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**TOWN OF CHESTER
SELECT BOARD MEETING
February 4, 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: Shawn Cunningham of The Chester Telegraph, William Lindsay, Frank Bidwell, Damon Tyler, Mary Adams, Doug Adams, Teresa Tyler, Evan Parks, and Larry Semones at Town Hall; Anne Henshaw, William Hoser, Kirk MacGinnis, Sharon Jonynas, Derek Suursoo, Frank and Julie Kelley, Joy Slaughter, Gene Czarnecki, 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 January 21, 2026 Select Board Meeting and the January 28, 2026 Special Select Board Meeting

Tim moved and Arianna seconded a motion to approve the January 21st minutes. Lee wasn't in attendance but caught a typo on page 5, line 45: there were two periods after the word repair. The motion carried, unanimously, and the minutes were approved. Arne moved and Arianna seconded a motion to approve the January 28th minutes. There were no changes and the motion carried, unanimously.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen's Comments

There were none.

Agenda Item 3, Old Business

Report by Town Manager:

Chester Economic Development Committee

The committee met for the first time last week. It was a good meeting and is a dynamic group of people. Preston and Julie are very excited. Julie has been waiting a long time for this.

Local Options Tax

The Housing Commission will give a presentation at the Town Meeting about the local options tax and what they're planning to do with the funds and why it is so important.

1 Trustee of Public Funds

2 The trustees met this week and approved the town's request for \$12,000 for a blower system for
3 the cemetery. The funds are sitting at a little over \$900,000, which includes the Cyprus Mineral
4 funds. They will have further discussions this year before they draw the funds and invest them
5 about what they will use the funds for. It will be included in upcoming agendas.

6

7 Wayfinding Grant

8 The grant has ended and was underspent by about \$40,000. The signs cost less than initially
9 thought. The Downtown Transportation Fund people came back to Julie and said these are the
10 last rounds of their grants where village centers can apply. They suggested Chester amend their
11 scope of work in the signage realm and encouraged Julie to find a way to spend those funds. SE
12 Group, who designed the wayfinding signs, have been retained for the entrance signs. A couple
13 of individuals in town are passionate about these signs and will join in the design discussion.
14 Julie hoped, within a couple of months, they would bring designs to the board and needed to
15 move fast because the extension expires at the end of 2026. There are five entrance signs.
16 \$40,000 may pay for the design and two or three of the signs. Julie confirmed the five signs
17 would be for routes 103 north and south, 11 east and west, and 35 to Grafton.

18

19 Grants

20 Julie included a note in the members' memo that she has frozen applying for too many more
21 grants in 2026. They need to know where finances are and won't know until May. Most of the
22 grants require matches. The ones that don't, they will continue with, like the bridge stuff. There
23 are very large projects taking place in 2026 and 2027. If something arises that the town would
24 really benefit from, Julie will bring it to the board but she isn't actively seeking things to do.

25

26 Finance Director

27 Julie has not received any applications yet and there are many towns in Vermont seeking the
28 same position. Julie is beginning to consider Plan B. Plan B would be a strong
29 bookkeeper/accounting person (non-CPA) and contract 15 hours weekly with an upper level CPA
30 who can review and do the analysis. There are benefits to splitting it. Julie has reached out to
31 accountants and people in the finance world and asked for referrals if they knew anyone who was
32 looking. Julie will give it another week before she advertises for the bookkeeper/accounting
33 position. Peter noted it was tax time. Julie said they have advertised it for someone experienced
34 in government finance, which is very different from corporate accounting. If someone had
35 interest and time and was good in accounting and interested in learning government finance, that
36 was another option. Some have easily made the change from corporate accounting to
37 government; some have not.

38

39 Road Salt

40 There is a whole thing with road salt throughout the country. The partial collapse of a salt mine
41 in New York has dramatically limited the amount of salt Vermont is getting. Kirby isn't
42 concerned yet but is proactively changing the way he's treating the roads. The back roads are
43 being sanded instead of salted to preserve until they can get more. Julie said they're using it
44 sparingly for the main road. They have inquired about using outside companies for salt and their
45 price is \$30 per ton, so they are going to avoid it as much as they can. They have been
46 advertising the situation on Facebook and Julie suggested the Chester Telegraph could put the

1 word out there, too.

2

3

Agenda Item 4, Class IV Road Policy

4

5 Julie was finally able to talk with Jim, who had been out. Jim is concerned about the policy and
6 feels strongly that they need to align with the road and bridge standards. Jim suggested the two
7 documents should be married into one. The town road and bridge standards become highway
8 policy. There is a section within that which deals specifically with Class IV roads and the work
9 that CCC did in drafting that policy and bringing them both together under one document. Jim
10 suggested Julie bring it to them to see how they felt about it. Lee wanted input from the board.
11 Arne is somewhat familiar with the document but said it would be good to have a copy so they
12 knew what they would be marrying and whether it was a good way to go. Peter has seen the
13 document and thought it was a great idea and would marry together well. Peter said they should
14 learn what legal trails are and documented well. Julie said the road and bridge standards were
15 from 2019 and needed to be looked at. Arianna thought it was logical to have all the information
16 in one place. Julie said they could rename the policy. Arne asked if it would mean they have to
17 look at Class III because they are making a new document and Julie said a lot of Class I, II, and
18 III are established by V-Trans standards but would need to make sure they're up-to-date with
19 their current standards. Tim thought it seemed logical but didn't think they had made much
20 progress in the year they had discussed it and would extend adoption. Julie said Jim would draft
21 something for the board. Julie said they wanted to make sure they did it right, especially
22 considering there was pending litigation, so it was important to take their time, which Jim had
23 emphasized. Jim also understood it had taken a while.

24

25 Evan Parks asked if the town would hold off deciding on these matters and Lee said that was the
26 next agenda item. Evan asked if they were going to wait for the policy and Lee said that's what
27 their attorney was recommending. Time would allow them to carefully consider everything with
28 the policy and, hopefully, avoid future litigation. Tim wanted Jim to commit to taking action and
29 Lee agreed. Arne noted having the historical location of the road and other factors was
30 important. They agreed taking their time was necessary.

31

32

Agenda Item 5, Discussion Re: Request for Discontinuance of Adams Road

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34 Damon Tyler made a request a while back. They are considering, as a board, how they will
35 handle his request. Arianna assumed there was a procedure and there is. Lee noted the Class IV
36 policy wasn't setting it out but the town attorney suggested marrying the two documents and
37 providing more clarity. Arianna wanted to know what the procedure was. Julie said this was their
38 time to decide if they will set a hearing to discontinue the road and noted it was why it was on
39 the agenda. Jim's recommendation was they pause until there is a policy in place and Lee agreed.
40 Julie noted this would be another impetus for Jim to get the policy finished. Arianna wondered if
41 it was fair to say since there was a request, once the policy was in place, they would already be in
42 line. There was agreement that the hearing should come after the policy is adopted. Peter noted
43 about his personal experience of haying on South Hill on an ATV trail and nobody respected
44 when he was haying. Peter said he understood Mr. Tyler's perspective.

45

46 Damon Tyler isn't happy with the way the policy is written and noted it was taken verbatim from

1 the Forestry Department's policy and shouldn't be adopted by Chester. He has tried to do it the
2 right way by bringing it to the board. Damon said statute tells how to deal with continuance and
3 wanted to move forward with that process. Damon said others have taken other methods and he
4 didn't want to go down that route and was trying to do the right thing. If the board won't
5 entertain a discontinuance for that section of the road, Damon didn't see them doing it for any
6 section. Damon had an issue with how the right-of-way statute was established and noted it
7 didn't go into any other town, had no neighbors, the farmland has an active mine, and farm
8 equipment goes by the house and around the barn. Damon noted the board had said that a policy
9 was just a guideline and he wasn't happy with how the policy was written. Lee wanted
10 clarification whether it was a section of the road or the entire road, as his email stated. Damon
11 said he had provided a map and it was a section that went from the farmhouse front around the
12 garage and barns through the gardens and alongside the mine and was concerned because the
13 map indicated the road went through a neighbor's house. Lee asked Damon what his timeline
14 was for having this done. Damon said they wanted it discontinued; the sooner the better. Damon
15 said the state wrote their policy with the assumption that a lot of Class IV roads are in state parks
16 and didn't take the use case of Adams Farm and the obligations. Damon said his goal was to
17 protect the family farm from risks and obligations and took offense when the town wanted to
18 have all of the rights and privileges but none of the obligations. Lee thanked Damon for the
19 clarification. Lee's recommendation was to wait until the policy is done before having a hearing
20 and asked the other members for their opinions. Tim said it would be unfair to someone who
21 came to them after the policy had been adopted and they should provide a level playing field.
22 Arianna said the policy they are discussing lays out the procedure for the hearing and taking up
23 the discontinuance and the other members. Julie said the process was in state statute. Lee said
24 they could have a hearing and delay a decision but didn't see that as being fair to anyone. Arne
25 pointed out if they had a hearing, the clock would start regarding what needed to be done and
26 limit them. Arne noted most of the Class IV roads have been in town for hundreds of years and
27 their uses are documented in the vaults, maps, and through history. The roads have had different
28 uses through history: to visit neighbors, get from one section of town to another, for
29 transportation, and for pleasure, or whatever. The roads are important to the town and are
30 mirrored in the town plan. Arne said preserving them is mentioned and some of the roads are part
31 of a system and named a list of roads that are connected. Arne said if they started removing
32 sections of road, they would lose the connectivity that they talk about. Arne said they've talked
33 about having trails that connect the high school and Lovers Lane and how great that would be
34 but the connectivity isn't there but the connectivity is there in the rural areas with these Class IV
35 roads. Arne would love to have the hearing and discussion but found it way too early to proceed
36 as the policy wasn't written yet. Arne said the 2020 Town Plan, which expires in 2028,
37 references Class IV roads and their importance in Chester and why he thought the policy was
38 based on that in addition to the state. Arne understood the problems with the roads and said those
39 problems exist with other roads, too. Arne didn't want to remove a section of the road and
40 prohibit future village endeavors 50 or 100 years from now because of the small problems they
41 addressed today. Lee thought that was a discussion for when they discussed the policy.

42

43 For the record, Kirk MacGinnis said he is awaiting the town's written determination regarding its
44 claimed authority over the disputed section of his driveway.

45

46 Damon said it was important that they partnered with their farmers and the folks who owned the

1 land and asked about petitioning to force a hearing. Julie said if the board decided not to set it for
2 a hearing, a petition process could force it. Lee asked how urgent this was for Damon as they
3 wanted to take the time to get it right. Damon said he was familiar with the plan but disagreed
4 with the way the town decided to go about some things and their priorities. Damon's goal was to
5 partner with local farmers, artisans, and business owners and help them thrive as much as
6 possible in Chester. Damon is interested in engagement and said he would do that with the board,
7 alongside them, or against them. Damon would be disappointed if they waited and would view it
8 as stalling. Lee saw it as a contradiction since he didn't like the policy but wanted them to move
9 forward with it. Damon said he was asking for a discontinuance. Damon said he respected the
10 board but some members said it wasn't going to happen over their dead bodies. Arne said that
11 was rude and he hadn't said that and they were looking at the individual situation. Damon, again,
12 said he was asking for a discontinuance. Lee said their job was to determine if they want to start
13 the process now or wait until they have the tools to guide them so they do it correctly. Lee
14 thought they had the same goals and noted the five members are trying to promote the well-being
15 of the entire Chester community, including farmers, artisans, visitors, and residents. Lee said
16 they had a number of characteristics they had to evaluate and points of view to consider in order
17 to make a wise decision. Lee understood where Damon was coming from but didn't agree with
18 the urgency. From Lee's perspective, at some point, they would hold a hearing whether by the
19 board deciding to hold one or by petition. Peter said the town could close the road for mud
20 season while it dried out and asked if it would help him as a farmer. Mr. Adams said it would not
21 because the construction working the pit put stone in and the road was probably better than the
22 main road. Damon said the road that had existed was almost unusable because of the rain. Mr.
23 Adams had been keeping it open. Julie asked if the town plowed Adams Road all the way out
24 and Damon said they did not; they plowed up to the cow barn and turned around. Arianna had
25 hoped because it was so well written, they could step through the process and Damon's would be
26 an example of how it is done. Those who took legal action had prevented the board from
27 participating. Arianna was glad they had a chance to review the policy exceptions that Damon
28 had taken and said it was only due to illness and the holidays that they had felt it moved so
29 slowly and once the attorney signs off on the policy, the board can respectfully and exactly by
30 the record, address Damon's requests. Arianna said they had only found out tonight and she had
31 thought they would address it. Arianna said if they didn't do it the right way, they were already
32 starting on the back foot and they wanted to do it right.

33

34 Anne Henshaw was trying to understand the issue and thought it sounded like actions that may
35 reduce public access to what sounded like public places. She asked if there was a place where
36 she could educate herself and be fully informed about its history. Julie was happy to sit down and
37 talk with Anne. Arianna said there were articles over the years talking about the pros and cons.
38 Anne just wanted to make sure she understood it. Arianna suggested looking up Ancient Roads
39 2010 Vermont and she would get a good education. Before she moved to Chester, Anne and her
40 family advocated for accessible natural spaces so she wanted to make sure she understood. Anne
41 said she would reach out to Julie to discuss it. Lee suggested a local map that showed all the
42 Class IV roads and said only a few accessed public lands and most were on private property.
43 Anne said that's why she needed to understand. Tim clarified that they weren't on private
44 property but private property abutted the roads.

45

46 Gene Czarnecki wondered if the request had anything to do with denying access to Simsbury

1 Cemetery and Peter said no, that it was on the other side.

2

3 Lee recommended Jim and Julie provide a draft of a combined policy and the members
4 supported that. Mr. Adams agreed with his son-in-law regarding the road but it didn't need to be
5 done immediately and told the board to do what they needed to do to figure it out and Lee
6 thanked him. Julie will put pressure on the attorney. The members agreed to do the policy and
7 then set up a formal hearing once it was done. Lee thanked them for their patience.

8

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Agenda Item 6, Certificate of Highway Mileage

10

11 This is the annual document and the disclaimer about Bailey Hill Road had been removed. Jim
12 recommended it remain a town road and they also had heard from the Bidgood Family who are
13 no longer contesting it. Arne noted it took two years to determine if it was under the town's
14 jurisdiction or if it had been discontinued years ago and the research that went into it took a lot of
15 work and time and wasn't easy. Arne noted some of the roads have been under the purvey of the
16 town for 250 years and it wasn't something they took lightly but were trying to get it right. The
17 members signed the document.

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Agenda Item 7, Approve Bond Documents

20

21 Julie said there were two articles. Arianna moved to approve the bond documents as provided.
22 Julie said the ballot, the resolution and the declaration of intent for the parving project for
23 \$300,000. Arianna moved and Tim seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously.

24

25 Lee asked for a motion for the ballot, the resolution, and the declaration of intent for \$430,000
26 for the Depot Street project. Arianna moved and Tim seconded the motion. The motion carried,
27 unanimously.

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29

Agenda Item 8, Art Gallery Serving Permit

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31 They do two small events for Fisher Arts: one is on February 13th and one is on February 14th.
32 Arianna moved to approve the serving permits for Fisher Art Gallery covering February 13 and
33 one for February 14. Peter seconded the motion. The motion carried, unanimously.

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Agenda Item 9, New Business/Next Agenda

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37

- Julie was asked by a few citizens if the town would hold a candidates forum. Julie said the last time they did, they gave pre-written questions to everyone ahead of time. They would ask Frank Kelley to moderate since Bill Dakin had done so in the past. The members thought it was a great idea. Evan offered to help. Shawn asked if it would include the school and the members agreed to include those candidates. Julie will pull the questions that were asked last time, which were general questions. It will probably take place in the last week of February.

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- For the next agenda, Jason Rasmussen and Hugh Quinn will attend in hopes that the Select Board will sign a resolution affirming the town's capacity to support development review and zoning administration of Tier 1(b). The Neighborhood Development Area

45

1 (NDA) was approved and the next step is the approval of Tier 1(b) which is what gets
2 that section out of Act 250 permitting. Arianna asked if they would be given information
3 beforehand and Julie said they would and that it wasn't a lot to read: the resolution,
4 which says they are willing to move forward with Tier 1(b) and then the proposed land
5 use maps with those sections on it. Julie will send the members the information as soon
6 as it's received. Peter confirmed with Julie that the map had been reviewed. Bill Lindsay
7 asked if the Planning Commission would be involved and Julie said they already had
8 been.

- 9 ● Lee mentioned the public funds and trustees and asked about the Cyprus Mineral Funds
10 discussion. Julie said it would not be on the next agenda.
- 11 ● Lee asked about people coming before the town being present to ask for funds from the
12 voters. Julie said the trustees had established a bylaw and policy on how they're going to
13 distribute funds. They will have two grant rounds annually and those requesting funds
14 will need to be a 501(c)(3) because they are already set up to process things. The town is
15 exempt from that. Julie was thrilled to see they have a policy now which provided
16 structure and guidance. Peter said when they finalize the policy, they should attend the
17 meeting.
- 18 ● Bailey Hill Road will be on the next agenda.
- 19 ● Julie hoped to have a draft of the public records request policy. The requests are getting
20 out of control and if there is a policy, there are things they can restrict or limit. Julie asked
21 to have a policy discussed at the next meeting.
- 22 ● The March 4th meeting will be reconfiguration of the board.
- 23 ● Julie hoped to have a draft of the use of town property policy.
- 24 ● Julie will encourage Jim to have a draft of the town roads policy by March 4th.
- 25 ● Tim heard some complaints about the town website and wanted to discuss it. Julie asked
26 for the complaints so that they could address them immediately, if needed. Peter
27 suggested the Economic Development Committee also address it.

28
29 **Agenda Item 10, Executive Session: Discussion re: Negotiation of Purchase & Sale**
30 **Agreement for Purchase of Solar Field pursuant to 1 VSA § 313 (1)(F)**
31

32 Lee asked for a motion to enter executive session to discuss negotiation of purchase and sale
33 agreement for purchase of solar field pursuant to 1 VSA § 313(1)(F) and invite Julie in and Tim
34 moved. Julie had been asked to give an update as to why there were so many executive sessions.
35 When they started the discussions regarding the purchase and sales agreement, they learned
36 several months in that the asset had been sold and that's why they are negotiating with someone
37 new, which has taken some time to get all the right players to the table for discussion. They are
38 learning more about the asset and some of that information is restricted and not public and part
39 of what's taking so much time. Shawn thought it was weird that they sold it while in negotiations
40 and Julie said they didn't have a signed purchase and sales agreement, so it was legal, though not
41 kind. Arne said it would make a great story when it was all behind them. Shawn was looking
42 forward to it being put out there. Arianna seconded Tim's motion. The motion carried
43 unanimously.

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45 (Executive session entered at 7:42 p.m.)
46

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

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(Executive session exited at 7:59 p.m.)

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Agenda Item 11, Executive Session: Town Manager Review

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7 Motion to enter executive session for the purpose of completing the Town Manager review was
8 made by Arianna and seconded by Tim. The motion carried.

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(Executive session entered at 7:59 p.m.)

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12 Motion to exit executive session was made by Tim and seconded by Peter. The motion carried.

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(Executive session exited at 8:50 p.m.)

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16

Agenda Item 12, Adjourn

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18 Arne moved to adjourn, and Tim seconded the motion. The motion carried and the meeting was
19 adjourned at 8:51 p.m.