

MINUTES OF THE JOINT TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE 7:00 P.M. PUBLIC HEARING ON TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2020 VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (PER EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR OF CONNECTICUT)

*Public access made available through live streaming on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4_xey3QjJmwe57R_6K94Dw
Public comments accepted at Comments@cheshirect.org and by voice mail message at 203 271-6638. Video will be available on Channel 14 and on demand at www.cheshirect.org as soon as possible.*

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Timothy Slocum, Vice Chairman; David Borowy, James Jinks, Sylvia Nichols, Peter Talbot, David Veleber, Donald Walsh.
Staff: Sean M. Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Asst. Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; William Voelker, Town Planner; Jerry Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator; Laura Brennan, Town Clerk; Tom Smith (D) and Sue Pappas (R) Registrars of Voters

Chairman Oris called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

Ms. Talbot called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman Oris acknowledged the passing of Derf Kleist, former Cheshire resident, who was active in the budget process and attended many meetings, expressing his thoughts on various aspects of the Town Budget. On behalf of the Cheshire community, Mr. Oris extended condolences to Cindy Kleist and the Kleist Family.

3. Recap of previously discussed budget items

Budget Committee Chairman Borowy commented on the uncertainty in our society at this time, and Council's decision making on next year's budget projections on revenue/expenditures and Town services.

**4. Proposed FY 2020-2021 Operating Budget, Annual Capital Budget
Five Year Capital Expenditure Plan.**

Planning, EDC, Town Clerk, Registrars

PLANNING DEPARTMENT – WILLIAM VOELKER, TOWN PLANNER

Mr. Voelker presented an overview of the Planning Department Budget.

Total Budget - \$386,989; Salary - \$370,886; Non-Salary - \$16,103.

The Planning Department is professional staff to the following boards/commissions/committees:

Planning and Zoning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Environment Commission, Aquifer Protection Agency, Environment Commission, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission, Economic Development Commission, Historic District Commission, The Beautification Committee.

The department budget remains the same year to year; the overall increase this year is 1.21%, which is \$3,656 salary based, and non-salary net of \$850.

Planning Department – was reorganized a few years ago; staff includes Bill Voelker, Town Planner, Suzanne Simone, Environmental Coordinator, Zoning Enforcement Officer Strollo (part-time), Jocelyn Patrignelli, Administrative Assistant, Catherine Donegan, Exec. Secretary.

The Council was informed by Mr. Voelker that even with the impact of the COVID-19 there are no setbacks with applications, staff is doing preliminary reviews, getting plans ready, holding conference calls with applicants, and staff is assisting with the support and expansion of the Town's economic base. The PZC virtual meeting will be held on Monday, May 11th, on CH 14. An invitation was extended to Councilors to contact Mr. Voelker or any staff member on planning and development for the Town.

A question was asked by Mr. Talbot about changing ways to do business, anything to be changed going forward after the pandemic, lessons learned, doing business post-pandemic with savings for the community, finding better ways to do business.

Stating he has not given this much thought, Mr. Voelker explained that staff is currently being rotated to insure their health and safety. With regard to the Planning Department, Mr. Voelker stated the work is related to land use, dirt, creation of properties, which is more face to face interaction, being in the field, and these tasks are hard to do electronically. There will be some virtual meetings and conference calls.

Building Department – Mr. Kimball pointed out there are things happening. He cited use of photographs, high density videos, closing out permits, etc. and more being done electronically than in the past.

IWW \$12,000 expenditure – Mr. Voelker explained that this expense is for third party review, and is reimbursable by the applicant.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – GERALD SITKO, EDC COORDINATOR

Mr. Sitko briefly reviewed the EDC budget, work of the department, and his responsibility and oversight of the Historic District Commission, Economic Development Commission, and The Beautification Committee.

Total Budget - \$121,883; increase of \$2,414, 2.02%.

Historic District Commission – budget of \$2,275; it is a land use commission, very active membership, great leadership and has statutory requirements which must be met in conducting its business.

The Beautification Committee – budget of \$13,225; the committee maintains the landscaping, plantings and trees on Town property, has responsibility for Arbor Day, Adopt-A-Spot Program, adopts beautification rules for properties, and participates in the Town Home and Garden Show.

Mr. Sitko informed the Council of his role in the economic development of Cheshire, and said he works quietly and confidentially with prospective clients looking at the Town for business opportunities. Recent economic developments include the Hartford Health Center, Medical/Surgical Center, Napoli Group, Alexion Building, and many others. Mr. Sitko gets an interested company/business into Town Hall, and work starts with Town Planner Voelker, Planning staff, development team, Fire, Police, Engineering...all working to bring the company to Cheshire, or retain them in Town. 70% of new growth comes from within, and he cited Whole Foods with its recent 86,000SF expansion. In his work, Mr. Sitko invites companies to EDC meetings, trouble shoots/solves problems, and builds a relationship with property owners.

Economic Development Commission – budget of \$4,860. Mr. Sitko talked about encouraging residents to support local businesses, and a marketing campaign is planned for people to patronize Cheshire businesses. At this time with the pandemic situation, many businesses are bending and there could be future breakage.

Business Appreciation Day – Mr. Sitko commented on the importance of this appreciation day, which started in 1992, and it should be done every year, as it is appreciated by the business community.

TIF – There are development opportunities coming for the north end of Town. Mr. Sitko cited the importance of funding to hire a consultant to go through the CEA application.

Mr. Sitko is working with the Engineering Department on transfer of State land in the north end, with the closing in very soon. Maps need to be developed, and this matter will be brought to the Council in a few weeks. The EDC would like to meet with the Council in June regarding the economic incentive program.

Remediation Program – work is ongoing with the Ball & Socket Arts site. There was a \$750,000 remediation grant; \$27,000 is in the account balance for the project; another round of grant funds is coming in June or July, and another grant request will be submitted.

According to Mr. Sitko, there are businesses interested in doing business in Cheshire, and things are happening on Route 10 and other areas of Town. Business development projects for Climate Engineering, Marbridge Home, Medical/Surgical Center, the Brewery, are moving forward. With the pandemic and economic situation, Mr. Sitko pointed out the importance of getting information out to the business community as fast as possible for SBA and other relief programs.

Council members thanked Mr. Sitko for keeping Cheshire alive and doing well with business opportunities...and there will be growth again. Regarding the status of businesses in Town, questions were asked about what the Council can do, how the businesses are doing, getting the word out for local support of businesses, reopening of small businesses and what their needs will be.

The Council's approval of the tax deferment program was a step in the right direction, and Mr. Sitko said it is appreciated. He noted some small businesses are not doing well, restaurants will not make up lost revenue; and some businesses will not be able to make it through the economic struggle. After a visit with local growers, Mr. Sitko said they are not in a good place right now, and he encourages and supports them with applying for PPE and SBA assistance.

With regard to economic development, Mr. Sitko noted the importance of TIF consulting services and getting the first application through the process.

Chairman Oris thanked Mr. Sitko for his work on economic development for the Town, his knowledge of what is out there for businesses. The Council continues to do what is best for the business community, has implemented the tax deferment program, and has concerns about shuttered businesses and impact on the real estate owners.

TOWN CLERK DEPARTMENT – LAURA BRENNAN, TOWN CLERK

Mr. Brennan thanked Councilors for everything being done to keep Town staff safe, the Town operational, and employees informed and up to date on the pandemic situation.

Budget/page 9 – The Town Clerk's budget FY 2020-2021 is \$196,645; decrease of \$10,471 or (5.06%).

Town Clerk Department Staff – Laura Brennan, Town Clerk; Patti King, Deputy Town Clerk; Amy Leonard, Asst. Town Clerk; two (2) temporary part-time staff return in August for the primary and November election. Staff is alternating days with staggered work hours, allowing for two (2) staff members in the office most of the day.

Ms. Brennan highlighted the department's work and accomplishments. Business is being done by mail, electronically or by courier; the vault was upgraded (photographs shown); several procedures were changed to on-line systems; marriage licenses/oath/signing license takes place outside in people's cars; deaths are filed by

funeral directors, permits are picked up and certificates are certified, and sent to the State weekly; appointments are made for land record access with encouragement to send documents by e-mail. Instructions for these procedures are on the website.

Presidential Primary has been moved to the August primary; it is expected there will be many absentee ballots.

Dog Licenses are by obtained by mail. There will be a secured drop box outside the office door for Town Clerk needs; staff needs laptops for at home business tasks such as e-mail responses, redacting SS#s from digital records, e-recording and indexing documents, reorganize electronic files, and taking on-line classes. Laptops would be funded by TC funds.

The listing of State, Federal and Local organizations for Town Clerk interaction and work was displayed, with starred groups cited for revenue generation.

Revenue Summary – Ms. Brennan reviewed the department revenue summary.
2020 projected revenue - \$692,500; revised due to COVID-19 - \$635,000
2021 projected revenue - \$593,440; revised due to COVID-19 - \$545,000
Revenue to date FY 19-20 - \$555,900

FY 19-20 Monthly Revenue Summary – Ms. Brennan reported that October revenue was the largest, \$61,000 in real estate conveyance tax. April 2019 conveyance tax was \$25,000; April 2020 conveyance tax was \$16,000.

Original Budget - \$259,000; revised (COVID-19) now at \$233,428.

Revenue 2013 to 2020 – In 2013 revenue was \$671,000. This was when banks were giving out money; 12,000 documents were processed in 2013; the revenue came from recording fees and conveyance taxes.

Savings - \$4,350; Town Clerk Training School cancelled; Spring conference cancelled; printing of ballots postponed to August; Advertising-Legal Notices not necessary; Contracted Services IQS savings.

2019 Town Clerk Fund Projects – Ms. Brennan highlighted the projects funded through TC; funds come from recording fees and supplement the budget. Last year \$40,000 came from Historic Document Fund to digitalize land record images; \$7,000 from MERS fund used to remodel the vault; there will be no funding of training or conference; \$17,000 funds the temporary employees, and this has not yet been spent.

Vault Remodeling – Photographs of the newly remodeled vault were shown to the Council; the project was paid through TC funds; total cost \$37,300.

The Council was informed by Mr. Brennan that land records go back to 1989, and there are plans to go back to the 1970's. All social security numbers must be redacted from these records.

In response to a question from Mr. Talbot about the staff need for laptops while working from home. Ms. Brennan said they could be acquired now, or after the pandemic. Staff is paid on an hourly basis.

Mr. Talbot cited his concerns of staff doing e-mail or after hours work when not officially on the clock.

Chairman Oris commented on the digitalizing of records, and the importance of redacting social security numbers. He questions a liability issue and protection of personal information.

According to Ms. Brennan, the books in the vault have social security numbers and anyone can get this information. Staff is being very careful to insure social security numbers are not on the records when they are being uploaded to the system.

Town Clerk staff has been assisting the pandemic effort making masks and protective gowns and donating them to Chesprocott for nursing homes.

ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT – TOM SMITH (D) AND SUE PAPPAS (R) Page 13

Mr. Kimball reviewed the budget. FY 2021-\$99,023; decrease of \$12,278, or (11.03%). Non-Salary items - \$9,950; increase of \$2,950 or 44.70%.

Mr. Smith updated the Council on the situation with the primary, and use of a mail ballot versus people working at the polls. He noted it may not be legal to have an all mail election. Poll workers could be reduced, but more people will be needed to deal with these ballots. Nothing is yet defined on what location would be used, nor is there definition of what this election would do for Registrars.

Ms. Pappas said the State is getting PPE, but it is unknown if and when it is coming.

Cost to run an election is \$10,000 to \$13,000, and no election in April saves money. There will be an August primary resulting in small savings.

The Council was told by Ms. Pappas there is a suggestion to use one (1) facility as opposed to all the schools and Arts Place. There is the option of using the high school, with each district in a separate area in the school. Mr. Smith said the State is looking at this and direction will be taken from them, with the question of whether this is legally possible. The decision will come from Hartford.

In the past Mr. Borowy said there was one (1) polling place for some referendums, which were efficient and well run, with savings generated.

Mr. Oris talked about the additional expenditures related to the COVID-19 and election process. Federal funding allocated \$5M to Connecticut, but we have no idea of how much comes to Cheshire...and he asked if this is correct.

Ms. Smith and Mr. Pappas stated that Mr. Oris is correct, and \$5M is the figure provided by the State. The funding is coming to the State, but they do not know how much Cheshire will receive of this funding.

Line Item #5203 – Ms. Jinks asked about the increase in this line item

Ms. Pappas explained that by State Law there must be one voting booth for every 250 voters, so this expenditure is in compliance with State statutes. As voter lists increase the Registrars want to insure there is compliance with the statute. Some of the older voting booths are being replaced.

There are two types of booths and Ms. Kimball advised that the Registrars are checking out and inquiring on these booths.

Ms. Pappas stated there is inquiry out to past moderators, asking them what type of voting booth they prefer. Most prefer the corrugated/plastic/cardboard booths which are easier to pack and use.

Mr. Borowy thanked Ms. Pappas and Mr. Smith for their presentation to the Council.

Preliminary Employee Vacancies – Town Manager Kimball informed the Council on the position vacancy list - Town Assessor, Head Desk Pool Attendant, Revenue associated with lateral transfer from Tax Office to Cheshire Police Department/Administrative Assistant (resulting in vacancy in Tax Dept.), Full-time Town Engineer, Lab Supervisor (WWTP), two (2) Police Officers (one retirement and another possible retirement).

Chairman Oris pointed out that the labor force in the Town and BOE budgets is a major expenditure. The majority of union contracts will be negotiated in June, and there must be discussion on labor expenses. Town and BOE employees can be told they will stay in their jobs, but there will be a 0% salary increase...and Mr. Oris believes employees would be receptive to this decision. With salary increases, Mr. Oris said the Town will not get to the 0% mill rate increase while maintaining services. He will be looking for labor to have a seat at the budget table.

Mr. Slocum agreed with Mr. Oris' statement about labor costs and their having a seat at the budget table.

Mr. Borowy stated labor is a big part of the operating budget. There must be a reduction in expenses going forward, with the least disruption to services and employees as is possible. The option of a zero salary increase was raised by Mr. Oris,

and he said the Council has many options to look at, and everything is on the table as the Council negotiates and adopts a budget.

Stating she basically agrees with these comments, Ms. Nichols noted CCM has information on activities of other towns as they were addressing public related issues and COVID-19. Many towns have adopted this policy of holding salaries the same for the next contract year. Cheshire is not out of sync with this option, as it is being considered by many CCM towns. This needs to be put in context, and Ms. Nichols said she would rather have a job than a salary increase.

Mr. Walsh agreed with the statements made and questioned the obligation of the Town under the contract on salaries, and what can and cannot be done. He would also rather have a job than a salary increase this year.

Town Manager Kimball advised the Council that there will be a discussion, in executive session, on negotiation strategy. He will have answers to the Council questions.

Chairman Oris thanked everyone for their participation in the public hearing and special meeting. He noted 22 people were watching the meeting on CH 14.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk