



**Chesterfield Select Board Minutes
Monday, January 29, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.
Town Office Building - 422 Main Road**

Mr. Fuller called the Select Board meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

Select Board Members Present: Trish Colson-Montgomery, and Don Willard III

Select Board Members Participating Remotely: Roger Fuller

Town Administrator Present via ZOOM: Brenda Lessard

Public Officials Present: Larry Cervelli and Joe Gazillo, Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Executive Comm.; Larry Holmberg, Emergency Management Director (EMD) and MVP Executive Committee

Public Officials Present via ZOOM:

General Public Present: Bea von Hagke, Charlie Hayes, Faith Williams, Saul Aguilar and Denise LeDuc from Hilltown Community Development Corp. (HCDC); Diane Drohan, Hilltown Food Pantry; Greta Willett and Victoria Dempsey from Health Outreach Program for Elders (HOPE), Greg Meister, and Sarah Hamilton

General Public Present via ZOOM: Angela Panccione, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

Recorder of Minutes: Brenda Lessard

On March 29, 2023, Governor Healey signed into law a supplemental budget bill, which, among other things, extends the temporary provisions pertaining to the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025. Specifically, this further extension allows public bodies to continue holding meetings remotely without a quorum of the public body physically present at a meeting location, and to provide "adequate, alternative" access to remote meetings. The language does not make any substantive changes to the Open Meeting Law other than extending the expiration date of the temporary provisions regarding remote meetings from March 31, 2023 to March 31, 2025.

This meeting was conducted with ZOOM access for the public.

Warrants:

Mr. Willard and Ms Colson-Montgomery reviewed and signed the warrants W24-16, WP24-16, WPD24-16 and WBB24-16. There was a discussion of an invoice submitted for payment by the Fire Department. Mr. Willard will reach out to the Fire Chief to ask about the invoice from Sentry Uniform.

Minutes:

Ms Colson-Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Mr. Willard, and unanimously voted to accept the special meeting minutes of 01/08/2024 as amended.

Addition to Agenda:

Full Agendas:

Mr. Fuller opined if the Select Board has a full agenda for the next meeting, a separate meeting should be planned to devote time to the FY25 budget. He also noted that some item discussions are lengthy and the board may need to have separate meetings to discuss certain issues.

Email regarding Public Comment at Meetings:

An email had been received from Andrea Estes from the Plymouth Independent asking about “Public Comment Period” on Select Board agendas. The Select Board noted that the Town of Chesterfield Select Board does not have a formal public comment period but welcomes input from the community. As the town is small, the Select Board recognized different schedules and will take comment from the public when they come into the meeting. Ms Lessard will respond to the email.

North Road and Damon Pond Road Updates:

Ms Colson-Montgomery noted that highway updates should be on the agendas going forward. Mr. Fuller can do the report and if further discussion is needed, the Highway Superintendent can come in to the meeting.

Chesterfield Select Board FaceBook Page:

Ms Colson-Montgomery would like to start a Town of Chesterfield Select Board page to keep residents up to date with duties the board does. No commenting would be allowed. A synopsis of the meetings could be posted there for the public.

Reports:

Dunham Building:

Mr. Fuller reported that he has not had the building appraised yet.

MIA Revaluations of Town Buildings for Insurance:

A meeting will be set up with Mr. Fuller, Mick Garrold and Ms Lessard. Mr. Fuller noted after 3:30 pm is best for him.

Internet Issues at Town Offices:

Mr. Fuller and Ms Lessard had a phone meeting with Mike Mastrionni, Chris Hanecak and Donovan Bambury from Westfield Gas & Electric after they came out to the Town Office to check the broadband speed and equipment. They removed the SonicWall and tested the speed coming into the ONT and had over 900 mbs download speeds and 700-900 upload speeds. They reported that the ONT and circuit is solid and has speeds close to a gigabyte. They suggested installing an access point (AP) in the Select Board office as they did note the speed slowed when they tested on their cellphones. They also recommended replacing the cabling in the basement. They had noted older wiring there. They also suggested moving the router which is in the

basement upstairs and installing it on a rack. Mr. Fuller and Ms Lessard also spoke with Entre who will be sending Tom LaRoche to the office to look at the issue and try to fix the internet issues that the Select Board has been experiencing during ZOOM meetings.

Recreation Committee Updates:

Mr. Willard reported that wrestling, basketball and noodlesize programs are still running. Pickleball is still running at the school in the gymnasium. He was asked by Jon Parrot about progress for the resurfacing of the tennis courts. There may be grants available to resurface the tennis courts and make outdoor pickleball courts at Russell Park. It was suggested to Mr. Willard to track the number of people playing and to look at the Open Space Recreation Plan.

School Updates:

Mr. Willard reported that one of the towns was withholding funds to Hampshire Regional (HRHS) until the FY23 books are closed and the Excess and Deficiency (E & D) funds are certified. Mickey Buhl is leaving in July to take a new job. The issues at the school are causing implications for all five towns in the school district.

5:00 PM: HCDC Public Hearing re: FY24 CDBG Grant:

The purpose of the hearing is to discuss the implementation of the FY22-23 CDBG grant and the FY24 funding allocations based on the proposed FY24 budget. Up to five social service programs can be included in the grant proposal. There were only three programs that applied. They include the Hilltown Food Pantry, the Hilltown Elder Network (HEN) program and the HOPE program. There is a total of \$232,511 which can be allocated to the combined social service programs. The HCDC recommends funding on the FY24 grant application to be \$129,739.85 for the HEN program which is 92.12% of their requested funds, \$30,203. for the HOPE program, which is 100% of their requested funds and \$72,568.15 for the Food Pantry, which is 92.12% of their requested funds.

Diane Drohan from the Hilltown Food Pantry reported that the food pantry has been a lifeline for seniors, low to mid income families and low to mid income individuals. They have noticed an uptick in people needing help especially with the increase in the cost of groceries and heating costs. They do receive data from the schools and offer a summer food program for kids at the local schools. They also purchase extra items that are needed like toiletries, toilet paper and chunky peanut butter. They leave their brochures at the Northampton Survival Center and local Farmers Markets.

Vickie Dempsey and Greta Willett spoke about the HOPE program. Ms Willett goes to seniors homes and does a wide range of activities. She checks on the food availability, home safety, medications, catheter checks, wound care, dressings. She makes sure that they have warm clothes and that their clothes are being washed. Sometimes she will play a game with a senior, especially if they are lonely and have had no visitors. She has one client that she plays Yahtzee with. The seniors she gives services to look forward to her visits. She said the clients are grateful for her services.

Charlie Hayes oversees the HEN program which supplies in-home chores for income-eligible seniors. These chores include house cleaning, washing windows and floors, laundry, etc.

Ms Williams noted that the grant would not include enough money to give 100% of the requested funds which totaled \$249,351. Their recommendations included looking at the resources available to the

programs for fundraising the shortfall. The HCDC opined that the HEN program and the Food Pantry had more opportunities for donations.

Mr. Fuller asked about the multi-year grant that occurred in the last grant that was awarded. Ms von Hagke noted that the FY22-23 grant was awarded that way due to COVID. The grant program did multi-year grants ten to fifteen years ago. She does not believe they will do multi-year grants again. Those multi-year grants cause unanticipated issues.

Mr. Fuller asked about the Housing Rehab program. He wanted to know how many of the applications included septic replacement. Ms von Hagke noted that the Town has a Septic Betterment program. She noted that the policies need to be looked at. The funding was not used in recent years due to the very low interest rates that a homeowner could get from a bank. The septic betterment funds were given to the Town from DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) to help homeowners with a low-interest loan to replace failing setic systems. There was a brief discussion if the money could be used for Board of Health purposes. The initial paperwork will need to be examined. Ms von Hagke stated Dave Christopolis was looking into the program and whether the HCDC could promote it.

Ms Colson-Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Mr. Willard and unanimously voted to approve the award amounts for the FY24 grant application as recommended by the HCDC.

6:00 P.M. MVP Updates:

Don Willard recused himself the community liaison discussion regarding compensation for the liaisons due to possible conflict. Mr. Holmberg passed out draft guidelines for the community liaisons. The MVP Executive Committee has not adopted the guidelines yet and are looking for input from the Select Board.

There is a sample liaison job description in the guidelines along with an 18 month commitment. The time frame for compensation will be from August 2023 to October 2024 and from October 2024 to September 2025 depending on the seed project. Ms Colson-Montgomery opined that the wording in the draft amendment about taking compensation if needed but refuse if you don't need compensation would put guilt on the liasions. She noted that all the state documents say liaisions should be paid. There is a paragraph about compensation in the guidelines that references payment via gift cards. Ms Colson-Montgomery noted that gift cards still need to be counted as cash payment. If they are handed out occasionally, they are not taxable but if they will be used for regular compensation of the liaison's time, they would be taxable under IRS (Internal Revenue Service) guidelines. There has been five liaisons recruited. Ms Panccione had discussions with the proposed liaisons and their preferred compensation. The rate will be \$25/hr. for wages for up to 80 hours. The gift cards could be gas cards, Walmart cards or grocery store cards. It was suggested that the PVPC deal with the compensation as it would be easier than the MVP Executive Committee doing it. There is \$16,000 in the budget to pay community liaisons but it has been suggested to put that amount at \$10,000 and use the remaining \$6,000 for engagement activities.

Ms Colson-Montgomery is not comfortable accepting the amendment without these issues being addressed first. Ms Panccione needs clarification of the method of payment and the financial implications for the liaisons. Ms Colson-Montgomery is not adverse to having PVPC doing the administration of the payments. It was noted the information given regarding the grants is inconsistent. Marissa Robinson will be contacted to clarify things.

Ms Colson-Montgomery made a motion not to accept this amendment to the contract and for the board to take it up at their next meeting. The contract will be put on hold.

Mr. Holmberg noted the proposed amendment had nothing to do with the liaison compensation package. The discussion was about a much broader subject about compensation to an individual. The proposed change in the contract would be administration of the grant changing from the Town to the PVPC. This would be an easier process.

The seed project has not been decided on. The MVP 2.0 grant is an evolving situation and the guidelines are not clear. Mr. Holmberg said it is a poorly designed grant process. Training from the State will begin soon.

The HCDC, who is doing the grant management, proposed giving \$1,500 toward the kick-off event from their fee. There was discussion of where the money will be taken from for the kick-off event.

Tighe and Bond will be coming to do building and town property assessments. The proposed dates were February 7 or 8. After discussion, February 8 works for those who will be present. Larry Holmberg and Don Willard will do walk-throughs with Tighe and Bond. Kent Hicks was also suggested to do the walk-through or be a sound board if needed.

Larry Holmberg re: CodeRed Proposed Upgrades & State Disaster Relief Fund:

CodeRed Upgrades:

Larry Holmberg presented an upgrade to the CodeRed system. The proposed upgrade uses the SMS protocol which is quicker, faster and has better reporting capabilities. Goshen has already agreed to the upgrade. Ms Colson-Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Mr. Willard and unanimously voted to approve the upgrade. The cost will be approximately \$500 more a year split by the two towns.

State Disaster Relief Fund:

Mr. Holmberg provided information about an Act creating a proposed new federal bi-partisan fund that would provide \$250 million in seed money to MEMA to provide emergency disaster relief and alleviate the damage, loss, hardship, or suffering caused by a natural or human-caused disaster or other catastrophic event. This relief would include municipalities, private non-profit organizations, businesses, and individual residents of the commonwealth. Mr. Holmberg supports this Act as the state does not have a state emergency fund for disaster responses, unlike 43 other states that have established a standalone fund. He would like the Select Board to send a letter of support. He will write a letter that will be put on the Town letterhead for the board to sign.

Town Administrator Report:

Police Department Room:

A proposal from Vee Builders was received to build the partition wall. The price is \$1,850. Whitely Electric was notified to come install two outlets in the new wall and run a hookup for the internet so the wiring does not have to run across the floor. The Select Board agreed to have Vee Builder and Whitely do the work as it would be less costly than the partition walls. The board would also like Vee Builders to fix the hole in the west wall in the police room.

Center Cemetery Access Road Agreement:

Ms Wyman called Ms Lessard with a few concerns. She asked about plowing, which the Town will not be doing. She also expressed concern that the agreement would create an entailment on her deed if the agreement is filed with the Registry of Deeds. She opined this might scare off potential buyers in the future. The Town may be able to have an agreement with Ms Wyman and Ms Gage that is just on file in the Town. Mr. Fuller reported he is willing to talk with Ms Wyman if needed.

Cordless Phones at Town Office:

The cordless phones were working again on Wednesday, January 17. Ms Lessard will return the defective phones and has reached out to TPX to find out how the issue was resolved

Library Updates:

The Library Trustees have a retired librarian who will be filling in starting February 1 as an interim librarian. She will be working 18 hours a week. The library is open for fifteen hours a week.

PVPC Alternate Appointment:

Mr. Willard made a motion, seconded by Ms Colson-Montgomery, and unanimously voted to appoint Sarah Hamilton as the PVPC Alternate with a term to end on June 30, 2024.

Adjourn:

Ms Colson-Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Mr. Willard and unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 p.m.