TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD MEETING
May 20, 2026, Minutes

Board Members Present: Lee Gustafson, Arne Jonynas, Peter Hudkins, Tim Roper, and Lauren Fierman at Town Hall.

Staff Present: Julie Hance, Town Manager, at Town Hall; Susan Bailey, Recording Secretary, via Zoom.

Visitors Present: Shawn Cunningham, William Lindsay, Deb Epler, Frank Bidwell, Derek Suursoo, and Jeff Holden at Town Hall; Tim Jones of Green Mountain Power, Karen Felt Ericson, SAPA TV, Sharon Jonynas, Kirk MacGinnis, Michael (no last name), and Mark McKeon via Zoom.

Call to Order

Chair Lee Gustafson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Item 1, Approval of Minutes of May 6, 2026 Selectboard Meeting

Tim moved and Lauren seconded a motion to approve the minutes. Tim noted on page 9, line 34 Meditrina was spelled wrong and on page 10, line 8, Jewett was misspelled. Lee noted on page 9, line 24 should say “would go along” or "was to go along” though he wasn’t sure what was actually said. The minutes were approved, as amended.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen’s Comments

There were no comments.

Agenda Item 3, Old Business

Report by Town Manager:

Sidewalks

The BikePed grants have opened up which are great for sidewalks and storm drain systems. Peter and Julie had discussed what might be the next best section on the sidewalk inventory. They got the Transportation Alternatives Grant which takes them from Town Hall to the bridge and this would pick up on the other side of the bridge, and go the rest of the way up North Street, all the way to Dalrymple. They walked that with Naomi and Matt from Dufresne who will put together a cost estimate for the grant application. It would happen in ‘28 or ‘29, so a match would not be required until then if they are awarded the grant. This is federal money that passes through the state, so Julie wanted to take advantage of it while they could and it was for a lot of money and is the one that's doing the $2.2 million Depot Street sidewalk project, so Julie didn’t want to miss an opportunity to get funding. If they get it, and the project gets done, all the way from Dalrymple and the corner of Church Street, all the way down to Bargfrede would be upgraded,

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which is a huge section of Chester's sidewalk system. They will look at the drainage when it's done. It will be repairing the old sidewalk and would fill in where there's a gap. The sidewalks will be concrete with granite curbing, which will change the drainage. The curbing won't change the elevation much.

All Boards Meeting

The meeting will take place on June 9th 5:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Audit Results

June 17th, Ron from RHR Smith will be at the meeting at 5:00 p.m. to go over the 2025 audit results, as well as the restated 2024 audit and do some financial education. Ron will also be providing education on how to read the financial statements contained within the audit, and answer any financial related questions that the board or public may have. Julie asked for any questions from the board and public by June 5 so she could get them to Ron ahead of time.

Sewer Project

The Force Main Project is on track. Contract 3, the gravity line on Depot Street,will start on June 1st. Contract 2, the Pump Station, begins on June 8th. There was a change in the work for the Force Main; a gravity section on First Avenue is asbestos, which they were going to remove but decided to keep in the ground because of the risk and cost of removing. They will line the section instead and everyone felt it was the best way to move forward and would resolve the issues. Jeff said if they cleaned it up and put the liner in, it would work. There was not an option of leaving it in place and putting in a new one near it. The state is mandating removal for water but not sewer. All the pipes will eventually need to be done.

Highway Department

They are doing paving and patching on Depot and North Streets and doing most of it with P & L Trucking to save substantial amounts of money and get done sooner. The paving can only be done when the asphalt plants are open, when it's not raining, and in hot weather. Julie asked people to extend grace and not yell at the highway guys or criticize or yell at the front office staff. All further conversations regarding paving Julie will handle. The paving won't be done in a day. They are doing an amazing job and the work will be completed. The southbound lane of Depot Street will not be done until after the sewer project in that section is complete. Arne pointed out the problems with infrastructure weren't just in Chester but across the state and country because they've been neglected on a federal and state level for years and now they have to address it. Julie noted it wasn't a town road and was the reason they're not paving it. They are patching it to get by until 2030 when the state has Chester scheduled. Tim appreciated their work and said he was pleasantly surprised when he rode down North Street the prior day.

Arne noted there was a young emerging artist group, The Emily Margaret Band, at Upstairs at Town Hall last weekend and it was a fantastic show that was well attended. Most of the kids are in high school, some college, and are professional. Lee appreciated Arne calling attention to it.

Agenda Item 4, Green Mountain Power Upgrades; Tim Jones

Lee noted the only change made was adding a minimum of 3 inches of new 3/4 fresh gravel

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instead of up to 3 inches; and the first number 1. Lauren moved and Tim seconded a motion to sign the agreement; the motion carried, unanimously and the members signed. Tim Jones from Green Mountain Power thanked them.

Agenda Item 5, Discussion Re: Letter to State on Act 181

Lauren didn't think it was elegant writing but wanted to put forward something she was willing to sign, which it was. The members signed the letter. Arne asked if there was anything final yet, from the state, and there was not.

Agenda Item 6, Financial Update: Q1

Deb Epler provided the financial review. She noted she had only begun working in mid-March so any questions regarding quarter one, she would need to research but was happy to do so. The report she had given them was taken from their accounting system. Deb said the system, NEMRC, was very antiquated but used statewide. Deb is learning the system which she found cumbersome and similar to an old DOS system. It would cost a lot of money to upgrade to something better. Cynthia Stoddard came in and trained both she and Deb Aldrich. It provides accurate reports for the data input but requires exporting the data to Excel to enable them to manipulate any data. They think they can do a better job presenting the financials, provide more transparency, and be used as a tool for the department heads. Deb asked them for any questions. Peter referred to fuels, which diesel would likely double, and questioned that there were no delinquent tax payments or delinquent water and sewer payments. Julie didn't think they budgeted delinquencies. Peter said if it was a tool they were using, they should know delinquencies and Julie and Deb agreed and said that information is provided on a balance sheet and not the profit and loss, which she could provide. Deb noted not all departments have balance sheets and only the water system and general fund did. Arne questioned NEMRC's abilities and Deb said she couldn't do comparisons with previous years in the system. Other accounting software would cost $250,000 plus $70,000 annually while NEMRC only costs $1,500 annually and also provides the Grand List. It works but is cumbersome and is also specific to government accounting. Cynthia did show them features they weren't aware of and was a wealth of information. Deb noted she had only been there 2 months, so she was still learning. They met with department heads to discuss procedures and setting a threshold for purchase orders. They learned they have an encumbrance tool. If the guys have a purchase over $5,000, they get a purchase order from Samantha, it's signed by Julie, and a copy given to finance who can enter it in the system and encumber it which allows the guys to know where they're at along the way. With the accounts payable module, they don't have to wait; Deb can do the payables daily, which show in real time. They are trying to provide as many tools as possible so department heads know their budgets in real time. The report would show the budgeted, actual, encumbered, how much remains, and a projection line. They will do projects on fuel, payroll, legal fees, and others. Julie will provide the board with financials monthly, including delinquencies. The second quarter reports should reflect these changes. Julie will include monthly reports in the meeting packet. Jeff said from what he had seen so far, it was clearer and would make it easier to monitor their budget, which he appreciated. They have established an internal process for invoices received and are implementing a new system; electronic invoices received are also printed. Julie said they met with the auditors and have a positive fund balance of $19,000. Arne noted it was important

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to get the word out that they are nowhere near as bad as was thought. For the solar department, Deb was able to touch base with the offtakers. St. Johnsbury Academy, an offtaker, would like to use more power. Lee thought the system was at 50% capacity so they could generate more power once it's repaired. Tim said if they didn't replace the inverters, they would be in a negative true-up situation. Julie noted that bids were due at the end of the month for the replacements. Arne said it would be useful to have the details regarding production from the system. Tim said it was simple and they could track the production and knew what the expenses were so it should be a simple Excel sheet, which he had sent Deb and offered to sit with her, which she appreciated. They thanked Deb for attending and her presentation. She will attend future meetings.

Agenda Item 7, Sign Loan Documents: Highway Equipment and Projects

Julie said these were the two loans for highway equipment, approved at Town Meeting, and for the matches for the two grant projects. Lee entertained a motion to approve the note, resolution, and the tax certificate for borrowing $100,000 for capital projects. Arne moved and Lauren seconded the motion. Peter wondered if they could get a bond next time so they would get a better rate. Julie said they could. The motion carried, unanimously, and the members signed.

The capital improvement note for $375,000 for a dump truck, one-ton, and a cruiser. Lee entertained a motion to approve the note, resolution, and tax certificate for $375,000. Lauren moved and Tim seconded. The motion carried, unanimously, and the members signed the documents.

Agenda Item 8, Review and Adopt Amended Cemetery Regulations

The members had received a copy of the documents. Lee entertained a motion to approve the cemetery regulations. Arne moved and Tim seconded the motion. Julie noted there was one change from the word statute to statue. Peter asked about raising the fees and Julie said they had raised the cemetery regulation fees. Bill Lindsay asked what was changing and it was the fee schedule. The motion carried, unanimously. The fees go into effect immediately.

Agenda Item 9, Entertainment Permits; Down to the Roots and PJ's Country Kitchen

Lee entertained a motion for approving the application for the entertainment permit for PJ's Country Kitchen. Lauren moved and Tim seconded. There were no complaints from the police. The motion carried, unanimously.

Lee entertained a motion for the entertainment permit for Goldman Group d/b/a/ Down to the Roots. Tim moved and Arne seconded the motion. Arne asked if they had clarified their application as requested at the previous meeting and they had. The motion carried, unanimously, and the members signed.

Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda

- Julie said since they were doing the all boards meeting on June 9th, currently, there wouldn't be much on the June 3rd agenda and maybe one wouldn't be needed, unless

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something came up.

- Lauren wanted the protocol for filling school board seats on a future agenda.
- Arne questioned if there was the Use of Town Properties policy. Julie said she was waiting to get it back from Jim, along with the traffic ordinance for overweight and oversized permits and ticketing during snow season on the Green. Currently, they can't have vehicles towed because it's not in the ordinance. Tim asked if the Green was an issue in the winter and it is.
- Julie received a letter from the Chester Snowmobile Club thanking the Select Board. They have their annual appreciation barbeque on June 7th from 11 to 2 at the Pinnacle and the board was invited to attend.

Agenda Item 11, Adjourn

Tim moved to adjourn, and Arne seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:33 p.m.

SEWER COMMISSIONER'S MEETING
Following Selectboard Meeting

Agenda Item 1, Citizen's Comments

There were no comments.

Agenda Item 2, Approve Bond Anticipation Note

They got the loan documents for the bond. They haven't done project anticipation notes in the past because they had the funds but this project was large enough, they could, and would likely do the same for the sidewalk project next year. They will receive a payment from a contractor, pay it, provide a cancelled check, and it will probably be 60 days before being reimbursed. It was a long time for this time of year to float payments. On the advice of counsel, they suggested bond anticipation notes, which were a non-revolving line of credit. This was for sewer so the funds would not be used for anything in the general fund. The policies are woefully outdated and something to address. Going forward, they will include interest in their expenses. Every time they receive a bill, they will draw from the note to cover the amount; when they receive a payment, it will go back on the bond. Tim didn't think it would be much interest with a rate of 3% and payment within a couple months. Julie agreed. Arne asked if the interest for the note was included in the budget and it was not. Julie said that's why they would pay it back as soon as payment was received. Arne wondered what the cash reserves for the sewer department looked like because usually they were decent and they were. Peter said it was the curse of the fund balance and Julie agreed. Lee entertained a motion to approve the bond anticipation note line of credit, resolution, and tax certificate for $2.9 million. Arne moved and Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. The members signed.

Agenda Item 3, Adjourn

Tim moved and Peter seconded a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

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