TOWN OF CHESTER
CHESTER HOUSING COMMISSION MEETING
August 19, 2025, Minutes

Present: Julie Hance, Hugh Quinn, Lauren Fierman, Caroline Morgan, Sharon Baker, Joe Karl, Preston Bristow, and Jason Rasmussen of MARC at Town Hall. Absent: Bryan Santiago and Courtlandt Pennell.

Visitors: Peter Hudkins.

Call to Order

Joe Karl called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Agenda Item 1, Approve Minutes from the Previous Meeting

Hugh moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting and Sharon seconded the motion. There were no changes. The motion carried and the minutes were approved, as written.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 3, Marketing Committee Update

This item was tabled for the next meeting as there were no committee members present.

Agenda Item 4, Neighborhood Development Area Update

Hugh said the necessary changes to the development bylaws were going to the Selectboard the next day for their review and once done, Regional Planning will submit the application to the state. Hugh wasn't sure of the timeframe with the state and Jason said if they received it before their next monthly meeting, they would address it. Hugh said they were on schedule for meeting NDA approval. There are discussions at the state level about closing the door to future applications and once closed, future land use maps need to be finished first which could delay it. Currently, an NDA designation provides Act 250 relief and grants for high density housing, and this would expand the diameter to include areas Chester believes should be targets for additional housing. If Chester is successful, it will get the housing sites on the map, and they will be exempt from Act 250, open funding opportunities from the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust and other organizations that would help the housing project.

Agenda Item 5, Housing Committee Webpage

Preston showed the members proposed updates to the website and said it could be updated when necessary. Joe noted members and the public could email Preston with suggested changes. The page would include a link to the housing study. Jason wondered if they should define affordable

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housing because people's perception of the term may not be good. Preston noted a lot of people like the term workforce housing but don't like Section 8, so they need to use their words wisely. Preston had heard a new, less stigmatizing term, missing middle housing. Preston had used affordable housing. Julie noted affordable and low-income housing were different. Hugh suggested they use missing middle instead of affordable housing and Joe suggested middle missing which is defined as workforce housing and affordable housing. Jason suggested linking to the state's documentation and definitions. Preston noted they pointed out that building houses was for all income levels. Sharon suggested first-time buyers or move-down buyers for people who want to move to something smaller. Joe suggested including their mission statement from the governing bylaws on the website. Hugh thought they should eliminate the word affordable because some people have a different definition for affordable. Julie read the mission statement: The mission of the Town of Chester Housing Commission is to create a strong sustainable inclusive community and quality affordable housing for all. Lauren thought they should keep affordable because it means affordable and shouldn't be a word they can't say. Preston pointed out the mission statement said housing is affordable for all and was different than saying affordable housing and understood they shouldn't use that buzz phrase. The others agreed.

Agenda Item 6, Presentation of Housing Feasibility Study

Julie said the study was complete and they had discussed at the last meeting how they wanted to launch it with the new web page. She was going to announce that the study was completed at the next Select Board meeting and would be on the web page, and they could launch it on Facebook with a link. Julie wondered if there was anything extra special, they wanted to do to get the information out. There is a booth at Fall Festival, and they could distribute cards with a QR code with a link for the feasibility study. Joe would ask the marketing committee to work on that for the Fall Festival. Hugh thought there should be a short summary, so people didn't lose interest in reading it. Sharon suggested displaying the boards from the study at the festival to provide a visual for people. Caroline thought it would help people to engage. Sharon suggested having a canopy over the table so they could display more, and people could walk around, and Joe offered his tent. The members would volunteer to cover shifts at the table and Julie would email the members. Joe added that citizens could also volunteer.

Agenda Item 7, Board Member Tasks/Old Business

Julie said the proposed local options tax would be discussed at the next Select Board meeting, the following night. Preston will give a presentation. The board wouldn't decide but it would enable conversations to begin.

Preston gave a presentation at the ZA roundtable.

Sharon has begun collecting donations at her candy shop for the housing fund. Joe would see if he could find mini housing piggy banks to distribute at the local businesses to collect donations.

Peter Hudkins mentioned a raffle for a sleigh ride and blueberry picking.

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Agenda Item 8, New Business/Next Agenda

- Marketing Committee update.
- Joe was tasked with reaching out to his clients who are builders and a friend built a house in Ludlow, and they are interested in being the developer and manager of the housing project. Joe would coordinate times with Julie for a Zoom and then report back to the committee.
- Julie and Preston attended a Let's Build Homes presentation today in Quechee, which was good. Let's Build Homes is getting themselves up and running as a resource. Miro Weinberger, who is the head of it, referenced Chester many times, which was good. Julie and Preston spoke with Bob Flint regarding step two for the housing project. Bob is going to get Julie the names of consultants, and they can start having conversations. CHIP (Community Housing Infrastructure Program) applications are expected to open next spring. It allows you to borrow against future Grand List revenue. The town and developers can apply for CHIP funds, which are limited and that is why Chester wants to be ready. A consultant could assist with this process. Hugh wondered if CHIP funds could be used to put in the water and sewer and road infrastructure for the water tower property without a commitment to build the housing, as this infrastructure would encourage developers to build housing. Hugh thought a consultant could validate SE Group's analysis. Julie will have names of consultants for the next meeting.

Agenda Item 9, Adjourn

Lauren moved and Hugh seconded a motion to adjourn. The motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:48 p.m.

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