TOWN OF CHESTER

PLANNING COMMISSION

August 03, 2026, Minutes

Commission Members Present: Hugh Quinn, Cathy Hasbrouck, Jeff Holden, Carl Henshaw.

Staff Present: Preston Bristow, Allison Hopkins (MARC), Kellen Appleton (MARC)

Citizens Present: Peter Hudkins, Shawn Cunningham (Chester Telegraph)

Call to Order

Chair Hugh Quinn called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Agenda Item 1, Review Minutes from June 1, 2026, Meeting

Motion to accept minutes made by Cathy Hasbrouck, seconded by Jeff Holden. Jeff noted that page 2 line 80 should be clarified to say Chester did not want truck traffic on Routes 11, and 103, but that the State had mandated it. A vote was taken, and the minutes were unanimously approved, as amended.

Agenda Item 2, Citizens' Comments

Peter Hudkins shared that the Vermont Agency of Transportation is scheduled to re-pave the parts of VT RT 103 and 11 within the Urban Compact in 2030. Chester currently has several projects planned or underway including The Green traffic management improvements and new or improved sidewalks but some may require the Main Steet drainage project, not yet funded, to be competed first. In preparation for the 2030 paving project the town in conjunction with Regional Planning has identified a list of other possible improvements that should be considered when the paving project is done. Peter asked the Planning Commission to review this information for possible inclusion in the upcoming Town Plan re-write.

Agenda Item 3, Review and discuss feedback from June 9th All Boards Meeting

Allison Hopkins compiled and presented a summary of the feedback from the June 9th All Boards meeting that focused largely on a status update of progress to date on the Town Plan re-write. At the All Boards Meeting the Planning Commission presented the Chester demographics, SWOT Analysis, and current Town Plan with other town boards and commission for alignment and feedback. Allison documented the essence of the discussion and synthesized them into the prevailing message organized by Town Plan chapter.

Under the SWOT analysis, strengths centered on Chester's rural character, historic identity, and strong sense of community. Weaknesses focused on aging infrastructure, limited economic opportunities, and access to services. Opportunities included expanding housing options, responding to demographic changes, renewable energy initiatives, transportation improvements, school-related planning, and strengthening coordination with state agencies. Discussion of threats emphasized the importance of preparing for future growth while preserving the community character that residents value most. Allison concluded that the strongest themes repeatedly returned to balancing necessary growth with maintaining Chester's identity.

Much of the discussion about the Town Plan chapters focused on Housing and Economic Development. Feedback consistently identified housing as the community's highest planning priority, emphasizing the need for a greater variety of housing types to support current and future residents. Members observed that discussions about housing density and appropriate development locations were not expressions of opposition to growth, but rather conversations about how growth should be managed alongside available infrastructure. The board agreed that additional housing should be accompanied by investments in roads, utilities, and municipal services to ensure sustainable development. The discussion reflected a broad consensus that Chester must plan proactively for future housing needs while preserving the town's rural character and quality of life. The conversation expanded into an extended discussion about second homes and their impact on the community. Members acknowledged that second homes present both benefits and challenges. Some noted that seasonal residents contribute significantly to the tax base while placing fewer demands on municipal services and supporting local businesses that provide landscaping, maintenance, and property management. Others expressed concern that increasing numbers of second homes contribute to rising housing prices, reduce opportunities for local families to purchase homes. Although opinions differed regarding the ideal proportion of second homes, the consensus was that second homes are not inherently harmful; rather, the community must maintain a healthy balance between seasonal and permanent residents while increasing the supply of affordable workforce housing.

Turning to economic development, members expressed broad support for strengthening and diversifying Chester's economy while maintaining its historic and rural character. The discussion focused on encouraging investment by continuing to make inroads in streamlining the permitting process for various business uses. Some suggested that the town could streamline local approvals by reducing the number of uses requiring conditional use review before the Development Review Board. At the same time, members emphasized that conditional use permits serve an important purpose by allowing the town to require improvements such as sidewalks, drainage upgrades, traffic controls, landscaping, and operational conditions for larger projects.

Agenda Item 4, Review Draft Town Plan Responsibility Matrix

Kellen Appleton developed and presented a draft Town Plan RACI Matrix. A RACI matrix is a project management tool that helps articulate key project stakeholders and what role they play in the execution of the project work. RACI is an acronym which translates as follows:

R (Responsible): Who is responsible for performing the work

A (Accountable): Who is held accountable for the outcome of the work.

C (Consulted): Who is consulted for input and subject matter expertise about the work

I (Informed): Who get updates on progress, but do not help do the work or give direct input

Defining the RACI for each chapter in the Town Plan will ensure key stakeholders are engaged

appropriately and provides transparency about who and how various constituents will be involved in the update of the Town Plan. In order to provide consistent writing style, reduced duplication and provide for easier editing MARC & Town Staff will produce draft content while consulting subject matter experts rather than assigning chapters directly to subject matter experts for authoring. The initial draft RACI matrix was reviewed and feedback provided for incorporation in another revision.

Agenda Item 7, Adjournment

Jeff moved to adjourn, and Cathy and Carl seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and it passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned.