TOWN OF CHESTER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING
July 29, 2026 Minutes

Board Members Present: Damon Tyler, Bryan Santiago, Phil Perlah, Bob Flint, Julie Hance, and Preston Bristow at Town Hall; Carl Henshaw via Zoom.

Visitors Present: Barre Penske and Shawn Cunningham at Town Hall.

Call to Order

Preston Bristow called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and expressed appreciation to all for their flexibility in agreeing to postpone the meeting for one week.

Agenda Item 1 – Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting

Bob moved, and Phil seconded, a motion to approve the minutes of June 24, 2026. The minutes were approved as written. Preston thanked Susan Bailey for her thorough minutes of the past and announced that, as part of the town's cost-cutting measures, these and future meeting minutes would be prepared internally by town staff.

Agenda Item 2 – Citizen's Comments

Shawn Cunningham thanked the Commission for the work that had gone into the newly launched economic development website but pointed out numerous inaccuracies within the online business directory. Because the website serves as the public face of Chester's economic development efforts, he stressed the importance of correcting these errors quickly and provided a list of errors he had found. Commission members thanked him for identifying the problems and noted that previous public feedback had already resulted in several updates. Damon emphasized that both he and Carl welcomed corrections from residents and business owners, explaining that the online business directory was intended to improve over time through community input.

Barre Penske offered a proposal regarding the FEMA buyout properties located across from Motel in the Meadow. He suggested that the town begin thinking about the properties as a future community asset capable of hosting festivals, concerts, farmers markets, sporting events, and other activities that could attract both residents and visitors. He proposed giving the area a name such as "Riverside Park." Julie explained that the land is subject to FEMA deed restrictions, which are quite restrictive, because it was acquired through flood buyout programs. She noted that Vermont has introduced a reutilization program that could allow improvements for passive recreational uses if the town applied and received approval. Julie also noted that the Selectboard would ultimately determine whether the town wanted to assume responsibility for maintaining and managing such a space.

Agena Item 3 – Discuss Survey Results to Date

Damon summarized the 85 survey responses received from several target groups, including business owners, older residents, young families, and out-of-state property owners. He provided an AI-assisted summary of the responses to identify major themes while protecting individual identities, acknowledging that AI summaries could occasionally contain inaccuracies. Members discussed several recurring concerns raised by respondents, including the need for additional restaurants, improved parking, better trail access, expanded retail opportunities, permitting assistance, and the long-standing desire for a local pharmacy. Julie clarified one survey comment concerning denied investment opportunities, explaining that it referred to a specific property owner's unsuccessful driveway permit application rather than a broader pattern of investment being rejected. Overall, Commission members agreed that the survey results generally confirmed issues they had already been hearing from residents and did not contain any major surprises.

Agenda Item 4 – Discuss Ways to Increase Survey Participation

Considerable discussion focused on increasing participation in the surveys. Phil remarked that despite actively searching for the survey, it had been difficult to locate on the town website. Damon acknowledged the concern and explained that the Commission had intentionally pursued only a "soft launch" while refining the website. Initial promotion had consisted primarily of newspaper announcements and personal outreach to business owners. Future plans included distributing QR codes throughout town, posting flyers on community bulletin boards, sharing survey links through local Facebook groups, promoting them through the Chester Telegraph and town newsletter, and eventually launching a coordinated social media campaign once branding materials were complete. Members agreed that improving website accuracy before a major public launch would leave a better first impression and encourage greater participation.

The Commission also brainstormed broader economic development ideas inspired by survey feedback. Members discussed coordinating restaurant schedules so that more dining options would remain open throughout the week, particularly on traditionally slower evenings. Damon described conversations with community members interested in organizing a Friday farmers market on the Green, noting that such an event could encourage nearby businesses to remain open later and generate additional foot traffic. Other members suggested tracking annual festivals and regional events that bring travelers through Chester so the town could better position itself as a destination or worthwhile stop along those travel routes. The Commission agreed that shoulder-season tourism represented an important opportunity for supporting local businesses.

Bryan introduced several preliminary logo concepts for the Economic Development Commission. His designs incorporated architectural elements already featured on Chester's gateway signs to maintain consistency with the town's existing branding. Commission members reviewed multiple variations, discussing the balance between visual appeal and simplicity. Several members preferred the cleaner, more minimal designs, observing that logos must remain recognizable when reproduced in different sizes and formats. One design prompted humorous discussion because some members thought its shapes resembled airplane wings or rocket fins rather than rooftops. Bryan explained that the concepts were only early drafts intended to gather

feedback and agreed to continue refining them before presenting updated versions at the next meeting.

Attention then turned to long-term management of the Commission's website and technical resources. Damon emphasized that he did not want the project's success to depend solely on his involvement and volunteered to train another Commission member and a town employee to maintain the website, update databases, and manage the survey system. Carl volunteered to serve as the Commission-member backup, and Julie suggested that Amie Record and Samantha Vertefeuille on the town staff be the ones to receive training. Damon explained that the website was built using relatively simple technology and could be maintained by someone with basic technical knowledge after appropriate instruction.

Agenda Item 5 – Next Meeting Agenda for August 26th

Before concluding the meeting, members finalized several action items. Damon agreed to make respondents' names and email addresses optional on the surveys after discussion about public records requirements and participant privacy. Members reviewed the anticipated timeline for finalizing the Commission logo, launching a larger Facebook campaign, and distributing promotional materials following the August meeting. Bryan indicated that revised logo concepts would be ready for approval at the August 26th meeting. The Commission agreed that at the next meeting they would continue to review survey responses, finalize branding, and prepare for a broader public rollout of the economic development initiative.

Agenda Item 6 - Adjourn

Bob moved to adjourn, and Phil seconded the motion. The motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:51 p.m.