

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING HELD  
ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2023 AT 6:00 P.M., CHESPROCOTT HEALTH DISTRICT,  
1247 HIGHLAND AVE., CHESHIRE, CT 06410**

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Present:

Tim Slocum, Chairman; Don Walsh, Vice-Chairman; Peter Talbot, David Borowy, Jim Jinks, Sylvia Nichols, John Milone

Staff/Guests: Sean M. Kimball, Town of Cheshire Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Assistant Town Manager; Noelle Shepard, Management Specialist; Jack Casner, Fire Chief; Town Attorney Jeffrey Donofrio; Maura Esposito, Chesprocott Director of Health; Jeff Andrews, Chesprocott Chief Sanitarian; Hilary Norcia, Chesprocott Public Health Educator; Michael Federico; Lauren Backman; Liz Normand; Andy Giordano; Maria Benvenuto

Absent: Sandy Pavano, David Veleber

Chairman Slocum called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

**1. ROLL CALL**

The roll was called, and a quorum was determined to be present. David Veleber and Sandy Pavano were absent.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.**

**3. DISCUSSION WITH CHESPROCOTT BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND HEALTH DIRECTOR REGARDING CHESHIRE'S PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CHESPROCOTT HEALTH DISTRICT.**

Tim Slocum mentioned that he had seen in the minutes of the last Chesprocott Health District Board meeting where Maura Esposito shared a list of proposals including changes to fee schedules to the board. He asked Maura Esposito to provide an overview of these for the Town Council.

Maura Esposito reviewed the recommendations that she had made to the board. One of the recommendations included rescinding the current fee schedule and reverting to the January 2022 fee schedule. She mentioned that they could start providing customer satisfaction surveys and do Town Hall meetings with businesses to create an open dialogue.

Tim Slocum explained the board structure of the South Central Health District, which had the municipal managers within the district serve as board members. He stated that they are requesting that the Chesprocott Health District board change their bylaws to have the board include the municipal managers from Cheshire, Prospect, and Wolcott as voting ex-officio members.

Attorney Donofrio explained that the voting ratio between the towns would need to stay the same with the addition of members, but they could give the votes differing weights.

A discussion was had on the history of the Chesprocott Health District board's consideration of the old Artsplace Building on Waterbury Rd. as a new location. Maura Esposito reviewed the history of Chesprocott Health District trying to find a new space since 2018. There was no formal vote by the board on whether to move forward with the Artsplace building. Sean Kimball clarified that there was no formal vote, but several board and staff members brought up concerns about the Artsplace building, which is why discussion had ceased. The Artsplace building is approximately 3,600 square feet, which is bigger than Chesprocott Health District's current space. Maura

Esposito explained that they had considered whether they would want to have additional space in the new building for holding mass clinics.

John Milone questioned how Chesprocott Health District accumulated such a significant fund balance over the years. Maura Esposito clarified that the fund balance is currently at \$1.2 million and explained that it was a result of fee schedules, having funds left over at the end of the year, and high yielding CDs.

Maria Benvenuto explained that the board never received feedback from the communities regarding the fee schedule.

David Borowy expressed his concern regarding the looseness of Chesprocott's budgeting and that it appeared the board knowingly adopted a budget with a surplus per past meeting minutes. He mentioned that they have one of the highest per capita fees in the State.

Maura Esposito explained that they hired an accountant this year, Mike Federico, and he started in July. Mike Federico was introduced and explained that he had experience in Quinipiack Valley Health District. He mentioned that other reasons for an increased fund balance can include grants and grant addendums and unexpected funds received from the State. He expressed his hope that providing this information to the board moving forward with assist with the budgeting. The necessary buffer for a fund balance was discussed.

Don Walsh mentioned that he read the meeting minutes from the last meeting where Mike Federico recommended not dropping below a \$12.15 per capita fee. Mike Federico explained that dropping to a \$10 per capita fee rate would reduce revenue by \$175,000. The health district would have to cut \$190,000 in expenses, which would result in some difficult decisions – i.e. cut personnel and services.

Maura Esposito explained that the Chesprocott Health District board did adopt a fee increase, but it was never put into effect due to a Quickbooks error. Therefore, the fees have not been increased. She mentioned that Chesprocott just secured Anthem's acceptance of Chesprocott as a medical health provider, which enables them to bill for vaccinations.

Peter Talbot mentioned his desire to see budgets that are forward-thinking but also fiscally sound. He inquired which scenario keeps Chesprocott afloat with no personnel and services cuts. He further mentioned that having a municipal representative, Town Manager Kimball, on the board has been key for Cheshire. Lauren Backman explained that her expertise is public health, and that it has been helpful to have a blend of experiences.

Jim Jinks expressed his desire to see more dialogue with businesses as businesses are looking for a health district that is more of a "partner." Maura Esposito explained that she used to be active in the local Chamber of Commerce but had to take a step back over the past year due to personnel issues. She can now resume this.

Don Walsh brought up his concerns regarding the employee turnover of 22 people in two years. Maura Esposito explained that accusations were made about her by former staff and brought to the board's attention. Currently, there are ongoing investigations with the involvement of a labor attorney.

Don Walsh, speaking on the WPCA's behalf, mentioned that there has been 1 septic report done, and the Engineering Division had to ask for it because they had not seen one in a long time. Maura Esposito explained that Town Engineer Kement did request it, and they got it over to him. He further asked about Fats, Oils, and Greases (FOG) reports, but Maura Esposito clarified that those are the responsibility of the WPCA.

Discussion was had on having a health district employee stationed in Town Hall. Maura Esposito explained that if a Sanitarian is out on an inspection, there is someone with an RS always in Chesprocott Health District building.

Further discussion was had on the possibility of moving to Artsplace's old building. The second floor is a blank slate, and Maura Esposito reinforced that this is what architects are hired for. She mentioned that the board needs to identify whether the space needs to also be able to accommodate a mass vaccination site. Discussion was had on whether Cheshire would charge rent or have their share in fees lowered. Lauren Backman suggested the board perhaps take a field trip to see Torrington Health District, a health district that Maura Esposito mentioned that she liked the setup of.

Jeff Andrews, Chief Sanitarian, mentioned that since he has been with Chesprocott Health District in December 2022, over the last six months he has never seen such a well-oiled machine. He recognized Maura Esposito's leadership.

Hilary Norcia introduced herself and explained that with Chesprocott she has been able to do things in community health that she was never able to do such as a newsletter. She explained that she works well together with the nurses.

Maria Benvenuto explained that they are not accountants, and approving a budget with a surplus was not knowingly done. She expressed that she agrees with having the municipal CEO's on the board and her desire to bring the potential of Artsplace to the board for a vote.

Mike Federico will be running additional financial reports with different scenarios for the Town Council and board.

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT.**

Don Walsh motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Jim Jinks seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously by those present, 7-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Attest:

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Noelle Shepard, Management Specialist