

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOS MEETING

TOWN OF CHESTER, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
Wednesday, December 29, 2021
ZOOM Meeting

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman Gister called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. In attendance included First Selectwoman Gister, Selectwoman Janecek, Selectman Englert, Terri Englert, Virginia Carmany, Rick Nygard, Bob Blair, Susan Wright, Andrew Gardener, Kenneth Younkin, Kris Pollack, Joe Cohen, Ed Meehan, Meredith Devanney, and Scott Smith.

APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Lauren reported that P&Z appointed Elaine Fitzgibbons to a two-year term expiring 12/20/23, as Chester P&Z's representative to RiverCOG.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Charlene Janecek made a motion to approve the minutes from the 12/15/21 BOS meeting, as amended. Tom Englert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Note: proper spelling "DeCarli" and "Watershed".

REVIEW AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF CHESTER-DEEP RIVER ROAD SWEEPING RENEWAL

A copy of the Road Sweeping Agreement between the Towns of Deep River and Chester was included in the BOS packet. This agreement has been in place for many years and funds are budgeted (\$13,500) for street sweeping. Street sweeping typically happens in April/May.

Charlene Janecek made a motion to accept and to authorize the First Selectwoman to sign the Road Sweeping Agreement between the Towns of Deep River and Chester as presented. Tom Englert seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The contract expires June 30, 2022.

REVIEW AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF CHESTER-DEEP RIVER TRANSFER STATION RENEWAL

A copy of the Agreement between the Town of Deep River & Chester to Provide Limited Bulky Waste Disposal Facilities was included in the BOS packet and expires June 30, 2022. None of the terms have changed in the renewal (\$70,000 per year paid quarterly and is currently budgeted); however, there are on-going concerns with the MIRA plant and there is the option to "opt out" of MIRA.

Charlene Janecek made a motion to postpone signing the agreement until further discussion can take place with Deep River. Tom Englert seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

The BOS stressed the importance of Chester having a "seat at the table" when Deep River determines the next steps for their transfer station (i.e. capital improvements, opting out of MIRA, contracting with another provider for municipal waste pick-up). Any potential changes made by Deep River will take time

to implement and because the contract expires in June 2022, the consensus of the BOS was to move forward with signing the agreement.

Charlene Janecek withdrew the motion.

Tom Englert made a motion to accept and authorize the First Selectwoman to sign the Agreement between the Town of Deep River & Chester to Provide Limited Bulky Waste Disposal Facilities as presented. Charlene Janecek seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF NRCS FUNDING FOR 2018 STORM DAMAGE REPAIR

Lauren reported that the Inland Wetland Commission reviewed the proposed repair work at Great Brook and Pattaconk Brook as a result of the 2018 storm damage. It is anticipated that the project will go out to bid in February/March 2022 with work anticipated to commence in late Summer 2022 (driest part of the Summer).

Jacobson continues to work on the project and we are incurring bills for their services (preparation of permitting {DEEP, Army Corps, and local applications}, engineering, etc.). Additional funds are necessary for these “soft costs” that are the responsibility of the Town. The NRCS grant is a 75/25 match. The original estimate for the work was \$220,000 but it is anticipated that the cost will be more now as the estimate was developed 2.5 years ago. The consensus of the BOS was to wait until additional cost estimates are developed and then the BOS will work with the BOF to determine next steps. No action taken at this time.

TOWN MEETING RESULTS

Relative to the recent Town Meeting:

- All items “tabled” at the Town Meeting must be brought back to a future Town Meeting exactly the same way it was presented at the original Town Meeting. Had the items been “voted down”, there would be an opportunity to “go back to the drawing board” and present them differently at the next Town Meeting.
- Proposed Cedar Lake Ordinance – Lauren reported that the BOS did not necessarily believe that the way the proposal was written (to ban motor boats) was the best way to move forward. The item was brought before the Town Meeting so that the Town would ultimately make the decision. The proposal was put forth by two Commissions and the BOS “wordsmithed” it to allow for some flexibility. Feedback received prior to the Town Meeting indicated that the Ordinance would be voted down; however, the fact that it was actually “tabled” at the Town Meeting means it must come before the Town in the identical format as at the last Town Meeting. The same applies to the “tabling” of the Garbage Ordinance.
 - Note that these proposed Ordinances have been discussed by the BOS starting in December 2020.
 - Lauren will seek legal advice on whether the BOS may “withdraw” the tabled Town Meeting items and revise them or if they must come back to a Town Meeting in the identical format.
- The primary concern at the Town Meeting relative to the ARPA requests seemed to be the perceived lack of involvement of the BOF. It may be appropriate to bring the ARPA requests back to Town Meeting, after further discussion with the BOF, in the same way in which the requests were made originally.
- Due to Covid, the BOS deemed it appropriate to have a “larger” Town Meeting agenda vs. splitting the agenda into several Town Meetings.

Relative to comments made at the Town Meeting regarding items being presented pre-maturely or “rushed”, Lauren commented:

- The initial list of the ARPA projects was discussed by the BOF and the BOS in July 2021 and revised. It was brought to another BOF meeting in August. A document at that August meeting noted the following “the highlighted items were considered by the group (BOS and BOF) to be highly important”. Those exact same items discussed by the BOF and BOS 7 months ago, came before the recent Town Meeting.
- The first “tranche” of ARPA funds, \$623,000 was received in June 2021. To date, \$0 has been spent. Note that surrounding towns are actively allocating these funds.
- To address the comment from the Town Meeting that exact dollar amounts needed was unknown, Lauren reported that many of the items requested must go out to bid. Before these bids are received, it is impossible to know exact amounts needed.
- Regarding a comment made at the Town Meeting about the need to focus on the most vulnerable town residents, a motion was made to table both the Social Services request and the Tri Town request. Both of these initiatives would have aided Chester’s most needy.
- Lauren will follow-up with Rick Nygard, BOF Chairman, relative to the perception that some figures had changed between the BOF meeting and the Town Meeting.
- Items on the Town Meeting agenda were carefully researched to ensure that they met all eligibility requirements of the ARPA funds. The importance of the WPCA and IT projects was stressed.

The BOS will have further discussion with the BOF regarding the ARPA funds.

Charlene suggested that a Public Hearing be held prior to another Town Meeting.

2022-23 BUDGET PROCESS

Lauren will distribute a budget process “template” for BOS review. The goal is to streamline the process and to distribute budget information in a timely manner. She suggests that the months of January/February be spent reviewing and vetting budget requests followed by BOS deliberation on same followed by a presentation to the BOF and perhaps joint BOS/BOF meetings for continued budget discussions. It was further suggested that any public hearing or town meeting on the budget wait until after the school budget is finalized. Peter will review the draft budget schedule prior to its finalization.

SELECTMEN REPORTS

Lauren reported:

- New restaurant, Village Bistro, opened in the Village.
- The anticipated receipt of in-home Covid-19 test kits from the State has been delayed. The State had requested municipalities distribute the tests prior to the New Year’s holiday and the Town developed a distribution plan; unfortunately, the tests did not arrive in Connecticut and distribution of same has been delayed/postponed until further notice. Information about the delay was posted on the town’s website, Facebook page and via the town-wide email.
- The State purchased 6 million N95 masks that will be given to municipalities for distribution.
- Old Saybrook’s testing site will open on Thursday, December 30th. The Health District, OS Police Dept. and OS Emergency Management are coordinating this site.
- Today’s Covid rate in Connecticut is at 17.78%. Additional positive cases were reported to the First Selectman’s office this afternoon. Residents were encouraged to be vaccinated and “boosted”.

- Lauren's last day in office will be Wednesday, 1/5. The BOS meet to fill the vacancy on the BOS per the statutory process. A BOS agenda will be posted as appropriate.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Meredith Devanney expressed disappointment at the lack of information to the public and lack of oversight from the BOF relative to the Town Meeting. In addition, the perception was that the Town Meeting was "rushed". She questioned the First Selectwoman's ethics in regard to running for office in November while pursuing a job out of state and reported that it was not appropriate to hold the Town Meeting with "your departure on the heels of it".

Michael Cressman supported the suggestion to have a Public Meeting to discuss the individual projects prior to the next Town Meeting/vote on items. As previously reported, this is an opportunity for the Town to use the ARPA funds to provide long lasting effects to improve the Town. He continued that other towns have formed committees relative to ARPA funds.

Jon O'Hare congratulated Lauren on her new position and thanked her for her service to Chester.

Susan Wright reported that the public needs clarification on the action(s) to "table" an item or "vote it down" at a Town Meeting. These differences and the ramifications of same should have been made clear at the Town Meeting. She suggested that a glossary of terms would be beneficial. She supported the idea of a Public Meeting prior to the next Town Meeting/vote. The need for fewer items on a Town Meeting agenda would facilitate appropriate discussion on items.

Kris Pollack, past BOF member, supported the "tabling" of items at the Town Meeting as, in her opinion, there was not enough time to develop potential alternatives to the proposals presented to the BOF. She reported that her understanding was that the BOF/BOS meeting this past Summer was a "brainstorming" meeting and that the "list" presented was not finalized and ready for a Town Meeting. In addition, she felt that the Town Meeting agenda was too extensive and participants became "fatigued" at the meeting. She too supported a Public Hearing prior to a Town Meeting/vote.

Rick Nygard, BOF Chairman, agreed that there should be a Public Hearing to give residents the opportunity to provide their point of view. He continued that residents did not necessarily disagree with the proposals but that they felt excluded from the process. He reported that the BOF looks forward to receiving the proposed budget calendar and BOF members have been asked to look at specific parts of the budgets to streamline the process.

Julianne Divis reported that the Old Saybrook site will be open from 2 to 4 tomorrow for Covid testing and next week, they will be open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10 to 4. The testing site may be expanded or reduced as necessary.

In addition, Ms. Divis thanked Lauren for her service to the Town and wished her well in her next "adventure".

Ms. Divis reported that the letter that the BOF distributed just prior to the Town Meeting had a huge impact on how the Town voted. She stressed the importance of individuals' obligation to inform themselves on initiatives as there had been multiple BOS, BOF, etc. meetings over the past year where these items have been discussed publically. In addition, at a BOF meeting, the BOF did vote to approve the ARPA recommendations (they did change their minds at a later date).

Lauren thanked residents for their participation at this evening's meeting.

Tom Englert thanked Lauren for her work for the Town and wished her well.

ADJOURNMENT

Tom Englert made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. Charlene Janecek seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski
Clerk