TOWN OF CHESTER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
May 27, 2026, Minutes
DRAFT MINUTES

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

Visitors Present: Barre Pinske at Town Hall.

Call to Order

Preston Bristow called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Agenda Item 1, Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting (May 27, 2026)

Bob moved and Damon seconded a motion to approve the minutes from the meeting of May 27, 2026. The motion carried and the minutes were approved, as written.

Agenda Item 2, Citizens Comments

Barre spoke about El Pulpo Mecanico who has a flaming octopus burning man car. Someone in Westmoreland shipped the car out for a Memorial Day weekend party for the public to see. Barre shared a picture of it on social media and had 151,000 views. He proposed having it in Chester the weekend after it's in Westmoreland next year and charge admission. They play music, shoot flames, and have dancing which is mesmerizing. Barre saw this as a draw for Chester. Barre said it would bring commerce to the town because people then frequent local businesses. The fee to have the car is $45,000, but negotiable. Barre suggested having it for two days, charge admission, and get sponsorship. It was in a rural area in Westmoreland and wasn't advertised and still got a good crowd. Barre thought people would love it and pay to see it as it was nothing they had ever seen. Preston thanked Barre for providing the information to consider. Carl said it was a good idea and they could include it in the survey. Barre found it unusual that the fall festival had become a private group and thought the commission could help facilitate things like this if they used someone like him as a point person. Preston noted if it took place on town property, it would need the Select Board's approval. Bob wondered if the previous incarnation of Chester Economic Development Corporation still existed as a corporate entity, suggesting having a (c)(3) entity to run things through would be friendly. Preston thought Bill Dakin had filed to dissolve it. Bob said it was worth thinking of how events are structured and what entity. Preston would confirm that it no longer existed.

Preston noted they would normally meet on June 24th and had accepted an engagement to give a presentation about logging railroads for a regional commission in Woodstock, which is a topic that he cares about on a personal level. Preston told the commission they could meet without him or postpone their meeting to another date. Damon will be back by then, Bryan is the Vice Chair, and Julie is also quite competent, so they opted to stick with meeting on June 24th. Preston noted that both the White Mountains and Adirondacks are known for their logging railroads but that

the three logging railroads in southern Vermont were not well known and that was what his presentation was about. Preston said he could also give the presentation in Chester sometime.

Agenda Item 3, Discuss / Approve publicizing and distribution of community surveys

Damon has volunteered a lot of his time to complete this before he leaves for Scotland, which the members appreciated. Preston said it looked good and Julie's only concern was if the business directory wasn't flawless, someone may be upset. Bob, Carl, and Damon had viewed the list and Damon updated it. Barre noted his business was Vermont Wood and Bear Company but his building was called Barre Pinske Studio. There were duplicate entries for some businesses. Barre said listing his studio would be better because of his gallery. Carl and Damon had discussed the business survey including a place for businesses in the registry needing corrections and using it as a tool to get those corrections made. Carl said it was tough coming up with a registry from scratch and felt good about the work they had done. They could clean up the registry as they go along and eliminate duplicates. Since Damon was planning to be away, he would show Bryan and Carl how to access the database to make adjustments.

The surveys are working and have a part at the end for people to input information. They all have QR codes so they could share the codes on social media and the survey writes to the database. Damon will show Carl who can show Bryan, so they have access to the necessary data. Bob wondered who would release the information on social media, since it was an official town subcommittee. Preston could do it but would check with Julie first and he agreed it should be someone from the town. Preston thought either Aime or Sam from the town office handled the social media account. Barre suggested a small press release and Bob agreed. Damon suggested a soft launch where Bryan or Carl could approach business owners and inform them. Bob said it could go either way. Carl liked the idea of a press release and the town posting on its Facebook page and it could be easily shared from the Telegraph or town's Facebook pages and suggested the members share it regularly to keep it on top of people's feeds. Bob wondered if they needed to take action and Preston was comfortable with a consensus. Preston would likely write a press release and get the commission's feedback. Preston noted Julie had mentioned some businesses where Bob and she should visit and Bob was aware and Preston would let Carl know. Preston noted the press release would go to The Journal, The Telegraph, and the town Facebook page. Preston asked what they wanted the press release to say beyond what Barre had suggested and Damon thought that would be enough to get it started and added that he could utilize Facebook advertising to make sure users were aware. Bob noted there were a bunch of businesses missing on the spreadsheet between the letters L and S. Preston added they could wait until Damon returned to send out the press release. Bob thought it was ready and it would be better not to wait a month if Bryan and Carl could clean up some stuff on the database. Carl said, due to work constraints, his ability to do much for the next several weeks was limited. Damon said it was currently public and he wasn't planning to make it not public so they could push it when everyone was ready. Barre didn't think people would be critical and thought it would be nice to have the information out there and would probably take two weeks before the press release was published. Damon noted it was missing 88 through 147 and would try to fix it. Preston said if they put a press release out and 80 businesses were missing, they would be upset and wanted to avoid that happening. If Damon could get it fixed before he left, they could deal with it and issue a press release. Given Carl was busy and Bryan's availability being unknown, Damon pointed

out that nobody would be able to see if someone entered the data. Damon would let Preston know when it was fixed and said it would be good to have some other ideas in addition to the press release and what the next steps may be. Barre recalled the survey mailed to residents when he was on the Planning Commission. Carl didn't know that mailers were necessary. Bob said in addition to social media and the press release, they could spend some money with an ad in the Telegraph and boosting posts on social media. Preston recalled a paper survey with copies at the front desk and also believed it went to the Grand List, but that only included property owners. Preston said they had a good response. Barre didn't think they had conducted a survey with the Downtown Master Plan and Bob said they had listening sessions that provided an opportunity for input. Barre wondered what the ultimate goal was for the information received from this survey. Preston didn't think they had a target for the number of surveys but just enough to get a representative sample of how people answer. Bob added they could always follow up with focus groups. Barre noted sometimes peers don't share the same vision because they're not visionary or leader-oriented and the group needed to have vision and leadership and be forward-thinking.

Agenda Item 4, Discuss / Approve finalization and maintenance of business directory

Carl wondered what their thoughts were about other towns in the Okemo community. Carl used the recent yard sales as an example and noted if other communities had held theirs the same day, they wouldn't have been as successful, and it involved no cost except the soft cost of coordinating with neighbors. It was an opportunity to collaborate with neighboring towns and help one another. Bob said they would share it with the SRDC, as well as the Mount Ascutney Regional Commission. Preston should share with the chamber and anyone else. Carl wondered if other towns had an EDC equivalent they could speak with. Bob said Chester was it for the region; Springfield; the chamber; and Windsor Improvement Corporation, a volunteer 501(c)(3). Bob was happy to share it with them but noted the dynamics in every community were different and Preston agreed. Serving on the chamber board, of which Chester and Ludlow were the principal towns, Preston agreed they got along reasonably well but were very different communities. Preston said they were part of Okemo Chamber because they weren't big enough to have their own. Barre agreed that partnering up can be beneficial. Preston noted it was a rough climate for chambers right now and many were struggling, including his home town of Woodstock that has a half-time director. It was remarkable that Okemo's director was full-time and had two half-time assistants and was part of the reason Preston supported her. Preston noted Carol worked hard and had been raising the money. Preston said it would be difficult for Chester to have its own chamber. Damon thought the website was fixed, though could still have some minor issues which he would address when able. Bob thought it was good to go. Preston will work on a press release and circulate it to the members and would send it if everyone agreed. Bob would also ask Amanda in his office to review it.

They mentioned the tough climate again and reduction in funding for chambers and Barre said he could relate because he had zero inventory and had more work than he could do and mentioned raising prices. Carl wondered what pricing would need to be in order to pay liveable wages for the work he does. Barre said once he got his machines going, it would help. The work Barre does is labor intensive and repetitive but his next goal was to be able to pay a living wage and kids helping wasn't working for him. Bob said another small business where the owners work hard are realizing it's not the best use of their time to do that but hadn't built the revenues up to a

point where they can pay a living wage yet. Barre agreed it wasn't easy. Carl said scaling is one of the hardest things and having a 60% success rate with who you hire was good.

Agenda Item 5, Next Meeting / Agenda (June <?>, 2026)

This was addressed earlier and the next meeting would be June 24th.

Agenda Item 6, Adjourn

Bob moved to adjourn and Carl seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:48 p.m.