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**TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD MEETING
April 1, 2026, Minutes**

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

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

Visitors Present: William Lindsay, Jerry Ucci, Sharon Baker, Randy Miles, Frank Bidwell, Damon Tyler, Amie Record, and Shawn Cunningham of the Chester Telegraph, at Town Hall; Sharon Jonynas, Derek Suursoo, Kirk MacGinnis, Linda Diak, Heather Chase, Joy Slaughter, Michael (no last name), Scott Blair, Anne Lamb, Scott (no last name), 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. Lee thanked everyone for joining and asked them to sign-in. Lee reminded those on Zoom to identify themselves before speaking.

Agenda Item 1, Approval of Minutes of the March 18, 2026 Select Board Meeting

Lauren moved and Peter seconded a motion to approve the March 18, 2026 minutes. Tim noted on page 7, line 3, newspapers should be singular. Tim asked for an addition to the minutes on page 7 at line 26. Tim wanted to add that the motion carried “four votes in favor with Lee abstaining.” Nobody objected to the addition. Lee noted on page 8 of 9, line 18, there were two ones at the end of the sentence, so the duplicate needed to be removed. Bill Lindsay noted under visitors present, Sharon Banker should be Sharon Baker. The motion carried and the minutes were approved, as amended.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen’s Comments

Kirk MacGinnis wanted to state, for the record, that he understood Item 11 was a general VTrans compliance matter and not a site specific determination of the Wyman Falls Road segment identified in his pending petition or of any claimed right-of-way affecting his property. Lee thanked him for his comment.

Randy Miles attended because of the prior meeting about the paper of record. He said there was no second public comment or he would have said something at the prior meeting. Randy said he had some big issues with things that were said. Lee asked for clarification. Randy noted it was the March 18th meeting where he issued a formal complaint and he had issues with the way the board acted that night. Randy mentioned some of the phrases used at the meeting and said the paper did not print the truth and it was a big, big deal. Randy said the paper did not print what he asked to be printed and still had not acknowledged the whole statement he wanted printed on each of the questions. He wondered who to go to when a business wasn’t operating correctly or

1 being appropriately and that's what he was doing that night by going to the Select Board. Randy
2 said it was pushed aside and more importantly, pushed aside for the paper and not him. Randy
3 asked if they had looked at the information he posted. Randy thought it was biased that the paper
4 could do and print what it wanted and wondered if the board wanted a biased paper representing
5 them. Randy said there was no article or rules they had to abide by and had told the paper if they
6 didn't print what he provided, they were putting their own words in and not his and they had
7 chosen to do it. Randy said it was harmless what he asked them to print and they chose not to.
8 Randy asked the board to read the file and complaint and to sleep on it. Lee thanked him.

9

10 Linda Diak apologized that she wasn't in person as she had wanted to be. Linda said she was
11 appalled by Lee's comments at the prior meeting. Linda said it was one thing for Randy to ask
12 the board to punish The Telegraph, as he was a private citizen and is entitled to ask but his ask
13 carried no weight and more importantly, no threat. Linda said she was also a private citizen, like
14 Randy, and her words carried no weight and no threat. Linda had asked her husband, Tom, if he
15 had any opposition to what she was going to say and his only concern was retaliation that could
16 follow. She hoped she could speak her mind without retaliation as any Chester citizen should.
17 Linda thought his concern was warranted as she already was banned from the Chester Vermont
18 Facebook group by a man who lives in Ludlow for sharing an article that outlined how egregious
19 Lee's actions were. Unlike Randy and Linda, Mr. Gustafson was a government official and his
20 words carry weight. Linda said if Lee had followed through with adverse action against The
21 Chester Telegraph after saying what he had, it would be a violation of the First Amendment.
22 Linda didn't think it was something to be swept aside and thought Lee owed an apology to both
23 Shawn and Cynthia and the entire town. Linda didn't think Lee belonged on the board and
24 certainly not in the position of Chair. Lee thanked her.

25

26 Randy said his comment wasn't going to the Chair but to "you" and pointed at the board. Randy
27 said if a business does something wrong, the board talks about it and that was what the Chair was
28 trying to do. Randy said there was no guilt on Lee and he had opened the board discussion and
29 they quickly pushed it aside and became mad at him. Lee thanked him.

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31 Tim noted it was the policy of the board to not engage in responding to citizens comments.

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Agenda Item 3, Old Business

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35 Report by Town Manager:

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37 Thompson Jewitt Road Project

38 Work is commencing and the project is anticipated to take the full 2026 construction season but
39 completed this year. The contracts were awarded by the state and the roadwork will be Bazin
40 Brothers and the bridge work will be Cold River Bridges. Julie said they have worked with both
41 contractors for years and have a lot of confidence in them and are very pleased.

42

43 Box Culvert Projects

44 There are four large projects that are going out to bid tomorrow. They will likely award them at
45 the end of April. One is on Smokeshire Road and a large box on Christmas Tree Road. Both are
46 100% funded through FEMA 406 Mitigation. Cummings Road and Old Stage Road are both

1 large structures grants. They will get the word out once they know the start date for construction.

2

3 Depot Street Sidewalk

4 They are going out to bid in early May. They will bid for a 2-year construction season to get the
5 railwork done. The easement expires at the end of 2026, so the railwork must be done by the end
6 of this year. The remainder can go to 2027. There is language stating that any sidewalk work
7 done this year has to coordinate with the sewer project going on this year. Julie will keep them
8 posted. She hoped the railwork is done this year and the sidewalk next year.

9

10 Generator Grant

11 They were awarded \$100,000 from FEMA a year ago for the generator grant. The price doubled
12 so they submitted a modification request to FEMA. It was awarded and along with an extension,
13 they received another \$120,000. They have until the end of May 2027. Daniels, who was
14 awarded the bid and has the generator, will begin work this summer.

15

16 Transportation Alternatives Grant

17 They just received word that Chester was awarded the grant for \$594,000 for an additional
18 sidewalk that begins at Town Hall and goes toward North Street. Chester's match is \$148,500
19 and that doesn't need to be addressed until 2027, so they don't need to come up with the funds
20 this year.

21

22 Capital Grants for Libraries

23 Julie submitted it yesterday, as the last rounds opened, for \$353,000 with no match. If received,
24 they would use the funds to replace the non-compliant ramp in front with a new entryway
25 accessible to the handicapped parking in the back of the building, an upgrade to the fire panel,
26 and an elevator upgrade.

27

28 Tim joked that no more new grants didn't last long. Peter added that sidewalk money was very
29 difficult to get. Julie added that it would be a huge section and would be nice. Arne noted the
30 projects that had been in the works for years were all coming together now.

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Agenda Item 4, Sharon Baker; Permission to Use Green

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34 Sharon thanked them for the last time she attended and was thrilled she had the opportunity to do
35 something wonderful on the Green on September 19th. 8 or 9 people have contacted her through
36 Facebook or directly wondering what they could do to help. Anne Henshaw even offered her
37 yard for whatever was needed. Sharon thought she had 3 vendors and it would be for Vermont
38 made food and producers. Sharon had to say no to some who wanted to sell crafts and jewelry.

39

40 She wanted the board to know that they revived the townwide yard sale for Memorial Day
41 weekend, May 23 to 25, to bring the community together to sell unused and extra items from
42 their yards at no cost to the town. It's currently advertised on various Facebook pages. Sharon
43 will ask The Chester Telegraph or The Vermont Journal to run a press release. Kathy Goodell has
44 taken point and so far, 11 have signed up to be on the map. The cost is \$5 to be on the map to
45 cover printing by Newsbank. Sharon wanted to reserve the Green for July 4th. She met with Julie
46 on February 5th who encouraged her to come to the board with her idea. Sharon reached out to

1 Carla Westine of the Historical Society who advised her that plans have been made for a slide
2 show, cemetery tour of the Revolutionary soldiers buried here, and an ice cream social with a
3 patriotic theme. Being the 250th anniversary of the birth of the nation, Sharon found it a great
4 day for the town to celebrate and showcase their love for their town, state, and country. Vermont
5 was not one of the original 13 colonies but was the 14th state to join the union. Sharon suggested
6 a townwide potluck on the Green, a parade with a red, white, and blue theme, a small brass band
7 playing in the gazebo, getting the schools involved with artwork or music, and decorating the
8 Green with patriotic flags and balloons. It is important for the children to know and understand
9 how we came to be. 50 years from now, they will celebrate 300 years of this nation. Sharon said
10 it would not be a day to make money but to celebrate the freedoms we have because of those
11 who sacrificed for us to live in the freest country on the planet. She was asking for help and
12 suggestions to plan the event and hoped they could use Town Hall to meet to get the ball rolling.
13 Sharon hoped they could work together, as there was a lot of talent in Chester and surrounding
14 areas. She invited people to visit her at her shops on the Green, Sharon's on the Common and
15 Chester Candy, as she is there most days. Lee thanked Sharon and asked Julie what the procedure
16 was and if it required a vote. Julie noted it would be a town event and not one organization
17 hosting it. Julie had asked Sharon to attend the meeting so the members were aware and okay
18 with it. Julie was happy to work with Sharon on the project. Julie had already heard from Carol
19 Neff and Chester Townscape who wanted to decorate the Green for Independence Day and Julie
20 had asked for the cost, although they may have found someone to fund it. Julie anticipated more
21 would be interested when word got out, such as the American Legion. Julie told the board that it
22 would be under the auspices of the town for a town event, so their permission wasn't needed. Lee
23 noted it was a momentous occasion. Tim said it would be a lot of fun and appreciated Sharon's
24 energy and vision. The members thanked Sharon.

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Agenda Item 5, Housing Commission Appointment

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28 Jerry Ucci and Sophie Stone had both expressed interest, but Sophie Stone was not present.

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30 Jerry said he has been involved in multi-family housing and a landlord for almost 20 years. Jerry
31 said being a landlord is near and dear to his heart. Chester and finding housing for people is
32 super important to him. Jerry is working on multiple projects in town renovating 200 plus year
33 old properties and creating living spaces. He and his wife just bought a property on Main Street
34 that closed Friday. There is an old barn in the back and they plan to renovate it and add two units
35 with the goal of offering them to people in Chester at affordable rents. Jerry is working with
36 some other landlords in town to revamp and renovate spaces. He has a lot of experience being a
37 contractor and property manager for 20 years providing a unique insight related to housing. Lee
38 thanked him.

39

40 Julie noted that Sophie had acknowledged receipt of the email as recently as this evening. Arne
41 noted Sophie had been a little elusive and Julie agreed. Julie had confirmed with her that the
42 meeting was tonight and Sophie said she would be on Zoom.

43

44 Peter asked Jerry if he had Section 8 units and he did. Jerry said he used to have more in
45 Southern Vermont and at one time, he had managed 400 units. During COVID, he said there
46 were a lot more voucher tenants and had dealt with the state, personally, with voucher tenants

1 and overseeing that. Lauren noted it was a wonderful experience to bring to the Housing
2 Commission. Lauren was concerned there could be a conflict if he could benefit from decisions
3 made by the Housing Commission, which wasn't a deal breaker but he had to be careful. Jerry
4 said he wasn't looking to benefit himself in any way, shape, or form. He passionately works with
5 a lot of folks in town to create housing. Lauren said she and Peter attend the meetings but don't
6 vote because of potential conflicts of interest. Lauren anticipated there may be times Jerry would
7 have to participate but not vote. Jerry said that was fine. Arne thanked Jerry for stepping up and
8 said it was always good to see community members get involved. Tim moved to appoint Jerry
9 Ucci to fill the vacancy of the Housing Commission. Arne seconded the motion. The motion
10 carried. Lee thanked Jerry and said he appreciated his willingness. Lauren told Jerry it was a
11 great group and Julie said she would connect him to the group.

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Agenda Item 6, Request Funds from Housing Reserve Fund

15 Julie noted the Housing Reserve Fund had around \$24,000 and the Housing Commission had
16 requested \$11,300 for the purposes of completing two market studies and an appraisal. By
17 lumping them together, they'll get a better price and save a few thousand using the same
18 company. The study is required before they can utilize any type of federal or state funding
19 sources, as it speaks to demand and how much housing is needed. They are asking for a market
20 study on the large parcel that abuts the high school and the property on Canal Street, potentially
21 for senior housing. The commission is considering the Dennis Allard property near the Family
22 Center which Windham & Windsor Housing has expressed interest in but they have not heard
23 back. Before they could move forward, they need an appraisal, which Martin is willing to do for
24 a relatively inexpensive amount. Arne questioned why it was a market study as it sounded like a
25 feasibility study. Julie said the developers who work with federal funding said they wanted to
26 know if people are looking for housing and they don't use the state's data for that. A site specific
27 study is required to show if 60 units are built, that there is regional demand before federal dollars
28 can be used on the project. Julie said it is also good data for Chester. Once the work is done, they
29 can apply to VHCB for 50% reimbursement. Many municipalities have used Martin who will fit
30 Chester in and they've also done work for the town before. Preston was also able to get a cost
31 break from Martin. Arne noted a local options tax could help finance this in the future. Lauren
32 moved and Tim seconded a motion to approve expenditure of \$11,300 from the Housing Reserve
33 Fund. The motion carried, unanimously. Julie thanked them and said they were appreciative.

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Agenda Item 7, Chester Economic Development Committee Mission Statement

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37 Lee read the mission statement: The mission of the Chester Economic Development
38 Commission, CEDC, is to promote a strong local economy that emphasizes tourism, agriculture,
39 forestry, businesses that provide goods and services, and compatible light industry and
40 manufacturing while increasing the tax base and building local capacity. Julie said the addition
41 was: while increasing the tax base and building local capacity. The CDEC has met a couple times
42 and felt strongly about adding that language to the mission statement. Julie noted it wasn't just
43 about bringing business but growing the Grand List and building housing capacity for new
44 business and future growth. Arne clarified with Julie that's what building local capacity meant,
45 which was housing and capacity for business and infrastructure. Julie said they felt it was strong
46 to add the Grand List component, because it's a very important part. Tim understood they were

1 keeping it broad so it was less wordy. It was a relatively benign change but important to the
2 CEDC. Arne moved and Peter seconded the motion. Arne said it was exciting they were all
3 coming into place. The motion carried, unanimously.

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Agenda Item 8, Town Clerk Appointment

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7 Amie Record requested to continue as Town Clerk. Amie said the last year had gone well. Lee
8 agreed. The main thing for her was learning about elections and deadlines. She noted you don't
9 realize what goes along with the job until you start training someone and training Samantha has
10 been going well. Amie thanked them for the opportunity. Julie said Deb had retired last year and
11 they appointed Amie for one year to make sure it was what she wanted. Usually, town clerks are
12 elected for 3 years so they were asking for a 3-year appointment. Amie asked them if they had
13 any questions. Tim was glad she was willing to commit to three more years. Arne asked
14 educationally with recertification, how it worked. Amie said she must train and recertify every
15 two years and that she and Samantha are going to a training in Rutland on Tuesday for new
16 clerks and there are things they are learning together. They can go to a training in September
17 that's Vermont based and one in November that's New England based. Julie noted that Amie did
18 the NEMC certification so Amie is a certified town clerk, although that is not required in
19 Vermont. Amie said she can become nationally certified and is working towards it. Lee thanked
20 her and entertained a motion to appoint Amie Record as the Town Clerk for the next 3 years. Tim
21 moved and Lauren seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. The members signed.

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Agenda Item 9, Adopt Annual Local Emergency Management Plan

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25 Lee said they should have a document that lays out the people and responsibilities for the Local
26 Emergency Management Plan. Julie said they needed a motion to appoint Lee as Chair. Julie said
27 this was required to get reimbursement from FEMA and was a standard annual form. Lauren
28 wondered if the people listed went through specific training and they did. Years ago, Lauren had
29 to go through FEMA's training. Julie said after the train derailment happened in Ohio, they had
30 been working with state partners to get a mock up training for a train derailment in Chester. Julie,
31 the chiefs, and several staff are going to Waterbury for a state derailment training as Chester has
32 been invited to participate. It's a tabletop exercise and she has been told they're fabulous. They
33 will do a tabletop in Chester with everyone on the list, including Select Board members. Julie
34 said they do one annually but have never done one full-scale. The Select Board will know what
35 their role is if there is ever a major disaster, which they have had. Arne pointed out it talked
36 about the Legion as a shelter and recalled an alternate shelter, at one time. Julie said they've used
37 the Legion as a shelter but it gets cut off from town when flooded, as does Route 11 West. Town
38 Hall could be a warming shelter, the library could be a warming shelter. The library grant
39 included \$20,000 to wire a generator and they have portable generators. The elementary school
40 floods, so it's not an option. The Academy building is also a perfect location given the new
41 heating system installed. The American Legion is needed for those south of town and they need
42 to identify one west, and one north, as they get cut off. Tim wondered if it needed to be
43 municipal property, and Julie said it made it easier. Currently, anyone north goes to Ludlow and
44 east goes to Springfield. Tim said Route 11 West was a challenge and Julie agreed and said that
45 was some of what they would discuss. The chiefs have put a lot of thought into it. Peter said
46 going to Ludlow or Cavendish wouldn't be possible because you wouldn't be able to get through

1 Cavendish. Julie agreed. Tim mentioned the old Armory but it was privately owned so they
2 would need to go through steps. Arne mentioned the Legion was privately owned and Julie said
3 they had gone through the steps to be named a warming shelter. Arne moved and Peter seconded
4 the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. Lee signed.

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Agenda Item 10, Adopt Annual Highway Financial Plan

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8 Julie said it was an annual form and they need to certify to the state annually that the budget
9 they're passing is at least the amount of the state aid received. Julie said she needed to break
10 down winter maintenance and non-winter maintenance for the budget and any major projects.
11 Every five years, VTrans reviews their road and bridge standards and makes the town sign a
12 document that their road standards meet VTrans and Chester's do, so for Chester, it's a formality.
13 Kirby has been through it and they are even stricter than VTrans on a few things. Lee entertained
14 a motion to approve the Annual Financial Plan for Town Highways. Lee read the Certificate of
15 Compliance for Town, Road, and Bridge Standards, and Network Inventory: We, the legislative
16 body of the Municipality of Chester, certify that we are reviewed, understand, and comply with
17 the town road and bridge standards slash public works specifications and standards passed and
18 adopted by the Select Board on February 4, 2014. We further certify that our adopted standards
19 meet or exceed the minimum requirements included in the June 5, 2019 state-approved template.
20 We further certify that we do have an up-to-date highway network inventory, which identifies
21 location, size, deficiency/condition of roads, bridges, causeways, culverts, and highway-related
22 retaining walls on Class 1, 2, and 3 town highways, and estimated costs of repair. Tim moved
23 and Arne seconded the motion to accept it. The motion carried, unanimously. The members
24 signed.

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Agenda Item 11, Adopt Road and Bridge Standards for VTrans Compliance

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28 Lee entertained a motion to certify the town road and bridge standards dated January 21, 2026,
29 for the municipality of Chester. Lauren moved and Arne seconded the motion. The motion
30 carried, unanimously, and the members signed.

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Agenda Item 12, New Business/Next Agenda

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- Jim Carroll will attend the next meeting and talk about rules of the Select Board and Town Manager and remind them of their jobs. He will also attend an executive session regarding a couple of legal matters.

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- Julie said they reached out to the high school about displaying artwork in the long hallway at Town Hall on a rotating basis.

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- Lee noted at the last meeting Lauren mentioned creating a policy when there are school board vacancies. Julie thought they could use procedures for a few different things. Lauren always distinguished between policy and recommended procedure; procedure could be tossed at any moment, while policy could not. Arne asked about Use of Town Property and Julie noted that Jim was reviewing it.

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- Arne confirmed the board will have the opportunity to ask questions regarding executive session legal matters. Arne mentioned Class 4 road policy and Jim and Julie said he will be discussing in executive session about the legal matters and how it all ties together.

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46

1 Shawn asked if the board training was open to the public and it was.

2

3 **Agenda Item 13, Executive Session pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313 (3), Evaluation of a public**
4 **officer or employee.**

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6 Lee entertained a motion to enter executive session pursuant to 1VSA subsection 313-3, relative
7 to evaluation of a public officer or employee and inviting Julie in. Tim moved and Peter made
8 the second. The motion carried, unanimously. Lee thanked everyone for attending.

9

10 (Executive session entered at 7:28 p.m.)

11

12 Peter moved to exit the executive session, seconded by Arne. The motion carried. There was no
13 action.

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15 (Executive session exited at 7:53 p.m.)

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Agenda Item 14, Adjourn

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19 Tim moved to adjourn, and Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting was
20 adjourned at 7:54 p.m.