TOWN OF CHESHIRE

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OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Meeting Minutes – March 2, 2021

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

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

Go-To-Meeting: Denise Gregoire, Finance Committee
John Tremblay, Finance Committee
Heather Emerson, Finance Committee
Lenwood "Woody" Vaspra, Finance Committee
Kathleen Levesque, Finance Committee
Rick Gurney, Water Commissioner
Michael Biagini, Water Commissioner
Carole Hilderbrand, Council on Aging
Eugene Gebarowski, Council on Aging
Peter Traub, Council on Aging
Anne Marie Furey, Chair, Cemetery Commission

M. Francesconi opened the meeting at 6:32 pm.

Open Session

Ms. 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.

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

1. **To Hear and Act on the Minutes from the Prior Meeting(s) – February 16, 2021**
   M. Biagini made a motion to approve the minutes of February 16, 2021 as presented – seconded by J. Levesque – ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries***

   M. Francesconi tabled the minutes of February 23, 2021 until next week.

2. **Department Budget Review with Finance Committee**
   a. **Highway Department –** Prior to the budget review, R. Navin reviewed his report which is attached to these minutes. R. Navin then reviewed his FY22 budget noting that his budget is level funded except for salaries. He said that salaries line item is subject to contract negotiations but as a place holder, M. Webber put in a 2% increase. With regard to capital expenditures, R. Navin said he is sticking to his 7-year plan; this year he is looking to replace the 2006 plow truck, which is beyond its life expectancy. He said he is looking at a smaller truck that will be less expensive but will still carry the same amount of material. R. Navin said he is also looking at a used backhoe which will cost around $75-80K instead of $125-130K. He said there is quality used equipment out there that will suit their needs.

      J. Tremblay asked R. Navin if he had to pick only one vehicle to get, which would be the higher priority; R. Navin said that the truck would be the higher priority. He said if he can't replace the backhoe this year, he will need a contingency plan for digging graves. R. Navin said his requests are in line with the replacement plan that was implemented last year. J. Tremblay asked what the status was with the two pieces of equipment on order; R. Navin said that the tractor should be delivered any day and the truck probably will not be delivered until July because it is backordered by Ford. R. Navin said that six-nine months to get a truck is normal. J. Tremblay said he received an email from BRPC regarding culvert grants; R. Navin said he was aware of those grants. He said he applied last year but did not get the grant, so he probably will not apply again. R. Navin said he will likely reapply for a grant for Lanesboro Road engineering. If we do not get it, we will have to use town funds.

      M. Francesconi asked about getting an extension of guardrails on the west side of Wells Road. R. Navin said that they added a section last year and if there is any money left, it will go towards new guardrails on Rt 116 as the guardrails there are falling over. Discussion followed – M. Francesconi asked R. Navin to look at the section on Wells Road and give a price. R. Navin said he would. R. DeAngelis asked R. Navin to look at the bank on Wells Road just before the old Swistak's because it is starting to fall. R. Navin said he would look at it.

   b. **Water Department** – R. Gurney reviewed their budget for FY22 noting the following:
      - 10% increase in the stipend for each Water Commissioner; he said this is based on other elected departments;
      - The salary amount for the licensed operator was left the same for FY22 since the person was just hired in January;
      - The Improvements for Pipe Replacement line item and the Main Replacement line item were consolidated into the Main Replacement line item;
      - The Superintendent line item was left blank because the town was supposed to find out what a competitive wage is; last year the superintendent received a 6% increase, and they do not know if that is competitive, high, or low.
      - Added a new line item – Vehicle Expenses and they budgeted $7,500; $2,500 is budgeted for gas and repairs and $5K is extra to be carried over to enterprise surplus account so that we will have the money when we need a new vehicle. J. Tremblay suggested separating this so that it is clear what the money is being used for. Discussion followed – M. Webber said that money can be pulled from the Main Replacement line item and put into the surplus account by a Town Meeting vote. He also said that it should be named so that money goes into the account for that reason. M. Webber said that he is going to investigate this because he wants to get comfortable with the process.

c. **Council on Aging** – M. Francesconi said that the Board received the Council on Aging Report prior to the meeting; she asked if any Board members had any questions about the report and there were none. E. Gebarowski then reviewed the Council on Aging budget noting the following:
   - Level funded as best they could;
   - The Coordinator's salary is budgeted at a 3% increase;
   - The Senior Aide salary is budgeted at a 9.75% increase due to the increase in minimum wage and changing the position from a 50-week position to a 52-week position;
   - Medical Car Ride Sharing line item should just be carried over; J. Tremblay said that the money cannot be rolled over because any money left goes into free cash.

   K. Levesque, Finance Committee member, questioned why the Cheshire Chatter line item went from $1,250 to zero and "My Senior Center" system was added at $1,250. R. Gebarowski said that the Cheshire Chatter is now coming out grant money and the $1,250 budgeted for "My Senior Center" software is the annual fee for use of the software. Last year it was budgeted so this year it was added into the budget. M. Biagini asked what the line item Other is used for; E. Gebarowski said that it is used for unexpected expenses that come up.

   M. Francesconi suggested that they look into LPi Services, a newsletter service to produce the Cheshire Chatter; some discussion followed and P. Traub said that he looked into that service twice and they rejected us twice because we do not reach enough people.

d. **Cemetery Department** – A. Furey reviewed the Cemetery Department's budget and noted the following:
   - Cemetery Commissioners stipend was increased by $147;
   - Labor line item was increased by $393; the last couple of years labor was budgeted on a 30-32 work weeks per year and the actual work year is 26-29 work weeks. With the increase in Massachusetts minimum wage and a decrease in the number of work weeks, the labor line budget reflects a small increase.
   - Equipment line item shows a small increase to cover service, repairs, and parts; new equipment comes from trust accounts.

   There was a discussion regarding a backup plan if the Highway Department can no longer dig the graves; A. Furey said that she knows of a contractor, Gary Daniels, that also digs graves. M. Francesconi said that if it ever came to needing plan b, the Board would let her know.

   J. Tremblay asked about the ongoing vault project; A. Furey said she had received three bids to do a surface fix on the vault; they all said that the vault itself is solid. M. Francesconi asked her to follow-up with M. Webber about this project. A. Furey said she would. She also noted that McCann is on schedule to do the garage project this year.

3. Old Business

a. Discussion regarding Senior/Veteran Tax Work Off Program

M. Webber said he spoke with Robin in the Assessors' Office and told her that the emphasis will be on the Chapter program and asked her to do some scenarios and expand on that; reduce the age from 70 to 65 and 225% of the federal income level. A survey will go out to town departments to determine their needs; once identified, we will have a better understanding on how far we need to go with the senior tax work off program. M. Francesconi said we will revisit this again once we get the feedback from the survey.

b. **Update and discussion regarding VADAR Accounting Software** - M. Francesconi said that VADAR rep ran through a demo of our accounting system and she said all the account numbers can be changed. She said that we can change our own chart of accounts and using project tags we can add numbers to further define accounts and align with the Uniform Massachusetts Accounting System (UMAS) which most other communities use. R. DeAngelis said that all account numbers should be consistent throughout all departments. M. Francesconi said that she is waiting for a quote to have VADAR redo our chart of accounts to start July 1st. R. DeAngelis said that she is doing what the department head and the Town Administrator should be doing. He said we need to get moving to get a new Town Administrator in place to work in these types of things. Lengthy discussion followed about whether to move forward or wait until a new Town Administrator is in place. R. DeAngelis said that it has been like this for a long time, and we need the new Town Administrator to do the research and come back to the board with a recommendation.

   J. Tremblay said that the Division of Local Services helped the Town of Sheffield when they were looking to get a grant for financial software; he suggested that maybe they could give the Board some guidance. He said the grants for financial software opens again in September.

c. **Update regarding open positions and job postings** – M. Webber said that he gave the applications he received for the Council on Aging positions to C. Hilderbrand. E. Gebarowski said that they will reach out and start interviewing and then they will bring their choice to M. Webber.

d. **Update regarding Town Administrator's position** – M. Webber said that he sent out draft job descriptions to the Board to review. M. Webber said the Board could hire a consultant to this work, but it would cost about $12-$15K and he is more than capable of doing it; he has done it before. He said he can put together a job description, timeline, schedule, and ad for the next Board meeting. A question about the salary amount was brought up and it was noted that the salary would not be approved until Town Meeting – lengthy discussion followed about whether to hold a Special Town Meeting or wait until Town Meeting – M. Webber noted that you really should have the money in place before making an offer. Following more discussion, the Board agreed to have M. Webber put a job description together for next week's Board meeting.

e. **Update and discussion regarding Fire Department heating system issues** – J. Levesque said that the circulator pumps have been fixed and they have heat. The Fire Chief is still waiting for the quote on a full replacement. M. Webber said he will be meeting with green communities and is wondering if he should bring this up to them. It was noted that the company hired to do the work, Guardian, quoted a price of $30 then it jumped to $90K. M. Webber said he would bring it up and report back.

4. **Public Comment Period** – M. Francesconi advised that the Lake District wants to meet with the Board and P. Traub on Thursday, March 25th at 6:30 pm. She will check with them to see if the meeting will be virtual or in person.

   M. Biagini asked M. Webber about the grant application for the Water Department; M. Webber said he started working on it today.

5. **Announcements from Board Members**
   J. Levesque asked the status of the actuarial study; M. Webber said he knows that R. Herzog furnished them with the information they asked for. He has not heard anything more.

   M. Francesconi advised that the quote for the locks just came in today but she has not had a chance to review it yet.

6. **Any Other Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48-hours Prior to the Meeting –** M. Webber presented the Board with a driveway permit for a curb cut on Outlook Avenue. R. Navin has approved the request. The Board all indicated that they were fine with the request and they all signed the permit.

7. **Adjournment** – *M. Biagini made a motion to adjourn at 8:50 pm – seconded by J. Levesque –* ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes –*** *Motion carries*

Respectfully submitted,
Noelle M. Pandell

Meeting minutes approved by:

Michelle A. Francesconi
Chair, Marketing & Development Liaison

Mark Biagini
Clerk

Jason Levesque
Emergency Services Liaison

Ronald DeAngelis
Highway & Infrastructure Liaison