# TOWN OF CHESHIRE

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## OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

### Meeting Minutes – January 26, 2021

**Members Present:** Michelle Francesconi, Chair
Jason Levesque, Emergency Services Liaison
Mark Biagini, Clerk
Ronald DeAngelis, Highway and Infrastructure Liaison

**Others Present:** Mark Webber, Interim Town Administrator
Noelle M Pandell, Interim Administrative Assistant

**Others Present via Go-To-Meeting:** Donna DeFino, Planning Board
Denise Gregoire, Finance Committee
John Tremblay, Finance Committee
Heather Emerson, Finance Committee
Lenwood "Woody" Vaspra, Finance Committee
Kathleen Levesque, Finance Committee

**M. Francesconi opened the meeting at 6:33 pm.**

**Open Session**

M. Francesconi read from a prepared set of remarks that was listed on the agenda concerning that, pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Board of Selectmen will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible.

M. Francesconi acknowledged the members of the Board present at the meeting.

M. Francesconi read a resignation letter from Robert Ciskowski, who resigned from the Board of Selectmen and from all committees he served on. *M. Francesconi made a motion to accept the resignation letter with regret – seconded by M. Biagini –* ***Roll Call Vote – All members – yes – Motion carries****.*

1. **a. To Hear and Act on Minutes from January 26, 2021** – M. Francesconi tabled the minutes.

2. **New Business**
   **a. Announcement of Planning Board Resignations**
   Donna DeFino, Chair of the Planning Board, advised the Board that Nicholas Graham and Joshua Marauszwski resigned as member and alternate member of the Planning Board; she then read their

resignation letters. D. DeFino stated that the January meeting was cancelled due to illness and there is nothing pending but they still have a quorum with four members should anything come up that needs their attention. After a brief discussion,

*M. Francesconi made a motion to accept the resignation of Nicholas Graham with regret – seconded by M. Biagini* ***– Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries****.*

*M. Francesconi made a motion to accept the resignation of Joshua Marauszwski with regret – seconded by M. Biagini* ***– Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries****.*

**3. Workshop Meeting**

**a. Joint Workshop with the Finance Committee**

i. **Review of Department spending to date -** M. Francesconi went through each department one-by-one and the following departments were discussed.

**Selectmen**

M. Francesconi requested that the website be pulled out as a separate line item and a separate code be created too if possible. J. Tremblay felt this made a lot of sense. He asked if the overage was because of the website. M. Francesconi said a lot of the overage was due to the website but also because there needs to be a better breakdown of those expenses. She further explained that that the website storage was exceeded and the fees for that added up. Discussion followed.

Administrator - J. Tremblay stated that in FY22 the Board may be looking at a different model and he suggested that they should think about how that might look. M. Francesconi noted that M. Webber provided the Board with a series of questions about what they are looking for in a Town Administrator so this line item will be adjusted through the budget process.

Town Audit – J. Tremblay said he does not think there is a policy on the frequency of audits and the last audit was in FY16. He asked if there is an audit scheduled in FY20; M. Francesconi said there was. Discussion followed – the Treasurer confirmed that the last audit was in fact in FY16. She said there was supposed to be one in FY19 but because of the pandemic it was put off. M. Webber said that the Board should appropriate for an audit annually. Discussion followed regarding the amount to budget for an audit; $15K is needed for an audit and currently $7,500 is budgeted but it does not carry over if not used. J. Tremblay suggested doing a warrant article to create a mechanism to carry the money forward each year. He said this would also make a clear statement to the residents. M. Francesconi felt the Board should appropriate $15K for the audit. There was also discussion about budgeting money for something and then it never gets done. It was agreed that if money is budgeted for something, then that something should be done.

Town Administrator Education Conferences – J. Tremblay felt this line item was a little high – discussion followed – the Board agreed that this line item should be lowered to $1,500 or $2K.

**Accountant** – M. Francesconi asked if the software line item should be moved to the IT budget; after some discussion, M. Webber stated that it is better to keep software line time in the individual departments because they all have different software needs.

On a similar note, M. Francesconi said that all office supplies for Town Hall will be in one line item in the Selectmen's budget. M. Francesconi asked if the ink for the departments' printers should be in the Selectmen's budget or in the individual budgets; after a brief discussion, it was agreed to think about this before deciding.

**Finance Committee** – There was a brief discussion regarding the $2K line item for the MMA meeting; J. Tremblay said to keep the $2K as they have made a commitment that someone will attend as soon as it is back online.

**Treasurer** – A brief discussion followed regarding the line item amount; it was noted that they have big record books that they get rebound.

**Registrar** line item shows no money spent last year but M. Francesconi said she would check on that because of the national election.

**OPEB** J. Levesque questioned that since we upped the budget last year, should we increase it every year; J. Tremblay noted that the annual commitment should be up to $20K. It was noted that Becky is working on the actuarial study; once we have that we will have a better idea of where we are.

**Town Hall & Buildings** – M. Francesconi noted that we are working on the projects at Town Hall. There was a brief discussion – J. Levesque asked if the general maintenance position would go in this section; M. Francesconi explained that they have been noticing that there is a lot of work to be done on town buildings and J. Levesque suggested creating a new position to have a maintenance person on staff. She said if we do this where would we list the position. J. Tremblay noted that a job description will be really important so that you have a realistic view of what that position will do.

M. Francesconi noted that the Cheshire Elementary School maintenance line item also includes utilities; she said utilities and maintenance should really be separated. M. Francesconi also noted that the Board should start thinking about calling this building something else. Discussion followed – R. DeAngelis stated that there needs to be a better way to track expenses, like utilities, plowing, mowing etc. J. Levesque noted that a lot of grant applications require are match and he asked where that would go in the budget; M. Webber noted that he has never seen a front-loaded line item for a match. J. Tremblay suggested that the Town needs a strategy around grants.

J. Tremblay noted that more money was spent out of the Special Repairs to Town Buildings line item this year beyond what the CARES Act is paying for. M. Francesconi noted that only COVID related expenses repairs were being paid for by the CARES Act money. She then outlined expenses that were being paid out that line item noting that there are still a lot of other repairs that are still needed:

| | |
|---|---|
| Painting | less than $10K |
| Rugs | less than $5K |
| Alarms | less than $3K |
| Masonry | Haven't received quotes yet |
| Lighting upgrades | No cost for that yet |

J. Tremblay suggested that the Board pay attention to the fact that free cash will shrink as money is used to do repairs that have not been done. J. Leveque asked about insurance going up annually and M. Webber said that he would get more detail on that.

**Police Department** – R. Herzog explained that there has been some confusion over the salary line items; Officers' Salaries = full-time officer salaries and Other Salaries = part-time officer salaries. R. Herzog said that it is being allocated properly now. M. Francesconi noted that they need to be renamed

**Fire Department** – J. Levesque asked if the boiler was included; it was also asked if vehicle maintenance was included in the Expenses line item. M. Francesconi said she would like the Fire Chief to explain the Expenses line item. R. DeAngelis noted that there are no maintenance expenses in any budget. Discussion followed and J. Tremblay suggested that bigger items should probably be part of the Capital Investment plan discussion. There was also a suggestion that there be a separate line item for vehicle maintenance.

**Insurance** – M. Webber noted that the state mandates the insurance limits, and he knows that we satisfy the limits, but he does not know if we go above that limit. It was also noted that nothing has been spent out of that line item yet; M. Webber said he will check on it.

**Tree Warden** – M. Francesconi said that R. Navin has a list of trees that need to be removed in the spring.

**Board of Health** – A question was asked about the Equipment line item being used; J. Tremblay said that last year $500 was budgeted but only $50 was used. It was suggested that the number could probably be cut back. R. DeAngelis said that rather than cutting the amount back, we should find out why the money was not spent on what it was budgeted for.

**Town Compactor** – M. Francesconi said that the costs may be reduced once we go to tags after the bags are gone.

**Recycling** – There was a question about why this is separate, and it was noted that we don't see the revenue side of this. M. Webber said he asked for that information.

**Streetlights** – J. Tremblay said that all of the money was used last year. M. Francesconi said that we are on track to use all of it again this year. A brief discussion followed.

**Street Cleaning** – It was noted that the money was used last year but no money has been expended this year; $6K was budgeted. R. DeAngelis suggested using the money for MS4. A brief discussion followed.

**Recreation** – J. Tremblay questioned that in years prior the amount budgeted was lower; it was noted that this year additional money was budgeted to invest in our youth. The money was used to send residents' children to summer programs. A brief discussion followed – it was noted that the port-a-potty used for the campsite should come out of the Recreation budget as well as money for the Father Tom Campsite. There was a brief discussion about the Cheese-Fest coming back and M. Francesconi said that it would most likely not happen until 2022 due to COVID.

**Library** – J. Tremblay questioned that $13,887 was budgeted last year for new books and magazines but only $8,379 was expended; Heather noted that there is no librarian, and the library is closed so there is no rush to hire one.

**Veterans** – J. Levesque suggested talking to the Veteran's agent regarding anticipated expenses; it was noted that R. Herzog can give information on that.

**Council on Aging** – M. Francesconi noted that we still have not filled the additional position nor the van driver position. The ride sharing pilot has also not happened. A brief discussion followed; it was noted that the Berkshire Eagle is very expensive to advertise employment listings so other options need to be investigated.

**Historical Commission** - $300 payment was made to Gus Martin for publishing books; M. Francesconi explained that we are waiting for meeting minutes and R. Ciskowski was following up on it before he resigned.

ii. **Presentation of Capital Assets with long range plans** – M. Francesconi said that nothing has been updated so she thought this time could be used to discuss what we are looking for so we can develop a plan. J. Tremblay said that he posted some documents in the joint Finance Committee folder regarding financial trend monitoring; the documents include a PowerPoint with data from the DOS website that shows trends that might stimulate discussion and a finance policy for Great Barrington on developing capital needs. M. Francesconi thanked J. Tremblay for those documents.

Regarding the Fire Department and Highway Department equipment needs, J. Tremblay said that he created a spreadsheet that he can update and share in the Google Drive folder. M. Webber said that it is nice to see that the Town has a proactive Finance Committee. M. Francesconi said that more discussion will follow as we move through the process.

iii. **Discussion regarding Free Cash and Stabilization** – J. Tremblay explained that the target range of certified free cash that the Town wants to be in is 7% or $465K of the general fund and the Town currently is at $533K so it is in a good position. Stabilization should be at $332K and the Town is at $446K. He said these numbers show that the Town is doing okay. Capital stabilization target range is 2% or $133K and the Town is at $114K, which is under the 2% target. These numbers give us a sense that we are not in a terrible position. We are headed in the right direction.
J. Tremblay also suggested that the Board figure out how much free cash they want to use to reduce the tax rate; discussion followed regarding the housing market and J. Tremblay said that the market going up expands the levy limit – J. Tremblay said that it is good to have 5-7% of debt and we are now at 3.5%. Additional discussion followed. J. Tremblay also noted that we applied for the strap grant and did not get it, but he suggested that the Board commit to reapply for the grant.

M. Francesconi thanked the Finance Committee.

**4. Announcements from Board Members**

**M. Francesconi** noted that the contents of the library are being moved to the cafeteria before the floors are refinished this weekend. She said there is a large amount of trash that the school district is willing to remove – following a brief discussion, *M. Francesconi made a motion to allow the school district to get a*

*dumpster and remove the trash – seconded by R. DeAngelis –* ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries***

**M. Webber** said he received an insurance check in the amount of $40K and a discussion needs to happen regarding next steps for fixing. He also advised that a meeting has been scheduled with the new AFSCME representative and the Highway Department to discuss the new agreement that starts July 1st. He also met with BRPC, who is doing the paperwork the Community Development Block Grant. He said the program is going well but slower than hoped due to the cost of materials rising and problems finding a good contractor.

5. **Any Other Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48-hours Prior to the Meeting** – None

   M. Webber advised that his schedule would continue with a long day on Tuesday and a short day on Thursday but noted that the Board members should not hesitate to call him anytime.

***6.*** **Adjournment** – With no further business, *M. Biagini made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 PM – seconded by J. Levesque –* ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes*** *– Motion carries*

Respectfully submitted,
*Noelle M. Pandell*