursement grant".

Virginia expressed concern that the BOS voted to accept the grant, should it be awarded, with no estimate of on-going expenses to the taxpayers for this service for the down town area only. As stated above the on-going costs are estimated at between \$30k and \$15K. It is anticipated that all costs

associated with a project will be available for discussion and potential inclusion during the upcoming budget discussions.

Annual Report - Dedication

Lauren reported that Richard Strauss had made a proposal to the BOS to consider forming a committee to review nominations, submitted by the public, relative to the dedication on the Town's Annual Report which has been a Board of Finance task for the last 18+ years. Typically, the BOF votes on the dedication placed on the Annual Report. Said Committee would be charged with soliciting and reviewing nominations received from the public and making a recommendation on same. Soliciting nominations from the public would broaden the list of potential individuals or groups to be considered.

Lauren reported that the Essex BOF has developed a list that is updated regularly, of potential honorees for their Annual Report. Valley accepts nominations from the public for their "Hometown Recognition" that is presented at graduation.

Virginia commented that the BOF has not seen Mr. Strauss' proposal. She did provide information from State Statute 7-406 regarding "Town Reports". It appears that it is the BOF's role to develop the Annual Report though the this Annual Report has been handled outside the BoF. Lauren will speak with Attorney Bennet for further clarification. The BOS will discuss further at their next meeting and possibly develop a written protocol for nominations and the BoF will take up the discussion at the October BOF meeting. Typically, the dedication is ready by the BoF November meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Jennifer Rannestad made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m. Greg Merola seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski
Recording Clerk