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**TOWN OF CHESTER
PLANNING COMMISSION
March 16, 2026, Minutes**

Commission Members Present: Jeff Holden, Scott MacDonald, Cathy Hasbrouck, and Hugh Quinn at Town Hall; Carl Henshaw via Zoom.

Staff Present: Preston Bristow, Town Planner, at Town Hall; Susan Bailey, Recording Secretary, via Zoom.

Visitors Present: Allison Hopkins, AICP of MARC at Town Hall.

Call to Order

Chair Hugh Quinn called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Agenda Item 1, Reorganization of the Planning Commission.

Hugh entertained options to nominate a Chair. Cathy nominated Hugh Quinn and Jeff seconded the motion. There were no other nominations. The motion carried, unanimously.

Hugh nominated Cathy Hasbrouck as Vice Chair and Jeff seconded a motion. There were no other nominations. The motion carried, unanimously.

Agenda Item 2, Approve Minutes from December 1, 2025 meeting.

Cathy moved and Scott seconded a motion to approve the December 1, 2025 minutes. There were no changes or feedback on the minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved, as written.

Agenda Item 3, Citizen Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 4, Review and Adopt Rules of Procedure.

Hugh noted they were included in the packet and they were effectively unchanged from last year. Hugh asked if there were any changes or any discussion necessary. Preston said when things go well, they never consider them but when things go bad, they are glad to have them. Jeff moved to accept the rules and Cathy seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. The members signed.

44 **Agenda Item 5, Review and Adopt Conflict of Interest Policy.**

45

46 Hugh said it was just an awareness for the members that the town has a conflict of interest policy
47 and wasn't an adoption. They are appointed by the Select Board and if they had any questions,
48 now was the time. Scott said when they are active on social media, to make it clear they are not
49 speaking as a Planning Commission member. Hugh said it wasn't addressed by this policy. In the
50 Rules of Procedure that they just signed, there was a social media policy and when commenting,
51 not to represent the Planning Commission but say what you need to as a citizen. Scott said some
52 comments could be seen as a conflict of interest later. Hugh said the conflict by definition was a
53 financial gain for themselves or a family member. Preston said the safe thing to do was if
54 someone thought they may have a conflict to disclose it.

55

56 **Agenda Item 6, Town Plan Update Kickoff Presentation.**

57

58 Hugh noted that they were getting ready to update the Town Plan which expires in 2028. Hugh
59 said they applied for and were awarded a municipal planning grant. They have enlisted Mount
60 Ascutney Regional Planning to make it happen. Allison Hopkins is a director at MARC and she
61 will help Chester tune up the Town Plan and get it up to date. Helen Appleton of MARC will
62 also assist.

63

64 Allison shared her PowerPoint presentation with those in attendance. Helen had a conflict this
65 evening and was unable to attend. The presentation is attached to these minutes.

66

67 Hugh said from his experience, oftentimes, trying to advance something in regulations that isn't
68 supported by or is conflicted with the Town Plan, can slow things down. The things the town
69 wants to do should be reflected in the plan. Cathy wondered about quarries and Allison said they
70 would fall under Act 250. Preston thought it would be nice if the Town Plan supported historic
71 quarrying that was done responsibly. Allison agreed that granite was a resource. Scott said if they
72 punished the industry because of bad actors, they were hurting themselves. Scott said Vermont
73 was polarized and suggested including cultural history and lifestyle which would make them
74 look more enlightened. Preston said the current Town Plan starts off with history. Allison said
75 they were all individual and that had to be realized but they were all part of the same state.

76

77 Hugh had heard only 2% of the land in Vermont is served by water and sewer and didn't feel
78 there was much being done at the state level to help solve housing problems for areas not being
79 served by infrastructure. Jeff, having worked in water and wastewater for 35 years, said they had
80 not done enough to keep up with the utilities to be able to add the necessary housing and the fix
81 is very expensive. Scott said if the vast majority of Vermont is rural and the policies coming from
82 the state are making it hard for people to build in rural areas without Act 250 kicking in, they
83 were kind of shooting themselves in the foot. Hugh said if the state made creating housing in
84 rural areas more difficult, they would somehow need to reconcile competing goals. Cathy
85 wondered about the plan where the state would be putting infrastructure in towns. Hugh said in
86 all the Community and Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP) presentations he attended, the
87 message was it is almost impossible to get a project off the ground in areas without water and
88 sewer. CHIP is a loan and the town would pay it back by the increase in the Grand List, but if
89 they don't have a project, they probably won't be eligible for CHIP.

90

91 They discussed how to provide opportunities for people to be involved, including social media,
92 meetings, and meeting people where they are, such as the transfer station and post office. Hugh
93 thought more people were tuned into a Select Board meeting than a Planning Commission
94 meeting. Allison said if it was at a Select Board meeting, it would need to be a joint meeting.
95 Preston thought people liked an open house because they could come and go as they pleased and
96 it was less formal and they could bring their children. Allison said they had conducted an open
97 house in Ludlow and it was well received. Hugh saw the Select Board option as a non-starter
98 given the positive results from the open house. Allison added that providing childcare and food
99 was welcomed and successful in Reading.

100

101 The grant is an 18-month grant and the grant end date is December 31, 2027. Allison said given
102 Chester's Economic Development Committee, Housing Commission, Tier 1B application, and an
103 expanded Neighborhood Development Area, there were so many things going for the town and
104 others were noticing. Preston and Hugh plan to do a fair bit of writing. This will not be driven by
105 the Regional Planning Commission but rather working together with town staff and the
106 community. The commission will have ownership developing the Town Plan.

107

108 Preston noted they want to attract more young people and families and realized housing and
109 schools were pretty important. They discussed transportation and Preston said that Springfield
110 was trying microtransit. Preston noted that a lot of people can't afford the upkeep on their
111 vehicles given something like replacing brakes and rotors can easily cost \$1,600. Preston said
112 they could consider printing the Town Plan in color making it more readable. After the April 6th
113 meeting, the commission will prioritize the work. Hugh said when it comes time for funding, the
114 Town Plan would provide backing if things were included in it. When it's done, the Planning
115 Commission members have to support it before it goes to the Select Board. Hugh never wants to
116 be in the position where all the members don't support something that is pushed forward. Scott
117 said it was possible one person may not agree and that's why they have a quorum. Hugh said if
118 the body votes to move something forward, if something doesn't go someone's way, they
119 shouldn't be a sore loser but rather support the process so unnecessary division isn't created.
120 Hugh made it clear that he wanted people to disagree but once a project is approved by the
121 majority, they should support it as a group. Preston said the state wants them to focus on flood
122 resiliency and there's a strong feeling that state designated river corridor is something Chester
123 doesn't want so there may be issues. Cathy said Julie is reviewing what the town spends over the
124 summer and whether citizens want certain programs. Cathy thought it would help if the
125 commission attended those meetings. Preston said that was a great point and the budget should
126 reflect their values. Preston used the example that some say the police are too expensive and so
127 the question was whether they should have them. Cathy said they spend money on recreation and
128 have a director who works hard and there is always something going on. Preston said having
129 these things help attract people to Chester. Carl said they have so many amenities for a
130 community of this size and didn't disagree there was a cost but they were assets. Carl wondered
131 how to encourage more people to utilize them and get more foot traffic. Carl said Chester is
132 amazing and the more people who know about it, there will be a stronger appetite. Scott asked
133 Carl when he was looking for a home how many real estate agents told him about the Pinnacle.
134 Carl said he had 5 agents and none but they had looked at a house close to the Pinnacle and the
135 listing agent told them about it. Scott said his agents didn't tell him and suggested realtors talk up
136 what they have. Cathy suggested having a family pamphlet for Chester. Preston thought they
137 needed to sell themselves better and although pamphlets are great, it should migrate to a quality
138 website. Preston said the Economic Development Committee is also talking about conducting a

139 survey. Hugh said the Planning Commission should cross connect with the Economic
140 Development and the Housing Commission to gain as much information as they can and reflect
141 that in the Town Plan. Carl agreed.

142

143 Preston asked Cathy what she had written down and she said roller derby. Allison said someone
144 in her office would travel to New Hampshire to play roller derby and it was quite a gathering.
145 Cathy said it attracted young women and their families. Preston noted in research for his list,
146 bowling alleys kept appearing. Cathy also said there was a cool stream that was fun to play in
147 behind the elementary school and wondered if they could find a few places like that which were
148 accessible and added they have good river swimming. Scott suggested they consult the town's
149 attorney for any safety-related liability they may have for promoting them. Cathy agreed. Carl
150 said the Conservation Committee could discuss that. Preston noted Barre Pinsky had talked about
151 the wetlands on Route 103 having the loudest peepers he's ever heard and suggested advertising
152 it as a spot for people to listen to them. Preston said some communities advertise their public
153 lands for birdwatchers which helps the local businesses which they patronize while there. Hugh
154 has driven to Vergennes to watch snow geese at the wildlife preserve. Carl said his daughter was
155 giving a presentation at Town Hall this weekend about saving salamanders. Preston said for
156 years Vermont sold itself on antiques and cows and foliage and the antiques and cows were
157 gone. Cathy said the cows weren't gone but less common but they had niche cows, like the ones
158 from Scotland. Carl said Popple Dungeon has beautiful cattle. Jeff said they were talking about
159 all the things that used to be there when he grew up in Chester and people came in and changed
160 things and now they want them back. Cathy suggested an indoor play area that would be big
161 enough to have a roller derby and wondered where people would bring their kids for gymnastics.
162 Scott said they should make the decision for those who live there and not because it's fun for
163 tourists. Preston was thinking of attracting people to come to Chester and live. Scott said they
164 shouldn't overlook who is already there and should consider them. Preston said Bill Lindsay was
165 on the Housing Commission for a while and understood young people needed to come in but also
166 seniors who were there who they needed to care for. Preston said they need to do both. Carl said
167 there is a program where you can rent out rooms for seniors who need extra help. Scott said a lot
168 of the folks around Chester are proud and Carl said it was a win/win. Hugh said to serve people
169 who live there, as well as those they want to come there. If Vermont is full of the elderly, they
170 need to figure out how to bring younger people there. Cathy said a pharmacy belonged on the list
171 and it wasn't just for the elderly. Allison noted urgent care needed to be on the list. Cathy
172 thought there was space in the Ellsworth Clinic. Jeff remembered the old pharmacy and the
173 pharmacist who knew all the customers and was something they would never get back. Preston
174 noted there was an effort to make pharmacies online but that doesn't help when you need
175 something right away. Smiling Steve opened up a pharmacy in Woodstock and Preston
176 mentioned Chester to him and he said he has a store in Springfield so Chester was too close for
177 another store. Jeff said his father wanted to put a milker in the barn and the banker came right to
178 the barn and asked what he needed. Jeff misses the way Vermont was and that people took care
179 of each other. Scott, who is from Wisconsin but lived on Long Island, said friends ask him what
180 the biggest difference is between Long Island and Vermont and he used an analogy about
181 slipping on ice in Long Island and calling an attorney, and in Vermont, making sure nobody
182 noticed. That is the Vermont Scott doesn't want to lose.

183

184 Hugh asked that they get a copy of the current Town Plan and read and become comfortable with
185 it. It was prepared May 6, 2020. Cathy said there were two major additions to the plan: energy
186 and economics.

187 April 6th will be a meeting on Act 181. At the April 20th meeting, Preston, Hugh, and Allison
188 will come up with something for the meeting. Allison may be away but Helen could attend. They
189 discussed the possibility of hosting the April 6th meeting upstairs depending on the number of
190 people who attend. They thanked Allison for joining them at this meeting.

191

192

Agenda Item 7, Adjournment

193

194 Jeff moved to adjourn, and Cathy seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously. The
195 meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

DRAFT

TOWN PLANS

A Basic Introduction



Allison Hopkins, AICP
Planning Director

P.O. Box 320
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[Ascutney, Vermont 05030](mailto:ahopkins@marcvt.org)
ahopkins@marcvt.org

Kellen Appleton
Planner

[my pronouns](mailto:kappleton@marcvt.org): she or they
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A Municipal Plan describes your community:

As it is

- Population
- Assets (public buildings, roads, utilities, farm & forest lands, recreational opportunities, etc.)
- Liabilities (abandoned factory, flood-prone intersection)

As you would like it to be

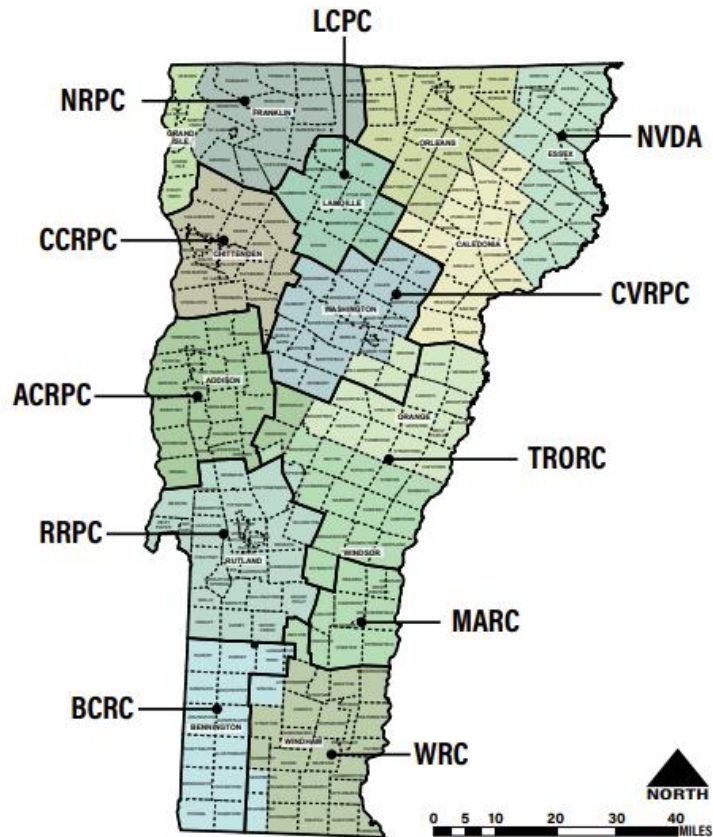
- Bike lanes
- Sidewalks
- Childcare
- Community Center
- Public Pool
- Outdoor concerts
- Solar Array
- Affordable housing

Benefits of a Municipal Plan

- Adopt Regulations
- Capital Budget & Program
- Act 250 Applications must conform to Town Plan
- Town Plan is considered in Section 248 Certificate of Public Good Applications
- More competitive grant applications



Planning in Vermont - 24 VSA Chapter 117



**STATE OF VERMONT
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS**

Process §4302(b)

Goals §4302(c)

Elements §4382



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Planning Process, §4302(b)

- A Continuing, Coordinated, Comprehensive process
- A policy framework to guide decisions
- Citizen participation
- Consider how growth and development affect community resources, including natural resources, infrastructure, and long-term sustainability.
- Work creatively with other towns to develop & implement plans

The process is as important as the product!

VERMONT PLANNING GOALS

§ 4302(c)



Municipal Plan Elements, §4382

1. Objectives, Policies and Programs
2. **Land Use** (Map and Statement), including any state designation
3. Transportation (Map and Statement)
4. Utilities and Facilities (Map and Statement)
5. Rare Natural Areas, Scenic & Historic Features (Policy)
6. Education (Map and Statement)
7. Energy (Option for Enhanced Energy Plan)
8. Economic Development
9. **Housing** (including targets)
10. Flood Resilience
11. Compatibility with Adjacent Municipalities and Region
12. Implementation Program

Where to Start?



Community Assessment – Data & Maps

Demographics – population trends, local & regional

Economic Conditions – employers, workforce, wages

Transportation – vehicles, miles traveled, traffic counts

Public Safety – personnel, facilities, equipment, 911 calls

Energy – generation, transmission, use

Housing – number, type, size, age, condition, median price

Mapped natural resources: water bodies, wildlife habitat, forest blocks, prime agricultural soils, steep slopes, scenic views, SFHA, current & future land uses

Mapped infrastructure: highways, railways, bus stops, sidewalks, trail networks, public buildings (schools, hospitals, libraries), power plants, water & sewer systems, historic structures

“When it comes to planning, if you’re not doing it with people – they think you are doing it to them.”

Roger Millar, AICP
National Complete Streets Coalition

Types of Citizen Participation

INFORM: Newsletter, Website, flyer, postcard, FPF

CONSULT: Survey, Public Meetings, Focus Group

ENGAGE: Workshop, Photo contest, SWOT

COLLABORATE: Advisory Committee, Charrette

Engage People in Creating a Shared Vision



Talk to people

**Food, fun and
celebration**



**Meet people
where they are**


**A culture of
communication**



Welcome Everyone!

The Future is Reading
presents

Food, Fun, & the Future of Reading




A Community Conversation

Join us for a community wide discussion on the potential of our Village. Share a meal and your hopes for Felchville. Your input will build on the feedback FIR has obtained so far and help direct what projects we take on first. **All are welcome! Doors open at 4:30pm. The conversation will begin at 5:00pm.** We hope to see you there!
If you have questions or need any accommodations, please contact Board@readingcommunitytrust.org.

Please join your neighbors at **Reading Elementary School:**

Friday, May 16th, 4:30-7:30PM
Childcare and Dinner Provided



Event made possible by: The Future is Reading - Reading Community Trust - the Town of Reading - The Village Trust Initiative - a partnership between Preservation Trust of Vermont, Vermont Council on Rural Development, and Vermont Community Foundation supported by a Congressionally Directed Spending award from former Senator Leahy

- Food
- Childcare
- Accessibility
- Contact information

Identify Goals & Objectives that:

- **Align with the 15 state planning goals in 24 VSA §4302(c)**
- **Address the 12 required elements in §4382(a)**
- **Reflect your community's Shared Vision**

Identify Priority Action Items

- **SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound**
- **Identify the people who will need to be involved**
- **Estimate anticipated cost (if applicable)**
- **Invite the public to help prioritize actions**
- **Remember: Having a few focused relevant actions is better than having a long list of vague aspirations**

Regional Plan Approval & Confirmation

- **Municipalities may request RPC approval of the municipal plan.**
- **RPCs will confirm the municipal planning process if:**
 - If the municipal plan has been approved by RPC
 - The municipality is engaged in a process to implement the plan
 - Is maintaining efforts to provide funds for planning
- **A confirmed Planning Process allows municipalities to:**
 - Adopt regulations & Capital Plans
 - Apply for Municipal Planning Grants
 - Have plan considered by state agencies in their planning

MPG Timeline

- **Grant End Date:** December 31, 2027
- **Primary focus areas:**
Housing • Land Use • Flood Resilience • Economic Development • Natural Resources
- **Community Engagement:**
Open House & “up to” 4 pop-up engagement events throughout the process
- **Project Phases**
- **Phase 1 – Launch & Foundation (Spring–Summer 2026)**
Kickoff, data & demographics review, SWOT analysis, early visioning.
- **Phase 2 – Policy Framework (Summer–Fall 2026)**
Update required plan elements and align with state planning goals.
- **Phase 3 – Growth Strategy (Winter 2026 – Summer 2027)**
Land Use, Housing, and Future Land Use Map development.
- **Phase 4 – Final Plan & Adoption (Fall–Winter 2027)**
Implementation strategy, public hearings, and plan adoption.

Role of the PC / Next Steps

- **The Planning Commission serves as the primary working group for developing the Town Plan.**
- **Throughout the process the PC will:**
 - Review and discuss draft chapters
 - Help guide policy direction
 - Participate in engagement activities
 - Identify priority implementation actions
- **Key milestones**
 - Data & Demographics
 - SWOT / Visioning
 - Review of drafts
 - Engagement
 - Public hearing and recommendation to Selectboard
- **Adoption process (brief overview)**
 - Planning Commission public hearing
 - Recommendation to Selectboard
 - Selectboard adoption

QUESTIONS?



Chester Town Plan Update: *Toward 2036* Campaign

Community Amenities to Attract Young Adults and Families (in addition to HOUSING and SCHOOLS)

List for discussion at 3.17.26 Planning Commission meeting

- Dog Park
- Microtransit
- Uber/Lyft
- Robotaxi
- Train Depot
- Walkability
- Sidewalks
- Pocket Parks
- Walking Trails
- Bicycle Trails
- Museums (Yosemite Firehouse?)
- Children's Museum
- Indoor Play Area
- Indoor Gym
- Community Center
- Cultural Center
- Co-Working Space
- Concert Shell
- Skate Park
- Climbing Wall
- Bowling Alley
- Hang-Out Spaces (pub, bar, brewery, winery, library open in evening, music venues)