TOWN OF CHESHIRE

80 CHURCH STREET | CHESHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS 01225
PHONE (413) 743-1690 | FAX (413) 743-0389

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OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Meeting Minutes – March 9, 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
Lenwood "Woody" Vaspra, Finance Committee
Kathleen Levesque, Finance Committee
Lynne Lemanski, Town Accountant
Rebecca Herzog, Treasurer/Tax Collector
Barbara Astorino, Board of Assessors
Nancy Delorey, Board of Assessors
Gary Trudeau
Eugene Gebarowski
Donna DeFino, Moderator

M. Francesconi opened the meeting at 6:31 pm.

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 23, 2021 and March 2, 2021**
   M. Biagini made a motion to approve the minutes of February 23, 2021 as presented – seconded by J. Levesque – ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries***

   M. Biagini made a motion to approve the minutes of March 2, 2021 as presented – seconded by J. Levesque – ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes – Motion carries***

2. **Department Budget Review with Finance Committee**
   a. **Moderator –** D. DeFino said that she thought Carol Francesconi had been appointed Moderator; M. Francesconi explained that C. Francesconi had been appointed Moderator for one meeting only. She then asked D. DeFino if she would like them to find someone else to serve as the Moderator. D. DeFino said that at this point she would like to stay on as the Moderator. With regard to the budget, D. DeFino said that she had not seen the budget; M. Francesconi said that it is the same as last year it; D. DeFino said that was fine. There were no questions from the Finance Committee nor the Board of Selectmen.

   b. **Town Accountant** – L. Lemanski said that the salary line item was based on the salary study. She said the expenses line item is more than enough and that it could be a little less. The software line item is $3,997 for VADAR and it covers three users; $1,333 per each user. Discussion followed – it was noted that after the salary study came out certain positions received a 6% increase, and the rest of the employees received a 2% increase. J. Tremblay suggested that the Board decide on a cost-of-living increase for all employees.

   c. **Treasurer/Tax Collector** – R. Herzog advised that the budget is level funded except for the Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector and her salary. She said she left her salary blank because she knew the Board was working on that. Discussion followed regarding the Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector position or a split position that assists multiple departments; J. Tremblay said that it will be tough to find someone who has all the skills to assist multiple departments and M. Webber agreed. M. Francesconi asked R. Herzog what she was thinking for a rate of pay for the Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector and the number of hours it would be; R. Herzog said $18/hour and she didn't know how many hours. R. DeAngelis asked if the Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector position would have to be elected since the Treasurer/Tax Collector position is; M. Webber said he wasn't sure. Additional discussion followed about making the Treasurer/Tax Collector position an appointed position; M. Francesconi said that we could put an article on the warrant for Town Meeting this year to make it an appointed position. Regarding sequence of events, J. Tremblay questioned if the election should happen before Town Meeting; it was noted that because it would be a bylaw change, a warrant article would be needed to change the sequence of events. The Board agreed to start the process for this**.**

   d. **Assessor** – B. Astorino said that the budget is level funded except for salaries; the chair's salary is a 2% increase and the members' salary increase is 3%. The Administrator/Assistant Assessor salary is a 6% increase, which is the same as last year. J. Tremblay asked B. Astorino about the $11K in contracted services; she said she feels all of that will get used as the most activity is in the spring. A brief discussion followed.

   e. **Veteran's Services** – This is not a line item that is within the Town's ability to control and can fluctuate.

   f. **Finance Committee** – J. Tremblay said that the budget is level funded.

   g. **Employee Expenses** – R. Herzog explained that the Berkshire County Retirement assessment increased, and the Employee Health Insurance increased because we are budgeting for two family plans; one family plan is for the new Town Administrator. The budget amounts are:

Berkshire County Retirement	$134,329
Employee Health Insurance	$195,000

Medicare	$ 13,500
OPEB Funding	$ 20,000

Discussion followed regarding the employee health insurance; J. Tremblay asked R. Herzog if she ever shops around to get comparisons. She said she does not, and she does not think she will do any better going elsewhere. Lengthy discussion followed – M. Webber advised that a handful of towns are with MIIA, which will be competitive the first year and then rates go up and once you are out of the Berkshire County group, you have to wait a period of time before you get discounted rates again.

h. Town Buildings – M. Francesconi advised that there are three projects that need to be done:

- Fire escape needs to be brought up to code; if not it can shut everything down. M. Francesconi is waiting to receive a quote to fix it;
- The soffit has considerable rot causing holes;
- A structure needs to be built over the entrance door because in the winter there are 4' – 6' icicles that fall right where people enter the building.

J. Tremblay suggested that all utilities be broken out. M. Francesconi asked where the internet gets posted and L. Lemanski said that internet gets posted to Town Buildings – telephones. M. Francesconi said that internet should get posted to independent department budgets. M. Francesconi pointed out that National Grid has not been posted at all since January; she said last year it was posted to each department but this year it has not been posted at all. L. Lemanski said that the previous Town Administrator told her to post National Grid to streetlights.

Following lengthy discussion, M. Francesconi requested L. Lemanski go back and pull all the National Grid bills and post them to the individual department budgets. M. Francesconi also requested that L. Lemanski provide the Selectmen with expense ledgers in as much detail as possible for streetlights and National Grid.

J. Tremblay said that Special Repairs to Town Buildings has $48Kin there and he asked if the Board was thinking of using that money from FY21 for the repairs noted above and the Selectmen said yes. M. Francesconi said that the Town Buildings budget will be revisited before the budget is finalized.

i. Selectmen – This was deferred to next week.

3. New Business

a. Discussion and potential action regarding authorizing Berkshire Engineering, Inc. to act as the Grant Administrator for the Cheshire Water Department to apply for funding through the Housing Choice Communities Capital Grant Program

M. Webber said that he supports this because he will not have time to do it. M. Webber does not have a quote yet so he does not know what the cost will be. Following some discussion, the Board expressed their support for this too and M. Webber will move forward with it.

4. New Business

a. Update and discussion regarding the demolition of the former Water Department Building located at 6 Main St.

The Town submitted a building permit for the demolition and the Building Inspector asked for the contractor to provide his contractor's license. M. Francesconi noted that G. Trudeau offered to do the demolition for the Town as a favor. G. Trudeau said that the Town should be able to

pull a permit as the owner of the building. After a brief discussion, M. Francesconi told G. Trudeau that they will look into this and get back to him.

b. Discussion regarding Senior/Veteran Tax Work-Off Program
M. Webber said he sent out a memo at the end of last week to all department officials to identify needs. He is waiting on returns. He received a couple so far, but he hopes to receive more next week.

c. Update regarding open positions and job postings – M. Webber three people were interviewed for the BOH Transfer Station Attendant position and they will have a recommendation on the agenda next week. G. Gebarowski said that the Council on Aging will be interviewing a couple of people tomorrow for the Van Driver position.

d. Update regarding Town Administrator position – M. Webber distributed a suggested timeline and asked the Board to review it for the next meeting. He said he also hopes to start narrowing down the scope and the salary at the next meeting**.**

M. Webber proposed forming a Screening Committee that will be made up of five people appointed by the Board. He suggested that the following be appointed: one member of the Finance Committee, the Interim Town Administrator and three at-large members of the public.

Following some discussion, M. Francesconi suggested requesting a resume and cover letter from anyone who is interested in sitting on the Screening Committee by putting something out on social media and posting a notice to town residents and the Board agreed.

5. Public Comment Period
Alan asked if the student that we are paying tuition for going to school in Northampton would affect the budget. M. Webber said that they are back to a full schedule now so we will get the full benefit going forward and she is a sophomore, so we have two more years. A question was raised about whether or not this would be reimbursable under Ch. 70; M. Webber said that was a good question and he would look into it.

M. Francesconi told P. Traub that the meeting on March 25th will be in person in the same room as the Selectmen meet in and access will be via the ramp.

6. Announcements from Board Members
M. Biagini asked what the $37K was for in the Cheshire School expenses and M. Francesconi said that a good portion of it was for heating oil. A brief discussion followed.

M. Webber gave the following update:

- A Berkshire Eagle story that highlighted the one-time funds that would be coming to cities and towns via the COVID relief package and Cheshire was listed to receive $308,693.
- The first highway union negotiating session was held and it mostly set out the guidance for future meetings. The union is seeking a one-year extension of the existing agreement and then would come back for a normal three-year agreement after that. The next session is April 6th.
- It's time to nominate the Town's Inspector of Animals. M. Webber recommended nominating Myron Proper who has held the position for several years. If the Board agrees, he can be contacted to sign the form, which has to be returned to the state by April 1st. M. Francesconi said if the Board agrees, this will go on the agenda next week. The Board agreed.

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

8. **Adjournment** – *M. Biagini made a motion to adjourn at 8:36 pm – seconded by J. Levesque –* ***Roll Call Vote – All members yes –*** *Motion carries*

Respectfully submitted,
Noelle M. Pandell