TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD MEETING
August 5, 2026, Minutes

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

Staff Present: Julie Hance, Town Manager, at Town Hall.

Visitors Present: (See attached sign-in sheet) at Town Hall; Logan Perreault, SAPA TV, Michael Miller, Kirk MacGinnis, and Monali King via Zoom. (The Zoom portion of the meeting was cancelled due to a power outage at Town Hall.)

Call to Order

Chair Lee Gustafson called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. and welcomed everyone. He led with the Pledge of Allegiance. Lee thanked everyone for attending and noted power had been lost.

SEWER COMMISSIONER'S MEETING

Agenda Item 1, Citizens Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 2, Sewer Treatment Plant Upgrade; Engineer Naomi Johnson

They were unable to show the PowerPoint presentation due to the power outage, but the presentation, along with the preliminary engineering report, had been distributed to the members prior to the meeting. Naomi was able to show the presentation via Tim Roper's laptop. Approximately 20 years have passed since the last upgrade, and the last bond payment will happen this year. The State of Vermont requires an evaluation report every twenty years and the engineering report serves this requirement. The range of the next steps, design and construction, are from 2027 to 2030, which include finding funding, completing design, and construction. They look at the condition of the facility and what the future flows are for 20 years. Population and past flows are factors for predicting future flows. A half percent annually is the average increase in population since 1900, however from 2010 to 2020, there was a decrease. The Village area of Chester has grown at a greater rate of 1.2% annually based on two data points. Naomi presented a graph representing flows that went back to 2011. The facility is permitted for .175 million gallons, an average which has only been reached once in 2023. The permit is for .5 million gallons daily and there are points in time where the flow has been exceeded. High flows occur during rain events and snowmelt. Leaks and breaks in pipes can cause ground water to rise and get in there. The Wastewater Asset Management Plan identified pipe segments in the system that were defective where flow infiltration occurred. Route 103 is one area. The 2023 peak was caused by the flooding and addressed in the report. The facility still complies with state regulations. When they replace equipment, they make sure it's big enough to handle excess flows and would like to go to .25 million gallons. The additional flow would get 75,000 gallons per day or the equivalent of 300

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housing units. 100 housing units would allow for other uses such as grocery stores the size of Shaw's, laundromats, and other large commercial buildings, such as breweries. They have leeway between the current flows and these options. Some components in the facility date back to the early 70s. The facility was installed in 1972 and age and capacity are factors. The pump station, software that operates one of the treatment units, and the blowers would need to be replaced, and other equipment. One alternative is to add a third tank or an equalization basin that would fit on-site. Naomi prepared a table with project costs for the alternatives. Naomi inflated the total project cost to 2028 when construction would happen at $4.8 million. Additional costs, including engineering and legal, brought the total to $6,932,000. Sources of funding include local bonds, the Revolving Loan Fund, and USDA Rural Development. Each may offer funding in addition to loans, such as forgivable loans and grants. Local borrowing is the least favorable. Factoring in other funding, the total would be approximately $850,000, which didn't reflect grants. Julie will pursue other grant options, including Northern Borders. Naomi said they could proceed with final design this year or next and go to the Revolving Loan Funds with interest free loans. It would require a bond vote, and construction could happen by 2028.

Peter agreed things needed to be maintained but didn't agree with bumping up the user rates by 64% to cover the costs of the project and said it could work against keeping people in town. Arne asked if it was the worst-case scenario with no funding. Naomi said they would pay half the cost for the report and design phases and were currently forgiving $750,000 per project under the construction phase, which wasn't a huge subsidy and was competitive. Naomi said if they were on their planning list, they would be aware of the project and may receive more grants. Arne asked for an explanation of the two options: one was a holding tank for excess and the other was a third sequencing batch reactor. The holding tank was the recommended option. When they do a preliminary engineering report, they're required to look at options in detail. Arne wondered about the high flows into the river and if it affected what they dumped there. Naomi said it did because it wasn't ideal quality. Peter pointed out the state's report didn't say they were failing and Arne agreed. They're required to have equipment that can pass the flows. Tim confirmed that doing nothing wasn't an option and wondered if there were operational costs between the two options. Naomi said there was a life cycle cost analysis, and electricity cost was minor. There wasn't a difference between staffing. Annually, there was currently a $100 difference between the two options. Lee wondered if they were separating storm runoff from sewer. Naomi said for sump pumps in basements that pump into the main, which is prohibited under the ordinance, the town should enforce. When designing and constructing a new main, they are required to have an allowance for influent filtration. Arne wondered how their sewer rates compare to other areas. Naomi thought they were slightly below average. Vermont has a database - an online tool to compare rates. Chester doesn't defer a lot of projects, but the wastewater system needs improvements, and the project is high priority. Arne, a system customer, said his yearly average is around $100 per month. 60% would apply to that amount. Naomi said assuming everyone pays the same based on consumption, the percentage would be the same. Lee asked what a catastrophe would be and Namoi said it would be flooding of the facility and violations of the state, which could mean fines or fixing it under emergency conditions. A few years ago, Springfield had a line break next to the river and hospital that had to be addressed. They weren't fined but required to do a report and design and will replace the sewer main on Main Street when they have funds. They've been on the priority list for at least a year. Lee wondered if there was a cheaper alternative to protect the taxpayer. Naomi would check the Asset Management Plan to see if pipes could be

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replaced or relined. Arne wondered if there were a lot of people with sump pumps and Jeff thought so and Julie said they did an evaluation several years ago. Arne saw sump pumps as one of the big problems. Peter said it was a good time to do it with the risers and the paving project for 2030 and possibly grab federal money for it. Jeff said they had a lot of failures this year which cost money and understood this would be a lot of money, but it costs to keep things going. Jeff said the degreaser worked and helped it to pump better and the new force main caused pumping to drop from over 4.5 hours daily to 1.2 hours or less, so the pumps worked better but something had to be done. Julie wondered how much capacity was left, as she was thinking about housing projects. Naomi said they consider the last 3 years of data and were at capacity. If the town wanted to add an 8-unit housing complex, they would not have capacity. Developers are required to get a letter from the town about the ability to provide reliable service. Arne thought a conversation should happen about what other sources of funding there was given that a small group of people would carry the load, but Arne agreed something needed to be done or they would pay more money for something that wouldn't be as good. The preliminary engineering report is good for at least 5 years. Julie said Ashely Lucht was looking at their rate structure since new meters were installed providing accurate readings and suggested they wait for her analysis before deciding. Naomi said if they went ahead with a design project in 2027, they wouldn't look for voter approval until 2028, so that provided a timeframe to figure out how to pay for it. Julie wondered if they could go to the voters in 2029. Final design needs to be completed by December of the previous year with a bond vote in May. If those milestones aren't met, they will be bypassed and go to the next town who's ready. Arne said they needed to get to that point, or they would be way behind. Peter said it was too expensive but confirmed this wasn't the only alternative to address the deficiencies, which are several. Arne noted they were at capacity. Peter didn't think it was the right alternative and should be staged. Naomi said final design has not been completed and they could have conversations about doing it piecemeal which had advantages and disadvantages. Naomi uses 3 to 4 percent annually to account for inflation. Peter said they should consider a maximum rate increase of 20% and work backwards. Arne said if they were doing it piecemeal, most jobs would end up a lot more expensive rather than doing it in one shot and Peter agreed. Arne said they should be shovel-ready and then discuss it. Peter wasn't ready to tell people their rates were going to increase 64%. Arne is a water and sewer customer and when people who have a leach field or septic system put in for $50,000 or $60,000 and $10,000 for a well and Arne's bill is $1,200 or $1,400 a year, he's doing well. Arne said they must protect the town and river. Peter asked for the number of sewer and water delinquencies and Julie would provide it at the next meeting. Lee said they need to decide if they want to fund the next step and then have numbers to take to the voters for a bond vote. Lee said Peter's point was good and he was hesitant to raise rates, but if it would cost another 50% to do it piecemeal, the voters should be aware. Lee thought Naomi should take her next step and then they would figure out how to pay for it. Naomi noted the next priority application was due January 2027 and the report lists February 2027 for design, so they have time. Naomi said capacity was the issue that stuck out and was an ongoing problem.

Bill Lindsay said over a period, the system the town provides is helpful for those who live in town, but those who live elsewhere, must have private septic. Bill wondered if the system was being installed for businesses that would help build the Grand List. Naomi said an industrial user could connect. The improvement project doesn't include additional technologies. Bill said when he was on the system, they paid for pumps and thought they should provide something to help economically. Julie said the plan included future growth for both housing and business. Tim

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wondered what it would take to receive pumps from other people's septic. It would require more capacity, and Jeff said it would require a lot more. Bill wondered if the cost could be incurred to make it a revenue source.

They thanked Naomi for her presentation.

Agenda Item 3, Adjourn

Tim moved and Peter seconded a motion to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING

Call to Order

Chair Lee Gustafson called the meeting to order.

Agenda Item 1, Approval of Minutes of July 15, 2026 Selectboard Meeting

Tim moved and Peter seconded a motion to approve the minutes from the July 15, 2026, meeting. Arne noted it was disc golf and not frisbee golf. Lee said on page 2, line 5, it should be a clear path. On the same page, line 45, gavel should be gravel. On page 7, line 14, it should say chosen to make the school whole. The minutes were approved, as amended.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen's Comments

Joann Erenhouse wanted to thank the Trustees for granting the request from Senior Solutions. She lives in Chester and is the facilitator for Memory Café operated by Senior Solutions. It's important to help people who are trying so hard to care for their loved ones. They try to provide a monthly place for them to come and receive support, get socialization, and have joy for two hours. It is available for free. St. Luke's Episcopal Church provides the space. It is offered every third Thursday from 11 am to 1 pm and they provide a healthy snack, including gluten and lactose free options. They sing, do art projects, and have an artist from Saxtons River. With the money they receive from the Trustees, they will bring experts to help the caregivers with legal forms to protect the assets of the families, provide chair yoga, and other things. The board thanked her for speaking.

Agenda Item 3, Old Business

Report by Town Manager:

<u>Sewer Project</u>
It's advancing on schedule and the Depot Street portion is expected to be completed and paved by the third week in August. The pump station project has just begun and is underway.

<u>Generator Project</u>
The generator project for the municipal well is ready to begin mid-August, and the generator is expected to arrive in November. They will get the site ready in August.

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Depot Street Sidewalk Project
It will go to bid on August 12 with bids due on September 8. The portion of the rail right of way will be slated to be completed this fall but most of the project will happen in 2027.

Jeffrey Barn
There were previous conversations about the barn. A quote was received from a contractor who would collapse the barn, remove the metal, and the fire department would do a controlled burn at the bottom of the bank away from the road. It's not budgeted for 2026, so they would consider it for 2027.

Academy Building
Now that the heating and cooling units are installed and functioning, Julie will assemble people to discuss options for the building to be open year-round. The Historical Society is staying and will have several representatives, but they don't need the entire space. Julie wondered if some Select Board members were interested. Arne was and Tim was, if he had time later in the year.

Paving Routes 103 and 11
In 2030, the state will pave the in-village portions of Routes 103 and 11. Peter and Julie met with Otis of Regional Planning and identified projects and Julie will add the one Peter had mentioned earlier about the risers. Julie didn't anticipate they would cover the projects, but they could collaborate. Peter went to the Planning Board on Monday and would return to the next meeting to discuss more with them regarding collaboration. Peter said they could fix the curb near the elementary school and other things they are slated to do at some point.

Pump at Pool
It burned up and was replaced. It was only three years old with a one-year warranty. They are sending the old pump out to identify what went wrong and possibly rebuild it as a spare.

Traffic Ordinance
They will address this at the September meeting, as 30 days' notice is required.

Tim asked about the status of drilling a new well. Julie said the state has implemented a new permit, which put them on hold. They have been going back and forth. Arne said they had an email from the Town Forester so there would be something coming soon and would give a presentation to inform them of the options. The contract was for 2026 to 2027 or 2028.

Peter asked about the grant and Julie said they heard back and there was some information needed but they hadn't heard, yet.

Arne asked about the Class IV lawsuit. Julie said there were motions and discovery.

Agenda Item 4, Vendor Permit Application; Jamaican Jewels

Someone from Jamaican Jewels spoke about their application and provided the date of August 22 with a rain date of August 23. Julie told them they couldn't block traffic and noted Meditrina had been in the same spot before. Tim asked about racial harassment and wondered if the police

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department was aware. The person responded. Julie noted that nobody had ever brought it to her attention, so she couldn't speak to it.

Peter moved and Tim seconded the motion to approve the permit for August 22 with a rain date of August 23. The motion carried and the permit was approved. They thanked Jamaican Jewels.

Agenda Item 5, Coin Drop; Ruck Up

Julie noted that Monali King had been present before the meeting began via Zoom, but Zoom was lost when the power outage happened. Julie hadn't shared the application because the wrong roads were on it. Monali corrected it and emailed it to Julie who received it right before the meeting. It was to take place on August 22nd from 8:30 to 4:30 and is what they do every year. The board would approve the Chair to sign and then it would go to the police department. Tim moved and Peter seconded the motion to approve the Board Chair signing the application. The motion carried.

Agenda Item 6, Review of Services; Department of Public Safety

Several members, two chiefs and the deputy chief, from the Department of Public Safety were present. Chief Tom Williams said a couple of years ago they tried to merge services and give the town more for their money. He spoke about medical services they provide and said they have a great combination of people with many skills who wear many hats. Chester has full-time fire and police chiefs. The Facility Director's office is at the fire station, so they can get the fire truck out the door in 30 seconds. They use trial and error to see what works. They attended a drill at the state emergency operations center and did a mock train derailment and fire and hazardous materials spill in the Wyman Falls area without advance notice, so they did not prepare ahead of time. FEMA, the State EOC, and other towns who attended were quite impressed and commented that Chester Public Safety has its stuff together. There was also an accident recently with a quick response which prevented any deaths. They also deal with overdoses. Combining resources with the departments is paying off. Getting grants for new equipment and more technologically advanced equipment has worked and the difference shows. They are also certified for multiple roles. Tom said they are asking people what they want to see with services.

Mike Randzio said Fire/EMS currently has one part-time fire chief and himself as full-time Deputy Chief of the EMS and five consistent advanced EMTs. On paper, they have 8 Vermont Emergency First Responders, 12 EMTs, 3 AEMTs, and 2 critical care paramedics. For the Fire Department, they have 18 firefighters, who are Firefighters 1 and 2. For law enforcement, they have 1 full-time police chief, 1 sergeant, 3 patrol officers, 1 administrative assistant, and 2 part-timers. A fully certified police officer requires 1,000 academy hours and 6 months of field training. A critical care paramedic requires almost 2,000 hours of training and 100 hours of continuing education in a 4-year period. They are fortunate to have these types of individuals in a small community. Mike said as critical care emergency paramedics, they have about 120 different emergency medicine skills and must know and be able to administer 80 medications. For law enforcement, they are certified in death investigation, firefighting, crash reconstruction, evidence technician, commercial motor vehicle, advance roadside impairment detection, field training officers, stop the bleed, LiDAR, radar, and technical rescue. For the small group they have, they can offer all that. For equipment, they have 2 engines, 1 tanker, 1 rescue, 1 utility, 1 boat, 1 hazmat trailer, 1 off-road trailer, and 1

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command vehicle/EMS second response vehicle or paramedic intercept vehicle and it is shared wherever needed. They house 2 boats for the state, which are not Town of Chester boats but they can use them and have them because they are deployed by the state for SWIFT water rescue. Chester has 2 ambulances and the newest truck they use for critical care transfers and the primary for 911 calls. The older truck does transfers and is the backup for 911 calls. There are 3 active patrol vehicles for the police department. They have 1 shared public safety car which can be used to go to training and 1 command multi-use pickup truck that Tom drives. Currently, Chester can offer 24/7 critical care paramedic coverage. Mike doesn't have his flight paramedic but has the equivalent of DHART but on the ground. His fellow paramedic was a DHART paramedic at one point, and the level of care Chester can provide. They can provide interfacility transfers at all levels: the most basic to the most critical. They are the backup for the hospital when the helicopter can't fly. Arne wondered what they don't provide that a big city would, and it was noted that they are better than most big cities. The SS4A grant would introduce some tools that are very rare in the state, such as field blood transfusions. They can host training in-house to certify individuals all the way up to advanced EMT. They can provide continuing education to critical care nurses, paramedics, police, and civilians. For the police department, they are still pushing community policing and partnerships. Mike said there's been a lot of organizational transformation in the past 5 years, and he loves to remind himself where they used to be and didn't talk to each other. Even with the small staff, they still provide 24/7 law enforcement coverage. Except for domestic and violent crimes, their law enforcement responses are joint responses. They help each other and most have multiple certifications. Interfacility transfers and 55% of the fees from traffic tickets bring in revenue. They stay engaged in the schools and attend events. They still have the Citizen Advisory Board and the Civilian Emergency Response Team. One of the officers is involved in Project Action in Springfield, a coalition of residents and the Springfield Police Department, HCRS, and the Family Center collaborating to improve community safety, health, and quality of life. Mike said Project Action has been a great benefit to them. Tom said as officers, they have more rules and training required. They are social workers, counselors, housing people in addition to traditional police officers. There is a lot that goes on behind the scenes that has nothing to do with traditional police work and helps those in the community.

The 2025 Community Needs Health Assessment identified 34% of the Chester community as 65 years or older. Almost 17% of the Chester population has a disability. 67.2% of Windsor County residents identify primary care services as an urgent need. Mike said if that need isn't met, it usually gets dumped onto EMS and they start seeing a bigger influx, which they have. In 2019, there were 411 calls and by 2024, they were almost 600. Almost 55% of Windsor County residents identified local safety services as a community strength. Since 2008, there has been a 28% drop in volunteers. Training is more rigorous and time-consuming. Police call volumes have also increased. Chester has numerous cross-trained individuals with certifications to ensure timely response and provide a whole service approach to the community. Current staffing levels are not sustainable long-term, and many are working more than 40 hours per week and feeling the toll. At some point, they need to address this. A new change, without any notice, is that the Fire Chief automatically assumes the role of Fire Warden. Chester's model has been noticed across the state.

Tom responded to the assessment of the Police Department that was done before he became chief. It was recommended that the police policies be trained to, which is done. The Chester PD needed to build trust in the community and embrace the guidance from the President's Task Force on

Policing, which has been accomplished and an ongoing process. They are progressing and improving constantly. They recommended a police advisory board, which they established. They are in the process of embracing the use of data tools. Their mission statement was updated and is on the town website. They have created a training coordinator but currently, there's no time to attend training because of lack of enough personnel. They have a recruit in academy. Tom noted they constantly communicate with the community, and his door is always open, and people don't hesitate to communicate. They've discussed adding a sixth full-time officer to serve as a detective. They are staffed at a bare minimum so a buffer would be good. Tom pointed out that the VSP is strapped for people and they aren't always able to respond immediately due to distance. Tom pointed out that Chester PD is one-man shifts which isn't attractive to some, including those who are beginning their career and looking for someone to help them. Tom said chasing someone in the woods who is armed with no backup is not a great feeling. Julie was aware of possible applicants who chose not to apply because they are one of the only police departments with one-man shifts. Day shift goes until 5 pm and evening shift starts at 3 pm so there are a couple of hours they can get a training in. Springfield has been good at listening to the radio and providing backup and Chester does the same for them and has offered the same for Ludlow. Julie said they will need to address it. Cross training has worked but to maintain things long term, they will need to address this. Arne understood this constant situation can cause burnout. It was pointed out that it would cost less to have per diem employees rather than paying Ludlow or Springfield to cover. Having more employees would allow the chiefs to consider ways to pull more money in. Decreasing response times to fires would also allow people to get a reduction in their homeowners insurance and businesses. Peter agreed that hiring people per diem would allow them to have time off and not get burned out. Julie said Scott would retire at the end of the year and Tom would retire in a few years. Currently, they have the perfect group, and they won't necessarily be able to replace them with the same cross-trained people. Julie said when they make awards for the SS4A grant, if they were recipients, it would help a lot. Arne wondered if the lack of healthcare impacted them and it does. Mike noted that they've seen clinics and pharmacies close and people can't get their medications or see primary care doctors. They recalled when an event had several people who required an ambulance and they had difficulty getting enough ambulances and had to find car seats to transfer some of the patients.

The board thanked them for attending and for their presentation.

Agenda Item 7, Approval of Adding Local Questions on Statewide Election Ballots

There was a memo with an email from Amie to Julie. Julie explained that the state mails out the ballots to every registered voter. Historically, the town has put the Justices of the Peace on the back of the ballots. The state is willing to do it, but the Select Board must pass a motion saying that's what they want. Julie read the suggested motion, "To allow local public questions to appear on statewide election ballots which will be mailed to all "Active-Not Challenged" voters by the Secretary of State's Office." Arne moved and Tim seconded the motion. Lee wondered about local public questions and Julie explained they were local elections and general elections were state elections. Voting for Justices of the Peace was local. Lee wondered if anything else would be on the back. This would allow them to include whatever they were voting for in person to be included, if requested and would only go to Chester residents. Lee was skeptical of the state. Julie said they didn't have to do this, but the town would have to provide their own paper and do it themselves.

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Julie said the only ballot the state mails is the general election every other November. The ballots have always been prepared by the state but now the state mails them. The motion carried.

Agenda Item 8, Errors and Omission

The board members signed.

Agenda Item 9, Liquor License: Third Class – Pizza Stone

Tim moved and Peter seconded a motion to approve Pizza Stone's Third-Class Liquor License. The motion carried.

Agenda Item 10, New Business/Next Agenda

- Highway will be the last department to present.
- On September 2nd, Ron will be at the meeting, and the discussions about fiscal year change and voting of the budget will be at that meeting.
- Arne asked about the use of the Town Green policy and Julie hadn't received it back yet.

Agenda Item 11, Adjourn

Tim moved to adjourn, and Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned 1 hour and 37 minutes after it began.

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Please Sign In

SHAWN CUNNINGHAM
Naomi Johnson, DG
Jeff Holden
Wm LINDSAY
Susan Elsaesser
Joann Erenhouse

S Loose L.