TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD MEETING
August 19, 2026, Minutes

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

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

Visitors Present: (See attached sign-in sheet) at Town Hall; SAPA TV and Kirk MacGinnis via Zoom.

Call to Order

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

Agenda Item 1, Approval of Minutes of August 5, 2026 Selectboard Meeting

Tim moved and Lauren seconded a motion to approve the minutes from the August 5, 2026, meeting. Tim noted on page two, line 29, that it should say cost differences between the two options; on page 5, line 44, the person speaking was from Six Loose Ladies and not Jamaican Jewels. Lee thought their name was Amelia. Lee said on page 1, lines 38, 39, and 45, he preferred to have a zero before the decimal point when referring to the number of gallons. The minutes were approved unanimously, as amended.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen's Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 3, Old Business

Report by Town Manager:

Follow-Up to Naomi's Presentation
It was included in the meeting packet.

Paving
Weaver Paving will pave Route 103 in the first week in September.

Agenda Item 4, Presentation of Lifeguard Award

Recreation Director Matthew McCarthy said on Sunday, August 9th, the Lifeguard Manager, Morgan Studin, texted him to say that Jacob Studin, the lifeguard on duty, jumped into the pool to save a younger child. The child's mother also texted Matt to say she was impressed with the quick-thinking of Jacob. Matthew presented Jacob with a certificate of gratitude for a job well done.

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Matthew added that Morgan has been lifeguard manager for the past three years and does a tremendous job. They applauded Jacob and thanked him. Arne said it was amazing and that a lifeguard's job is usually mundane but being able to snap into action and do what is needed was important and Jacob did a fantastic job. Arne noted they have a great crew and great training. The others agreed and thanked them.

Agenda Item 5, Review of Services: Public Works

Highway Director Kirby Putnam presented the following information the board was provided with, but the public may not be aware of:

There are 10 public works employees: one Highway Director and nine laborers. Two split the cemetery groundskeeping in the summer. Most training is done in-house. Two employees who have Class B would like to obtain Class A. Two or three employees would like to get their welding certificates.

They would like to reduce the amount of overgrown foliage, like poison ivy, as it causes allergy issues with some of the workers trying to control it. They are trying to trim back areas where vegetation is taking over, and they discussed the best possible options to do that.

The staff operates heavy equipment, including five dump trucks, two loaders, one excavator, two graders, one compaction roller, one sidewalk plow, a tractor with an over the rail mower and blower attachments, one backhoe, one chipper, three pickup trucks, a one-ton, and three trailers. Chester has 136 town roads, approximately 90 miles of which are dirt. There is 109 miles of total road. Maintenance includes 74 bridges and approximately 733 cross culverts. Chester installs most of the bridge replacements on timber deck bridges. Most of them are super structure replacements. They do abutments but some can get complicated. The ones that are all stone will probably need upgrading in the future. They do some culvert replacements. They do ditching where needed, which involves cleaning out ditch lines. Annually, they grade all the dirt roads and some several times a year. They also apply calcium chloride to some roads to help keep them compacted and suppress dust. They flush and repair culverts as needed and replace about 60 a year. They are doing less culvert replacements since they switched from steel to plastic but are still running into some minor issues. Quite a few have shifted and some get puncture holes. Annually, both sides of the roads are mowed, and street cleanup throughout the year, including trimming trees. For fallen trees, if something is in the road that someone moves, Kirby would welcome a call if it's blocking a ditch line and calls to notify them of bigger trees blocking the roadway.

Annually, they repair potholes. When outside contractors lay new asphalt, Chester does the shoulder work which takes time. They do crosswalk, line striping, and parking spot painting annually. They clean up the sidewalks and the sand from the winter, which has become more cumbersome over the past few years. They used to hire high school kids to assist but haven't received many applicants over the past few years, and no applicants this year. Lee wondered if they received a lot of complaints from property owners about sidewalks going through their property and Kirby said not typically. Some people clean their own sidewalks.

For winter weather, after approximately 3 inches of accumulation, all town roads are plowed, with

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salting and sanding asphalt and dirt roads, respectively. There are 10 plow routes, the shortest taking 3 hours. Lee wondered what the maximum amount of snow was that they can push off the road after accumulation. Kirby said on December 17th a few years ago, there may have been 2 or 3 feet on the road which they weren't able to get to until later due to other events and circumstances. Lee asked because 3 inches didn't seem worth plowing to him and Kirby said no more than 6 inches. Julie noted they get calls when people can't drive their vehicle on the road. Lee wondered if the expectation was valid. Arne felt anyone who lived in this area on a dirt road should be aware of what is needed for winter travel. Lee said they did a great job with the roads, especially in the winter. Kirby thought one of the routes took 6 hours to complete. Peter said the biggest problem was backing out on Route 103 when they do side roads, like Jewett and others. Kirby said sometimes they sit and wait for 20 minutes. Arne wondered about the grader on Lovers Lane and Kirby said they used the loader. The grader does multiple roads in town. Sanding is another 3 hours. Kirby said they don't sand much when plowing but it is done separately. Peter mentioned brining and Julie wondered how the system worked. Peter said brining reduces the amount of salt needed, but everyone needs to be trained. Julie said there were restrictions and penalties, and town managers were discussing it. It requires a system on the truck and one of the current trucks could be outfitted for it. Kirby knew the state only did so much per mile and didn't think they were going through multiple tanks, which he thought were 5 gallons. Peter said they would only need to do it on the paved roads. Rockingham does it pre-storm. Peter said the road surface must get wet because it peels the snow off cleanly. Tim thought they would need to make an extra trip and Peter said they wouldn't need to salt. A grader doesn't require that because it peels the snow off. Given the price of salt, Julie thought they should research it as an option. Kirby knew Springfield had switched to magnesium chloride.

Equipment is maintained during downtime between storms in the winter; Kirby discussed the costs of maintaining the equipment which they do, depending on if they have parts available. They can rebuild cylinders and other parts. Anything that doesn't involve a computer, they attempt to do and oil changes. Kirby said sensors were an issue. The newer vehicles pose an issue for them. In the last five years, they have probably had to replace 10 dozen pumps.

Another challenge is that employees are unable to take much time off in the winter and must take it in the summer, which slows production some.

Culverts three feet or more require a hydraulic study now. Sidewalk maintenance needs improving and foliage is an issue. Several highway department individuals are eligible to retire in the next two to four years and it's difficult to find people to replace them.

Kirby wants to establish a better system of monitoring conditions of bridges and replacement and repair cycles. They are considering warranties for equipment and trying to stretch the life to save money but have also increased vehicle maintenance which has doubled since 2020.
Peter noted the town was going to do the drainage work to offset the cost of the sidewalk project but that had disappeared. Kirby would talk with someone more qualified to see what it would involve.

The board thanked Kirby for his presentation and the work he does.

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Agenda Item 6, Draft Traffic Ordinance (hearing scheduled for September 16)

Jim's office made the changes, which were significant, to bring it up to date and there were two red-lined versions of the document which had been combined into one to show the changes. Tim wondered if the no passing zones were already no passing zones because he didn't believe he had ever seen a sign reflecting that. Julie noted they followed statute and would follow up with Tom. Lee didn't see where they needed to be posted. Julie thought no passing zones would only apply to state highways. She said she would investigate it. A public hearing is required because it's an ordinance and the public would have an opportunity to comment. Julie said they had a sign on the Green but nothing in the ordinance to enforce it. To collect the revenue from oversized load tickets, that also needed to be included in the ordinance. Lee noted they could discuss it at the September 2nd meeting, but that meeting's agenda was quite full because the auditor was present. The hearing on September 16th is for the public, but it didn't need to be adopted at that time and could be adopted later. Julie would include it in the October agenda. Arne questioned enforcement officers having the ability to stop motor vehicles at all times with or without process. Julie wasn't sure and would get clarification.

Bill Lindsay thought an ordinance was necessary to address e-bikes. Bill didn't think it was an issue in Chester and Julie noted department heads had just discussed this topic. Julie said it would require a standalone ordinance because they are bicycles and not motor vehicles. They were going to get sample ordinances. It was noted that other towns have had issues. Arne thought the state had rules and regulations already in place addressing e-bikes. Julie said they can't issue a ticket until they reach a certain threshold. Arne noted he had received several calls from people about e-bikes at the Pinnacle and high school trails, or other places. Julie said the Chief had looked into it. Lauren understood there were classes and a bike that goes over a certain speed requires registration. Lauren didn't think they needed to wait for the state to do something and Julie agreed.

Agenda Item 7, Town Forest Harvesting Update

The document is related to a service agreement for harvesting timber in the Town Forest. Hannah has been working with the CCC and representing the town and will attend the September 15th meeting. Julie is trying to find out the timeline for harvesting; they think it's over winter, but the timeline is important. Hannah would like to do a public site visit and Julie suggested doing that with her on September 16th. Arne wondered how involved the board wanted the CCC to be and noted Hannah would be attending the CCC's first meeting in September on the first Tuesday of the month, to give a presentation and discuss the project. The CCC did a pre-harvest walk with her before the trees were marked and now it seemed like everything was marked. There are options for logging and the low-grade timber. Arne noted there were 3 parcels which were over 100 acres and pretty much where the trails went. Arne asked where the revenue would go and if it would go toward future projects or back to water and sewer. There were a lot of questions, including the type of equipment and outfits bidding on it. The CCC is a good group interested in the forests. Arne hoped they would stay involved and wanted everyone to be aware of what was going on. Lee appreciated all the work Arne and the CCC had done on town property and wanted Arne to bring opinions from the CCC. Lee was happy to have Arne continue with Hannah. Arne noted Hannah had already started the work and Julie said it was all work they had already approved. Peter said that revenue was almost nonexistent and most of the effort was to make it a healthy forest. Tim

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was interested in the CCC but had been unable to attend recent meetings and wondered if they could ask the logger to stack up some logs to use to build a pavilion or something like that to enhance the recreational value of the Town Forest. Tim suggested if they got $5,000 in revenue from it, it would do more for the recreational value than giving it to Water and Sewer and thought it was something to consider. Lee agreed it made sense to consider. Tim suggested CCC develop a list of options to bring to the Select Board. Peter said Hannah had done a significant project in Windsor that demonstrated everything that can be done and was very well documented; Hannah did an excellent job of communicating the project and working with conservation. Arne didn't anticipate much revenue. Julie noted when it started, the board had discussed the CCC taking the lead. Arne will speak with Hannah about Windsor, and Julie can connect Arne with Windsor's Town Manager. Tim confirmed the board agreed with the CCC bringing recommendations.

Agenda Item 8, Scarecrow Weekend Festival

Julian Sottovia is organizing this event. Businesses and individuals are invited to put up scarecrows. The small holes used for Christmas trees on the Green will be utilized for scarecrow posts. They would like to have a small festival event on October 3rd and 4th from 2 pm to 5 pm and close Common Street. October 31st they will have judging and would like to close the street from 2 pm to 8 pm. The parade is also on that day. They plan to have other festivities. They need the board's permission to close Common Street. Lee wondered if there would be parameters regarding the displays on town property, because some displays, he's seen elsewhere have been macabre, so he was suggesting guardrails. Lee wanted to be protective of kids, so they didn't have nightmares. Julie thought Julian wanted to keep it child friendly. Lauren assumed there would be guidelines since they were judging the event. Julie would make sure that there were guidelines. Arne wondered if there would be an ordinance for Town Green that would address these things as he's received calls about an ordinance and advised them it would be coming up. Julie responded that the town received a large public records request and she had emailed the board. Lauren had nothing that Julie didn't send to her, and Julie responded that Lauren could provide a statement regarding that. It was noted the emails were sent to their town email addresses. Julie expected strong feelings from all sides regarding an ordinance for Town Green, but Jim would prepare it and she was pressuring him to get it done. Arne noted there was no hidden agenda and there were required paths they had to take to get it done.

Agenda Item 9, Brattleboro Hospital Birthing Center Resolution

The members received a document from the Town of Brattleboro regarding the Memorial Hospital Birthing Center. They asked if they would be open to adopting a resolution in support of the Birthing Center. Lauren moved and Peter seconded the motion to adopt the resolution. Arne said it was important and was the only one in Southern Vermont and there wasn't one in Springfield. Tim said it was a shame the medical system was shutting down birthing centers because they weren't profitable and Lauren agreed it was due to lack of profit and understood it was a business and funded that way. The closing will greatly impact people. Julie said these are the reasons towns like Chester are stepping up to critical care paramedic levels. Lee said the birthrate has dropped which contributed to its closing. Lee said the low birth rate was affecting schools, healthcare, and senior care. Tim said if healthcare wasn't for profit, none of this would be necessary. The motion carried, unanimously. The members signed the resolution.

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It was noted by some members that they may lose Springfield Hospital all together.

Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda

The next agenda will include fund balance policy with the auditor, fiscal year change, and budget. Arne had an idea for a future agenda item. Arne noted Jim Carroll does a great job but is getting older and they've never reviewed their legal services or a succession plan if he retired. They are affected daily by the workload and Arne, again, noted there was nothing wrong with Jim's services, but they should be prepared for a change. Lee said there were other services they farm out and should explore other options. Lauren said it made a lot of sense to her. Julie noted Jim was becoming busier because there weren't many municipal attorneys; she thought there were some coming through who had much more expensive rates. Julie agreed with Arne's concern. They thought it would be good to have succession planning. Peter said Jim's fees for the town were amazing. Julie noted Jim had other attorneys in-house, but it wasn't clear if he would pass everything on to them. Lee said it was a good point and thanked Arne for raising it. Julie said engineering was another issue as Naomi had retired but stayed on solely for Chester. Julie noted there was a lot that Naomi does that they don't get billed for.

Agenda Item 11, Executive Session: Discussion re Manager's Contract Negotiations

Arne moved and Tim seconded a motion to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing the manger's contract and invite Julie into the meeting. The motion carried and entered executive session at 8:27 p.m.

Lauren moved and Tim seconded a motion to exit executive session. The motion carried and executive session ended at 8:48 p.m.

The was no action taken during executive session.

Agenda Item 12, Adjourn

Arne moved to adjourn, and Tim seconded the motion. The motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

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Please Sign In

Wm Lyndsay

Wanda Purdy

Kirby Pittman

Jennifer Studin
Jacob Studin
Morgan Studin

SHAWN CUNNINGHAM
MICHAEL STUDIN