TOWN OF CHESHIRE

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

WWW.CHESHIRE-MA.GOV

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes –April 1, 2025

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 April 1, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

Board of Selectmen Members Present:	Shawn McGrath, Chair Jason Levesque, Vice Chair Ray Killeen, Member Michelle Francesconi, Member Ron DeAngelis, Member
Finance Committee Members Present:	Jeff Chaput, Chair Michael Biagini, Member Austin Alibozek, Member Kathy Levesque, Member (remote)
Finance Committee Members Absent:	Denise Gregoire William Rech Patrick Pettit

Others Present: Jennifer Morse, Town Administrator; Lynn Melchiori, Michael Alibozek, Police Chief; Peter Traub; Sabrina Damms, iBerkshires; Shay (remote); Whitney Flynn (remote & in-person); Art Kaufman; Tom Francesconi, Fire Chief; Dan Hassett, BRPC Public Health Alliance.

S. McGrath opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. with one recording device (iBerkshires)

Summary of Votes:

- Zoning Bylaw Resubmittal to Planning Board 5-0
- Planning Board Flood Plain bylaw submittal 5-0
- Cheshire Rod & Gun Club Licenses 3-0-2
- National Grid - Distribution Easement for 6 Main Street 5-0
- *Finance Committee* Adjournment at 8:09 p.m. 3-0
- Tax Title Custodian Appointment – Ben Gelb 5-0
- Consent Agenda 3-0
- *Board of Selectmen* Adjournment - 8:53 p.m. 3-0

Board of Selectmen Discussion/Decision Items (To Be Continued after the Joint Meeting if time does not allow)

- Police Chief request for change in Officer rank

  Chief Alibozek joined the board to discuss the rank of Officer Jean-Calixte (JC) to Detective. The Chief explained that Officer JC has a background in cyber technology and his long-term goal is to work for a federal agency. The request for a change in rank is for the title only as Officer JC needs a detective rank in order to attend advanced classes. Chief further explained that there would be no additional duties, he would still be a patrolman, and he will receive no additional compensation. Itwould be title only in the system. Questions regarding court cases and the change in rank, concerns about the assumption that the title change deserves more money. There was discussion about retaining employees as long as possible. J. Levesque suggested that the item be tabled at the next meeting to allow the Chief and Administrator to present a clarification letter and job description.

- Zoning Bylaw Amendment Resubmittal to Planning Board

  The Town Administrator stated that the process is confusing and shared that the amendment was previously voted and sent to the Planning Board. However, too much time had elapsed, and the process needed to restart with receipts which are in the packet. The executive assistant spoke to counsel about the process to ensure that it was being done correctly to avoid costly legal ads and to comply with the Attorney General Office's requirements.

  A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by R. Killeen to approve the receipts as presented and request that the Planning Board enter hearings for the Zoning Amendments.

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

- Planning Board Flood Plain Bylaw Submittal to Board of Selectmen

  Like the previous agenda item, the Planning Board has submitted an amendment to the Flood Plain Bylaw to the Board of Selectmen. The Administrator shared that this document was worked on by the Executive Assistant and has been reviewed by the state agency overseeing the process (DCR).

  A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to approve the request that the Planning Board enter hearings for the Flood Plain Bylaw.

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

- Cheshire Rod & Gun Club April Licenses

  A motion was made by R. Killeen and seconded by R. DeAngelis to approve the Cheshire Rod and Gun Club Licenses.

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

- National Grid – Distribution Easement for 6 Main Street

  The DPW Director explained the need for the easement which will put the Town Utilities on a separate pole.

  A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by M Francesconi to sign the easement to National Grid for 6 Main Street.

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

- Open Space and Recreation Committee – Next Steps

J. Levesque stated that Open Space & Recreation Committee member Art Kaufman had reached out regarding the continuation of the Open Space & Recreation Committee (OSRC) to implement the plan. The current Recreation Committee had voted not to take on the additional work. There was discussion regarding the OSRC also taking over the master plan. Art Kaufman relayed that the Planning Board has voted to give up the master plan. S. McGrath stated that in his opinion the OSRC is not the committee that should be addressing the master plan. R. DeAngelis shared his recollection of how the master plan was created stating that there is a lot to the plan, that is too big for Cheshire, and it could never be brought to fruition. There was further discussion on how the committee should continue. J. Levesque will reach out to BRPC to see how other Towns have moved forward with implementation once the plan has been approved.

Joint Budget Meeting

J. Chaput called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

- Berkshire Health Alliance – 7:00 p.m.
  Dan Hassett from the Berkshire Health Alliance (BHA) explained the role of the inspectors' program and that the five inspectors work under the direction and authority of the Board of Health. He explained the new state certification and tiered training program. Currently they are inspecting and permitting lodging establishments, mobile home parks, food establishments, and tobacco establishments. After July 1st the Berkshire Health Alliance will be handling all percolation and septic permitting, hauling permitting, and animal inspections. The fee for services is $24,000 per year, estimated revenue is expected to be approximately $15,000+, and a revolving account will be set up to allow permit fees to offset the expense. There were questions regarding the training program and required certifications as well as a question regarding well permitting. Dan will follow up on the well permitting requirements.

- Fire Truck Borrowing
  Chief Francesconi joined the board to discuss the purchase of the fire engine. The new engine is on the lot and ready to be delivered to the Town however the borrowing has not been approved due to a technicality as the special election warrant was not posted. The Town Administrator shared that special legislation was filed last fall to address the failure to post however the bill did not get passed in the last session, the bill has been refiled, and she has informed Representative Barrett and Senator Mark for the urgent need to gain approval. Representative Barrett indicated that he has spoken to the elections committee chair about pushing the bill forward quickly. The Chief explained that the truck is ready much earlier than anticipated and was notified two weeks ago of its completion. There was discussion on holding another Special Election as the town is paying a holding fee to the company, a special election has a forty-five day posting period and cost the town approximately $5,000. The Administrator shared that Rep Barrett would provide an update this week and that she will reach out to him first thing in the morning.

  Chief was asked about his operating budget which was level funded. He shared that due to successful grants the equipment is mostly new and in good shape. He has promoted Captain Martin to Assistant Chief so an adjustment will need to be made to add the third stipend. The Town Administrator shared that the Public Safety Complex Committee had requested an update to the report/cost estimate from EDM in 2022 and the number to make repairs with no upgrades as increased from $1,330,561 to $1,590,165.

  R. DeAngelis asked about radio communications and how many years we are into the agreement, the Town Administrator will follow up but believed that it was year 2, sharing that a radio stabilization account was set up two years ago. The Chief shared that dispatch has been taken over by the state at a cost savings to the town.

General Budget Discussion

S. McGrath referred to the iBerkshires Article regarding the Hoosac Valley Regional School District, it was noted that no documents other than the assessment have been sent to the Town for review. The Town Administrator will request the documentation including information pertaining to School Choice, Circuit Breaker, Excess & Deficiency, Rural Aid (including a list of staff currently paid with these funds), Revolving Accounts, and Grants. The request will be made so the Board and Finance Committee can review and gather questions prior to the budget hearing scheduled on April 15, 2025.

McGrath shared that there has been more transparency this year especially with notification regarding the increases due to outplacement services and health insurance increases. He further noted that the district agreement review was voted on by the school committee and the town voters will be presented with an amendment to use a five-year rolling average, the amendment to change at large voting was determined to have a negative impact on Cheshire's current representation. The Town Administrator shared that she had emailed the Superintendent regarding language that would require a 2/3 vote for large items such as a school closure, she will send a reminder with the budget request.

J. Chaput noted that the Finance Committee had discussed board/committee stipends at their last meeting, the Town Administrator reached out to Berkshire County and other regional towns to obtain information. Information obtained to date has been sent to both the board and the finance committee. J. Chaput also shared concerns regarding the library assessment, the Town Administrator has shared information provided by the Librarian pertaining to their budget, grants, trusts and state aid.

Finance Committee Adjournment

A motion was made by J. Chaput and seconded by K. Levesque to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 8:09 p.m.

Vote: Unanimous

Board of Selectmen Discussion/Decision Items – Continuation if Necessary

Tax Title Custodian Appointment - Ben Gelb (Revised 3/31/25)

The Town Administrator requested the appointment of Ben Gelb as Tax Title Custodian so we can handle the sale of 1666 Wells Road and work with the tax attorney on other tax title properties.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to appoint Ben Gelb as Tax Title Custodian

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

Motion Carries: 5-0

Executive Assistant Additional Duties until June 30, 2025

M. Francesconi left the room at 8:11 p.m. as the conversation pertained to the Executive Assistant

The Town Administrator asked for additional hours for the executive assistant in the interim for cross training in the collector office as the current Assistant Treasurer/Collector is going on vacation shortly and has given notice that she will no longer serve as Assistant Treasurer/Collector effective July 1, 2025. R. DeAngelis stated that the Town is creating a lot of overhead for a small town by hiring full time positions with benefit costs. He noted that health insurance is currently costing the town $35,000 per month for active and retired employees and stated that no one knows the cost associated with an employee in addition to their salary. S. McGrath stated that the request was for additional hours to fill a gap until the board reviewed job descriptions and discussed the path going forward. There was discussion on outsourcing the collector position to save money. R. DeAngelis shared that there is no

new growth yet the expenses keep increasing, with no structure or management of the Town. J. Levesque commented on how far the Town has come in the past several years also noting that the request was for temporary additional hours. R. Killeen pointed out the fact that the Board should be aware of public perception o from Town residents because of the relationship between the executive assistant and board member. M. Francesconi stepped back in the room and submitted her resignation effective immediately, she removed her personal belonging from the table and stepped into the audience stating that she was speaking as a citizen, that she did not want her name to hold back the Executive Assistant, she is doing an amazing job and loves working for the Town. Further she shared that she has a passion for the work that she has been doing, noting that the town is fortunate to have an employee who has the writing and organization skills. Additionally she shared that she does not need health benefits at this time. R. DeAngelis then stated that M. Francesconi should stay and that he would go noting that difficult discussions are part of being on the board. R. DeAngelis and M. Francesconi left the meeting at 8:30 p.m. R. Killeen stated that the executive assistant is more than capable like the police officer discussed earlier in the meeting and she should be retained. S. McGrath suggested that the topic should be tabled at the next meeting.

Consent Agenda

- Minutes – March 4, March 7, March 18
- Account Payable and Payroll Warrants

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by R. Killeen to approve the consent agenda as submitted
Roll call Vote: R. Killeen- Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; S. McGrath – Yes
Motion Carries: 3-0

Announcements – None

Public Comment

Peter Traub asked if there would be a decision made on the extra hours for the executive assistant. S. McGrath explained that it has been tabled to the next meeting that the intent was to bridge a gap until job descriptions, posting and town meeting decides. Peter then asked what could be done to fix the situation that happened to which S. McGrath stated he was unsure but would circle back with the individuals involved.

M. Francesconi stepped back into the room and rescinded her resignation from the board.

Any other business not anticipated 48 hours prior to the meeting.

Adjournment

A motion was made by J. Levesque and seconded by R. Killeen to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m.
Roll call Vote: R. Killeen- Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; S. McGrath – Yes
Motion Carries: 3-0

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Respectfully submitted

Jennifer Morse
April 8, 2025

Document List

1. Agenda – April 1, 2025

2. Keeping of livestock and poultry memos
3. Zoning Bylaw Amendment Memo
4. Flood Plain Bylaw Docs
5. Easement – 6 Main Street
6. Email re: OSRC continued work
7. Draft Minutes - 3/4/25; 3/7/25; 3/18/25

Approved: 4/15/25