TOWN OF CHESHIRE

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OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes –February 20, 2024

Pursuant to a notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, a meeting of the Board of Selectmen was held in person at 191 Church Street (Cheshire Community House) on Tuesday February 20, 2024, at 6:30 PM.

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Shawn McGrath, Chair
Jason Levesque, Vice Chair
Ray Killeen, Member
Ron DeAngelis, Member
Michelle Francesconi, Member

Others Present : Jennifer Morse, Town Administrator ; Whitney Flynn ; Tom Zappula ; Nancy Zappula ; Christopher (CJ) Garner, Common Table ; Peter Traub ; Bob Tetlow ; Bill Moriaty ; John Tremblay, CCA ; Laura Brennan, BRPC ; Eileen Quinn; Art Kaufman; Larry Pandell; Michael Tatro, National Grid; Fred Balawender; Brian Bedard; Jill Reynolds; Jeff Reynolds.

Summary of Votes:

- Vote to approve a new liquor license for Christopher Garner, Common Table at 41 South Street 5-0
- Vote to approve STAM (Small Town Administrators Legislative Priorities) to State Rep. Barrett 5-0
- Vote to approve National Grid/Verizon pole placement 5-0
- Vote to approve Public Safety Complex Committee 3-0-2
- Vote to appoint Ray Killeen to Public Safety Complex Committee 4-0-1
- Vote to approve Letter presented from Town Clerk, Christine Emerson 5-0
- Vote to enter executive session and not return to regular meeting–Warner vs Town of Cheshire 5-0

S. McGrath opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

New Liquor License Hearing for Christopher (CJ) Garner, Common Table, 41 South Street

S. McGrath read the Description of Premises: Common Table is a single floor, 1200 Square Foot American Style Restaurant with Bar, including commercial kitchen and dining room seating for forty; location formerly known as The Gathering. Christopher Garner introduced himself, stating that the Town of Cheshire needs and deserves a restaurant. He plans to open in mid-May with the hours being Tuesday- Saturday for dinner until 10pm, and Thursday-Sunday for lunch. S. McGrath questioned if there would be outdoor seating available: down the road. J. Levesque questioned if there would be only one entrance and one exit, CJ Garner replied yes. R. Killeen asked if there would be any parking issues: CJ noted there is parking for 45 cars. N. Zappula, an abutter, asked about redirecting a light currently on the back of the building which is pointing at her house: CJ will make the adjustment to the lighting. The Board and community members thanked and congratulated CJ for his efforts and commitment to making this happen.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to approve an All-Alcoholic Beverage Liquor License for Common Table located at 41 South Street, owned by Christopher Garner, as presented.
Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Economic Development Plan Phase 1 – Cheshire Community Association – John Tremblay and Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Laura Brennan

John Tremblay, Cheshire Community Association President introduced Laura Brennan as BRPC's Assistant Director and Project Coordinator he applauded her efforts in gathering the supporting documents and putting together the report; he noted that this project was fully funded by a Governor's budget earmark from Representative Barrett. Laura Brennan presented the document and highlighted a wide body of Cheshire relevant information, more specific than a general master plan would. She expressed that the document does not contain heavy recommendations or direct proposals; but rather shows projects of interest, things to celebrate about Cheshire and how it can be utilized and updated to maintain information specific to Town. The Board thanked Laura Brennan for this document and appreciated how well it portrayed Cheshire. R. Killeen questioned if the information within could be updated to reflect current census information, L. Brennan will plug in the updated numbers and send all the information by electronic format.

Cheshire Community Association – Leland Park Funds

J. Tremblay stated that the Town Administrator had shared the design proposal for the Leland Park (Cheshire Cheese Press Monument) project. He explained that an anonymous donor had given a check for "Cheshire Proud", which had been partly used for keeping the Town clean, furnishing Welcome Packets for new residents, and been used largely on tree and stump removal at the Leland Park site. The remaining balance of that donation is $3,491.40, which has been signed over to the Town of Cheshire and was given to the Town Administrator to put in an account for future projects of similar nature.

Consent Agenda

a. Minutes – February 6, 2024
b. Warrants – Payroll and Accounts Payable
c. Presidential Primary Warrant

A motion was made by M. Francesconi and seconded by J. Levesque to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.
Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Discussion/Decision Items

a. Paint Legislation

There was discussion about the proposed legislation and request for signature on the resolution. After discussion it was determined that the board will not sign the resolution and will work to notify residents of proper disposal of paint if the legislation passes.

Town Administrator Updates

a. STAM (Small Town Administrators Legislative Priorities)

The Town Administrator shared that as a member of STAM she would like to send the legislative priorities to Representative Barrett and Senator Mark. The priorities include changes to the Chapter 90 formula to increase funding, to create and fund the Municipal Building Assistance Authority, reform to Education

Funding Formulas and creating Sustainable Pathways for rural schools, Increasing the State Procurement Thresholds and Improve Prevailing Wage laws and reform to the State-Owned PILOT program.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by M. Francesconi to approve the submission of the STAM document to State Representative John Barrett III and Senator Paul Mark, as presented.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

b. Senior Center Van – Change to a 5 Passenger Accessible Van

The Town Administrator informed the Board that a 5-passenger wheelchair accessible van is available through BRTA, to replace the current 8-passenger van currently being used by the Senior Center. She stated the current van is not utilized to full capacity, and a smaller vehicle would be much easier for the drivers to manage. The Town Administrator also shared that she had met with the Town of Adams and the Cheshire Senior Center Director about shared services for van transportation, discussion is ongoing. R. Killeen reminded the board that money has been put aside to provide transportation services for residents.

National Grid/Verizon Pole Hearing - *S. McGrath opened the pole hearing at 7:15 p.m.*

S. McGrath read pole petition, as presented: Hoosac Drive – National Grid to install 2 JO poles on Hoosac Drive beginning at a point approximately o feet south of centerline of the intersection of pole 6 and Hoosac Drive and continuing approximately 85 feet in a South Direction. Install 1 midspan pole 5-1, 85 feet south of existing pole 6, side of Hoosac Drive, Install stub pole 5-84, 40 feet West of proposed pole 5-1 on the opposite side of the road, Cheshire MA. Michael Tatro introduced himself as a representative from National Grid and stated that he is proposing to install a new 45' pole, and a new 35' pole on Hoosac Drive (the weigh station) for Verizon and National Grid use, as soon as possible. The Board questioned conservation of the wetland area during the project; the company would be utilizing all best practices for safeguarding the area per DEP regulations.

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by S. McGrath to approve the installation of 2 new utility poles on Hoosac Drive, as presented.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Fire/EMS Update & Public Safety Building Exploratory Committee (Create & Appoint) – Chief Francesconi

Chief Francesconi gave an update informing the Board that the 2003 Engine needs to be replaced. He shared that the 1991 Tanker is eligible for grant funding. However the grants are extremely competitive, the Town Administrator is currently writing a grant to replace the tanker.

Chief Francesconi reported no issues with the transition of ambulance services to Northern Berkshire EMS. He attributed the ease of transition to the well qualified, expertly trained volunteer department member's first responder skill sets, as an invaluable asset. J. Levesque questioned if the response times are any different now; no, coverage issues are nationwide, and Cheshire is fortunate to have three qualified first responders available during daytime hours to assist in all calls.

Chief Francesconi explained that the 800MH radio transition was discussed at the Berkshire County Chief's Association meeting, and although the State is being very cryptic, the Fire Marshall believes the conversion is projected to go live in 2025. The first wave will launch police radios, and after testing the system, then fire, EMS and highway will go live. Chief Francesconi has communicated with the police department and the highway department to have compliant radios for when the system goes live. Cheshire Fire Department radios comply already, and the department is ahead of the curve with everything being implemented, and ready to go,

whenever the flip is switched. T. Francesconi informed that the State is taking over Berkshire County's Dispatch center.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to approve the formation of a Public Safety Complex Committee.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

The Town Administrator reminded the Board that a request was put out to the community on the website for volunteers to serve on the Public Safety Building Committee. Chief Francesconi and the Town Administrator recommend the following appointments. Fire Chief, Tom Francesconi; Police Chief, Michael Alibozek; Former Police Chief/Fire Department Member, Tim Garner; Finance Committee, Patrick Pettit; Assistant Fire Chief/EMD, Corey Swistak; DPW Director, Corey McGrath; Board of Selectmen Member, Ray Killeen; Town Administrator, Jennifer Morse.

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by R. DeAngelis to appoint Thomas Francesconi, Corey Swistak, Corey McGrath, Timothy Garner, Michael Alibozek, Patrick Pettit, and Jennifer Morse to the Public Safety Complex Committee.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Abstain; S. McGrath- Abstain
Motion Carries: 3-0-2

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by R. DeAngelis to appoint Ray Killeen to the Public Safety Complex Committee.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Abstain; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Abstain; S. McGrath- Abstain
Motion Carries: 4-0-1

Discussion/Decision Items

b. Budget (Positions, COLA Increases, Class/Comp, Capital Planning)

The Town Administrator discussed FY25 budget and the difficulties with the development of the budget. A compensation and classification study are in progress. Capital Planning discussions are on-going with the UMASS Collins Center, who has ideas about collecting outstanding tax receivable to create surplus overlay in the current budget, creating an Enterprise fund for the transfer station, and debt service recommendations.

The Town Administrator reported that the school budget is up, health insurance has gone up, Berkshire County Retirement is up over 8%, and IRS has determined a COLA increase of 3.2%. The Selectboard recommends putting 3.2% into the budget's preliminary calculations and going from there as the numbers come in.

The Town Administrator reported there is one person currently doing three roles, and many factors have contributed to the need for an additional person to bridge the gap of ongoing needs. Ideally a full-time Assistant Treasurer/Town Collector could be considered to collect all monies payable to the town for taxes, water collection, transfer station sales, special events, etc., with payroll included. The Town Administrator shared that if "money grew on trees" the Municipal Clerk position which works with boards and committees would be a full-time position as well. There was discussion regarding the Municipal Clerk/Assistant Tax/Collector position and the fact that the intent was to have a back up Assistant Treasurer/Collector to work 10-15 hours a week, this has not been the case. There was discussion about the water collector position which will be divided into both the collector and admin position, to allow for segregation of duties, as highlighted in the Financial Management review and audits going back to at least 2016. R. DeAngelis recommended reaching out to the Collins Center to see if they can do a time study.

He was also looking for further clarification on why the Treasurer/Collector office was able to manage the workload for many years and was now looking for a full-time assistant. J. Levesque also questioned the need for a full-time assistant in the treasurer/collector's office. S. McGrath suggested that one option was to fund the position with succession planning in mind, noting that when the Treasurer/Collector retires the town could look to hire outside consulting services for some of the treasurer duties, freeing up additional funds for the full-time boards assistant position.

Town Administrator Updates

c. Unforeseen Business – letter from Town Clerk, Christine Emerson regarding elections

"Requesting the Board designate Police Chief Michael Alibozek the authority to assign the minimum number of police officers at the Chief's discretion, according to scheduling and availability, in each election in 2024, in accordance with Chapter 92, of the acts of 2022, as was done in 2023."

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to allow the Town Clerk to give the authority to Police Chief, Michael Alibozek, the hiring responsibility for police officers regarding elections.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Announcements from Board Members

M. Francesconi reported that the Valentine's Dance went well both nights and was well received by the participants and the community. She stated the dates for next year have already been booked for February 7th and February 8th.

Public Comment

Fred Balawender presented a problem on Notch Road regarding [McDonald] Brook's rising waters eroding the embankment. He reported it has already taken many trees over the past 7 or 8 years, and he fears it will take the road if another bad storm comes along, creating an emergency.

Adjournment and Enter Executive Session

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by R. DeAngelis to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 p.m. to enter Executive Session – Warner vs. Town of Cheshire MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a), Reason 3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and if the chair so declares, and not return to open session.

Roll Call Vote: R. DeAngelis - Yes; R. Killeen – Yes; J. Levesque – Yes; M. Francesconi – Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Respectfully Submitted:
Whitney Flynn
Jennifer Morse
February 28, 2024

Document List

1. Agenda – February 20, 2024
2. Common Table – LLC
3. Economic Development Phase 1 Report
4. Petition for Joint Pole Locations (National Grid & Verizon)
5. Draft Minutes – February 6, 2024
6. NBEMS – January Statistics

7. STAM – 2024 Legislative Priorities
8. Highway Department Bi-Weekly Report

Approved: March 5, 2024