

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

**TOWN OF CHESTER  
SELECT BOARD MEETING  
February 18, 2026, Minutes**

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

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

**Visitors Present:** Lauren Fierman, Mary Adams, Doug Adams, Hugh Quinn, Jason Rasmussen, Larry Semones, and Jerry Ucci at Town Hall; Anne Henshaw, Kirk MacGinnis, Sharon Jonynas, AJW, Scott MacDonald, and SAPA TV, via Zoom.

**Call to Order**

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

**Agenda Item 1, Approval of Minutes of the February 4, 2026 Select Board Meeting**

Arianna moved and Arne seconded a motion to approve the February 4, 2026 minutes. Lee noted on page 6, line 15, the third to the last word should be purview and on the same page, line 22, parving should be paving. Tim noted on page 4, line 2, continuance should be discontinuance. The motion carried, unanimously, and the minutes were approved as amended.

**Agenda Item 2, Citizen's Comments**

Kirk MacGinnis of 1039 Wyman Falls Road said it was a records and process request and not a debate and that the town's February 18, 2026 letter acknowledged receipt and retention of his documents and confirmed no Title 19, Section 709 hearing date had been set. Further, the town's letter of February 17th, 2026 letter claimed a Class 4 highway and a presumptive three-rod right-of-way at or near 1039, and claimed staging authority within that right-of-way. He said a presumption was not on that boundary and asked them to identify the specific public records that established the right-of-way corridor location and width at or near 1039 and the written authorization relied on for staging bridge materials there. Kirk asked them to please note in the minutes that he made this request. Kirk said, for the record, he emailed his discontinuance petition on November 7, 2025 at 12.35 p.m. and said Town Council's February 18th, 2026 letter stated the town received it November 10, 2025 at 9.40 a.m. and he asked them to state the current procedural status and the date they would schedule the Title 19, Section 709 hearing, and to note that in the minutes. Lee thanked Kirk for his comments.

Jerry Ucci recognized the town for setting up the candidates' forum the previous night and was pleased to see the amount of people who attended in person and on Zoom. As a candidate, it gave him hope people were interested in the town and moving it forward. Jerry said, and added it was

1 part of the reason he was running, that there were multiple candidates for both the select and  
2 school boards who spoke to the fact that they weren't running due to politics. Jerry said the paper  
3 of record had posted his candidate statement a day late and he had noticed on top of every article  
4 in every link on the paper of record there was a paid advertisement by the Democratic party that  
5 showed three members of the select board who were running and two school board members  
6 who were running. Jerry said it had no place there because politics didn't belong on either board.  
7 Jerry said if they continued down the road of having people sit on the boards who would only  
8 take one viewpoint into consideration, the town and schools were doomed to fail. Jerry said he  
9 wanted the board and public to hear his statement. Lee thanked him.

10

11 Lauren Fierman of Chester said she was also a candidate and noted her picture was one of the  
12 ones in the ad in the Chester Telegraph and had made no statement as to whether she was  
13 running for political reasons. Lauren said she wasn't planning on speaking but felt compelled to  
14 say the reason she was running wasn't solely running about politics, but a statement that politics  
15 had no place in the running of government was a bit disingenuous. Lauren said in one way or  
16 another, local politics involve politics. She took exception to the idea that having support from a  
17 political party necessarily equals being unavailable to see all points of view. She, personally,  
18 identifies as being an independent but was pleased to have the support from the local Democratic  
19 party. Lauren said she would continue to make her own statement and not speak for others to  
20 believe that all of them, whatever their politics are, should be and can be capable of hearing all  
21 sides of every issue and always treating things as though all things are on the table. Lauren  
22 added that everyone is entitled to their opinion but the opinion that politics makes you  
23 unavailable to make a decision involving everybody's ideas wasn't necessarily true. Lee thanked  
24 her.

25

26

### **Agenda Item 3, Old Business**

27

28 Report by Town Manager:

29

#### Budget Documents

31 Julie had been dealing with auditors who were there last week. Julie said it was in their memo  
32 and she had spoken with several board members that it was brought to her attention over the  
33 weekend that when she had asked for the transfer department to be separated from the  
34 ambulance, so they could track it separately, the formula calculating the total was not changed.  
35 So the budget as adopted and printed was short \$56,000, which had been addressed internally.  
36 Julie said they could either amend the article at Town Meeting and increase the budget or hang  
37 tight and see what happens throughout the year. She said the transfer service could likely  
38 generate additional revenue to offset it. Lee asked if the \$56,000 was the ambulance budget that  
39 was short. The transfer service's total expense was not included in the bottom line and was why  
40 the budget was \$56,000 short. Arne asked if that's what it cost to run the service and didn't  
41 reflect the revenue. Julie said it was only the expense line that had not been included. Arne asked  
42 what the revenue was and noted they had kept it conservative with what they were expecting.  
43 Julie said they had put in \$250,000. This year they had budgeted a total of \$500,000 with  
44 everything. In 2025, they brought in \$517,590. Lee thought because it was the ambulance  
45 transfer service, he guessed they would make up the shortfall and wasn't super concerned. Julie  
46 said they knew they ended 2025 in a deficit but didn't know how much yet and, at some point,

1 they would discuss how to make it up. If they borrow mid-year to make up the deficit, they could  
2 include this number. Julie thought they should just manage the budget tighter. Arianna felt that  
3 was where they needed to be because when they approved the budget, they all were as high as  
4 they could go. Arianna agreed with Lee and thought they should monitor the transfer service.  
5 Peter reminded them they had also set up a reserve fund with \$70,000 so they had some cushion.  
6 Julie said when she received a phone call at home over the weekend, it wasn't a pleasant  
7 conversation. Tim said it was better to know now and Julie agreed.

8

#### 9 Finance Director

10 Deb Epler will be coming back to the town and was hired as the new finance director. Julie needs  
11 to circle herself with people she trusts. Deb worked for the town a number of years ago when  
12 David was there and Deb was who had helped them transfer from the old green ledgers to  
13 Quickbooks in 2007. Deb will be a great asset and has a government finance background and is a  
14 crackerjack when it comes to budgets. The department heads are excited to have her back. Julie  
15 and Deb have already had conversations, and she will officially start March 16 and is conferring  
16 with Julie in the interim. Arne said it was good news and Julie agreed. Deb doesn't live in  
17 Chester anymore and will work remotely all but one day a week. She will be in the office for two  
18 weeks overlapping with Laurie. Laurie's last day is March 31 and is happy to assist afterwards, if  
19 needed, but Julie didn't anticipate much need. Deb and Julie will meet with the auditors in early  
20 April. Arne asked how much time was left on the audit. Julie said they were in the office three  
21 days the prior week. They are working on the single audit now and have a target date of the end  
22 of April. Julie has asked them to go back and re-evaluate 2024. By the end of April, they should  
23 have an exact idea of what is going on. The auditors will appear before the board in May. Peter  
24 asked if they would reconcile the ARPA funds. Julie said they didn't need to and she could  
25 provide Peter with the federal report she prepared. Arne asked if it would affect the price they  
26 pay for the audit because of how far back they were looking and Julie said no, that she had made  
27 that clear. Julie would provide Peter with a list of where the ARPA funds went.

28

29

#### **Agenda Item 4, Adopt Municipal Resolution on Tier 1B Status**

30

31 Jason Rasmussen and Hugh Quinn were present. Jason is with Mount Ascutney Regional  
32 Commission and was before them recently to discuss Act 181, which the legislature passed a  
33 year and half ago. Jason said there was confusion about what the act included. Typically, they  
34 would be asked to sign a resolution about Tier 1B status which would mean the town wants Act  
35 250 exemptions in and around the Village Center. Jason said if the board signed the resolution  
36 for Tier 1B, it meant Chester wanted Act 250 exemptions for housing projects in and around  
37 Village Center. Jason said it would include what the state recently approved for their  
38 Neighborhood Development Area. It would give them permanent Act 250 exemptions in a pretty  
39 big area, which Jason was surprised the state had approved, as the NDA was big. It was a legacy  
40 neighborhood development area and should be smooth sailing. To Jason, as a planning  
41 commission and Chester Housing Commission person, it was a no-brainer that the exemptions  
42 were a good tool for housing. Jason presented the area to those in attendance with a map. Peter  
43 thought it was important that the municipal resolution spelled it out. Arianna asked if the  
44 exclusions were only for housing and Jason said there were 4 tiers and Tier 1B was a good fit for  
45 Chester and was just housing. A housing project of 50 units on 10 acres or less is what they were  
46 talking about. There is no limit to the number of projects, only the size. Someone with a 60 unit

1 development would need to go through Act 250. Lee confirmed it would be related only to  
2 housing. Jason said the resolution was calling out the statutory requirements for Tier 1B and  
3 hoped it was self-explanatory. Peter thought it should mention housing. Tim noted it was in the  
4 last clause, but maybe not as clear as Peter was asking for. Arne said the town would control it  
5 through zoning and confirmed they wouldn't need to jump through as many hoops with the  
6 resolution. Jason agreed it would make it easier. Larry Semones said they would still need to go  
7 through the same steps as Act 250. Arne said they were spelled out in zoning. Larry agreed it  
8 would eliminate Act 250. Arianna asked why anyone would be against it and if there was any  
9 reason to hesitate. Larry Semones thought it could affect the rural areas and Jason said they were  
10 two totally separate things. Arne added that the tiers had to be accepted on their own. Jason said  
11 Tier 3 didn't exist yet because the State Land Use Review Board had not finished the rulemaking  
12 process and would ultimately determine what Tier 3 is and Jason had no control over that and it  
13 was a separate conversation. This was whether they wanted Act 250 exemptions in and around  
14 the village area and Jason didn't see any reason not to do it. Lee said Julie had modified the  
15 document to include: "Whereas, in accordance with Vermont law, 10 BSA subsection 6033, the  
16 municipality may request Tier 1B area status for the purposes of Act 250 jurisdiction for  
17 housing." Arne asked if there were any Act 250 things that would apply in the village, such as a  
18 brewery. Jason said it would not impact a brewery and would have to go through Act 250. Jason  
19 said they could go back for Tier 1A in the future but it required a lot. Arne was just wondering in  
20 case there was something they could add that would help, but it sounded like it was just for  
21 housing. Peter said the Tier 1A was for if you were going to take over the Act 250 permits that  
22 were also in your town and you were going to have to take care of those and they didn't want to  
23 do that. They agreed it was an administrative burden. Lauren Fierman thought Tier 1A required  
24 developmental capacity in town and they had to manage the development and Chester didn't  
25 have the resources. Jason said Tier 1B, to him, was a no-brainer and they could approve it  
26 tonight and always change it down the road if they wanted. Jason recommended they approve it.  
27 Lee asked if there were any other comments. Scott MacDonald said when it came up at the  
28 Planning Commission meeting, which Jason attended, the reason they suggested Tier 1B was that  
29 the other option was an administrative nightmare. Lee thanked Scott.

30

31 Lee entertained a motion to sign the Resolution on Tier 1B status, as discussed. Arianna moved  
32 and Arne seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. The members signed the  
33 resolution. Jason hoped they would submit the plan next week to the State Land Use Review  
34 Board and he anticipated they would want changes and expected to resubmit it in August and  
35 would hopefully be approved and kick in at some point in the fall. Jason said it would help with  
36 housing. Hugh said if it got delayed, because they had their NDA approved, and a housing  
37 project came in, they would get their Act 250 relief and had a safety net if there was a delay.  
38 Jason agreed. Lee thanked them.

39

40

#### **Agenda Item 5, New Business/Next Agenda**

41

- 42 ● Julie noted they would have a new board because it would be after elections and Arianna  
43 was leaving. They would have reorganization.
- 44 ● Class IV policy: Julie hoped to have the first draft for the next meeting, as Jim is working  
45 on it.
- 46 ● Public Records Policy: they will have the first draft.

- 1 • Use of Town Property Policy: Julie hoped they would have a draft but it would likely be  
2 the second meeting in March.  
3

4 Following up on their earlier discussion, Julie told Peter that they do reconcile ARPA funds.  
5

6 **Agenda Item 6, Executive Session: Review of Legal Opinion from Town Counsel Re: Bailey**  
7 **Hill Road pursuant to 1 VSA § 313 (1)(F)**  
8

9 Peter Hudkins recused himself.  
10

11 Lee entertained a motion to find a premature general public knowledge of confidential attorney  
12 client communications for the purpose of providing professional legal services relative to the  
13 status of Bailey Hill Road would place the Town of Chester at a substantial disadvantage.  
14 Arianna moved and Tim seconded the motion. Lee entertained a motion to enter into executive  
15 session for the purpose of reviewing a legal opinion received from counsel regarding the status  
16 of Bailey Hill Road pursuant to 1 VSA § 313(1)(F) and to include inviting in Town Manager  
17 Julie Hance. Arianna moved and Arianna seconded the motion. The motion carried  
18 unanimously.  
19

20 (Executive session entered at 7:06 p.m.)  
21

22 Motion to exit executive session made by Arne and seconded by Arianna. The motion carried.  
23

24 (Executive session exited at 7:24 p.m.)  
25

26 The Board stated that the legal opinion from Jim Carroll can be made public. The Town  
27 manager was asked to insert a page into the road book referencing the legal opinion.  
28

29 The Board thanks Arianna for her years of service on the Board. She will be missed.  
30

31 **Agenda Item 7, Adjourn**  
32

33 Arianna moved to adjourn, and Tim seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting  
34 was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.