

Meeting called to order by Rick Nygard at 7:01 pm on 4/21/2022. Michael Jordan was seated for Virginia Carmany. Rick Nygard, Bill Bernhart, Michael Joplin, Andrew Gardner, & John O'Hare were also seated. Steve Cline and Deb Vilcheck were present, but not voting. Ed Meehan was present from the Board of Selectmen (Charlene in France on Vacation). Peter Evankow, James Grzybowski, Susan Wright, Allison Abramson, and Devin Chester were also on the Zoom.

Audience of Citizens

No citizens had comments to make.

March 17th BOF Meeting Minutes – Motion to approve by Michael Joplin, seconded by Bill B. Vote was unanimous.

Minutes for next meeting (May) will be taken by John O'Hare.

Proposed Budget for next fiscal year:

Discussion of various approaches to finalizing the budget and setting a mill rate.

Proposing to assign 200k from fund balance but may be able to reduce that to 50k or less.

Property tax and fees, based on information from the tax collector, Peter reviewed we could reduce the prior year's by \$5000, interest and fees by \$2500, building permits – bring to \$7500, conveyance tax to \$10,000. A total of \$25,000. We could take additional \$18,800 from fund balance.

Rick mentioned that we did get significant money back from region 4 and the supervision district. General agreement among members in this course of action. No vote taken at this time.

Significant percentage increase in the general fund budget – going up by 8.9% (350k). Parks and Rec have salaries increasing due to Covid last year restricting activities. Public works goes up 115K – 43k of that is payroll for an additional hire. The Hose Company goes up by 21k and 17k of that is payroll – they are planning to add one salaried person. The police budget is increasing by 34k of which 13k is salary increase for the trooper. Benefits for town employees goes up due to 3 new employees being added and the insurance cost is up approximately 10%. 3.15% overall increase in the budget. This could lead to a flat mil rate (at 29.5).

Peter commented that the board of finance increase in the budget is simply due to contingency transfers for Winthrop Rd. rehab.

Ed Meehan voiced the BOS support of keeping the mil rate flat – that this is a prudent approach in his opinion.

Approval of ARPA projects

The ARPA committee expense proposal was not included in the Agenda. This was pointed out by Bill and Rick put this topic off to the next meeting due to the confusion and the lack of another town meeting before then.

Total funds already approved according to Bill Bernhart, ARPA committee chair:

social services fund 100k, Tri Town proposal for 44,820, Chester Library for 6k, full service generator for town hall at 120k. The proposals already approved or waiting for town meeting are: Fire boat was 70k, 10k for SSK refrigerated truck, WPCA at \$98,480, the hybrid meetinghouse at 60k, Body cameras/storage IT at \$83,000.

Rick commented that this represents approximately \$592,000 out of the \$1,246,840 of ARPA funds

Mike Jordan asked for additional details as to how the Tri-Town proposal would be used. Allison Abramson was asked to review this since she was on the call. Additional mental health needs due to the pandemic caused Tri-town to restructure their services and to have greater integration with the local schools. All services have been in greater demand due to Covid. She discussed the cost sharing between the three towns and the state/any grants, etc. 10 year (125k per yr) mental health/substances abuse grant is expiring in October. This will put a strain on TTYS finances. \$44820 to bolster 3 positions over two years, along with similar support from the other two towns. The request amounts were allocated by population.

Motion to accept TriTown Youth Services ARPA proposal and recommend moving forward. \$44,820. The motion was made by M. Joplin and seconded by M. Jordan. Motion passed unanimously.

Motion to pass/move forward Social Services proposal for ARPA funds. \$100,000 was requested in this proposal. Michael Cressman who was on the Zoom and involved in the drafting of this specific proposal agreed to speak about the request. Disproportionately impacted residents – below 185% of the federal poverty line. Lowest earning 5% of households in Chester. M. Cressman said that estimated that 85-100 households meet this definition. Offered \$1000 per household to be spent for things like fuel, electricity and other essentials. Rosie B. would administer this program and knows about much of the need/the people with needs. M. Joplin asked about the number of impacted people and M. Cressman answered that based on average household size in Chester, this would be about 210 people. Rick wanted to keep the sustainability of this support in mind when the second tranche of funds is released. Bill B. responded that social services support will be targeted with the second half of ARPA funds. Mike Jordan voiced support and **John O'Hare made a motion to approve, Mike Jordan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Library proposal

Rick read the (attached) letter of support by Karin Badger V.C. of the Library board.

\$6000 for concrete pad

Lots of discussion about this proposal. Bill voiced support and Mike Jordan questioned the timeline and the need (due to the library being beneficiary of a private trust). Mike asked if it was necessary to pay from ARPA funds when there is a private trust.

Devin L. Chester asked to comment on the project. The town required that a tank be moved and the library wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. She expressed support for the project and said that many important improvements have been funded by the private trust they are beneficiary of.

Bill voiced additional support due to this being one of the only ARPA requests that has come through the request process from members of the community. He'd like to see more projects like these, that are from the community, for relatively small dollar amounts, and are high profile/high use in town.

Michael Joplin made a motion to approve, and Bill B. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Proposal for Generator for Town Hall – \$120,000

Mike Jordan asked about the need for a new generator when it wasn't a major issue during Covid. The Fire house can be used as backup, but Ed Meehan said that it is unusual for a town hall to not have a backup generator that runs the whole building. James Grzybowski was asked to comment on the need and the utilization of the fire house during an emergency. M. Joplin questioned the need for a \$120,000 generator, can we get away with a 50-60k generator? James wasn't sure but does know that the current generator barely runs any systems and would not be able to power more. He reported that the current quote is for a complete backup solution – the entire building and all services would be powered. Emergency operations ideally should be split between the Fire Dept. and the Town Hall – one for operations and one for shelter/the public according to James G. Chester Elementary is not an option due to a lack of backup generator there.

Rental of generators were discussed, both pros and cons. It was mentioned by Bill that Chester Elementary might be putting in an ARPA proposal for a backup generator. Mike Jordan asked about the useful life of this generator. 15 to 30 years was discussed as possible – James G. said that the fire house was at approximately 20 years on their generator (with good maintenance). Mike Jordan expressed support for looking at a smaller/less expensive generator. John O'Hare asked James what would be needed and James/Ed did not know of the exact specs that the quote was for or how much excess amperage there would be. Both James and M. Joplin agreed that often smaller generators will be much more expensive in cost per amperage and might not be cost-effective. John O'Hare doesn't want to vote on this until more information is presented to understand the need and any alternatives. M. Joplin also voiced support for waiting on more information before approving. Rick figured that the competitive bidding process would allow us to get additional opinions on what is necessary. Ed voiced support for the project but did say that he wasn't able to answer every technical question that BOF members were asking. Bill and Ed discussed ARPA approval process and the need for town meetings to be held later this year. Ed offered to get the technical information prior to voting it forward. John and M. Joplin said they wouldn't feel comfortable moving forward without additional information. James G. offered advice on finding peak amperage use for the town hall building and comparing that to the generator specifications. James G. asked if the quote/amount was for the entire system (auto-disconnect, etc.) or just the generator. Rick asked for the ARPA committee and Ed to get these technical details together in order to bring this proposal back to the Board of Finance. Bill and Ed agreed that this was doable.

James G. commented on how undersized the current town hall generator is.

John O'Hare made a motion to put the discussion of the generator aside until we have more information. Michael Joplin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Current year adjustments for Tree Removal

Proposal by Peter, Charlene, and Rick was to increase 535,000 – Peter 500k of surplus (mostly from the schools) to prefund capital and this would add 35,000 to that in the current year.

Moved by M. Joplin, seconded by John O'Hare. Motion passed unanimously.

Peter reported that building permits are up 686,000. Buildings and grounds and additional work at Winthrop Rd.

Chester elementary is under by \$73,000 as a rough estimate. \$790,000 surplus overall so far. This is relatively high due to the reimbursement of funds from the region and supervision district. The end of the year looks good according to Peter and Rick.

Public hearing is May 10th, and the next Town Meeting is May 24th. BOF meeting is May 19th. Auditor is available on May 25th if members are available for a meeting. If not, we will schedule for the June meeting.

Rick asked about other business, John asked about the Masonicare tax situation – Rick said that the next court date is in October according to the First Selectwoman.

Audience of Citizens

There were no comments from citizens present.

Motion to adjourn made by John and seconded by M. Joplin. Motion approved unanimously. Rick noted that the meeting adjourned at 8:46pm.

Respectfully submitted

Andrew J. Gardner

Letter from the Library BofT concerning Library ARPA request:

RE: APRA request from Library

To the Chester Board of Finance,

I am writing in support of the Chester Library's request for ARPA funds of \$6,000 to complete the installation of our outdoor solar-powered charging station table and seating with handicapped access.

The table was purchased with a separate grant as explained in the application. It needs to be bolted to a concrete pad. The Town crew has completely prepared the site, having removed the overgrown bushes, completed excavation and grading, and built rebar framework over sand and gravel. They have advised that the concrete needs to be poured now to prevent any settling.

The Library is requesting these funds for material costs and the stamped concrete installation. We have already devoted \$112,000 from a private Trust to renovating and taking care of long delayed maintenance problems, even though the Trust is designated to be used for capital improvements, not maintenance issues. For decades our current Library building was neglected to the point of being a health hazard, due to a sole focus on construction of a new building elsewhere. The BOF prudently voted down the last NQP proposal as unaffordable. We took advantage of the Covid shutdown to finally do the needed repairs, which just could not wait any longer, and updates to make the Library a more pleasant and functional environment.

We feel this request for APRA funds is very reasonable and fitting with the APRA guidelines. This will be a wonderful outdoor space addition for the community. We would like to proceed immediately, as everything is ready for completion and installation.

Thank you,

Karin Badger

Vice chair, Library Board of Trustees