TOWN OF CHESTER
HOUSING COMMISSION
January 20, 2026, Minutes

Commission Members Present: Hugh Quinn, Julie Hance, Lauren Fierman, Caroline Morgan, Sharon Baker, Joe Karl, Bryan Santiago, Courtlandt Pennell, and Jason Rasmussen at Town Hall; Preston Bristow by Zoom.

Visitors Present: Peter Hudkins at Town Hall.

Call to Order

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

Agenda Item 1, Approve Minutes from the Previous Meeting.

Hugh moved and Lauren seconded a motion to approve the November 18, 2025, minutes. The minutes were approved, as written.

Agenda Item 2, Citizen Comments

Joe noted that they invite citizens to join them and they can also submit comments by email. There were no comments.

Agenda Item 3, Local Option Tax Discussion

Julie informed them the Select Board had approved adding the local option tax to the Town Warning. It will be a floor vote and not an Australian ballot vote, so whoever is in the room at Town Meeting will decide. Julie suggested they encourage people to attend. She expected the Select Board to sign the Town Warning the following evening. Town Meeting is Monday, March 2nd. If it is approved, it will take a couple of quarters before it takes effect. A 1% tax would be applied to rooms, meals, and consumed alcoholic beverages at restaurants. Julie said, on either side, people need to show up and ask their questions. Courtlandt confirmed this was the 1% tax that would help fund housing. Lauren anticipated those who felt strongly against it, may have positive thoughts about it being voted from the floor because it could be easier to shoot it down. Joe said it coincided with legislation passed about adding a tax to sugary drinks. Julie thought there was something in the legislature. Julie thought most who opposed the tax was because they understood the need but saw it as another tax. Julie suggested when the article came up at Town Meeting, that the Housing Commission stand up and support it. She said the Select Board would also be present and one or two of them weren't crazy about it being on the ballot. Julie said a couple of members had asked what the budget of the Housing Commission was so she provided them with a document of expenses that will come up as the commission moves forward and suggested the members refer to it in preparation for questions. Julie suggested a presentation of it before the vote would help inform people. Joe said he could go to the Chester Andover School and ask them if they had any people they were unable to employ because they couldn't find housing. That would go a long way, along with sharing third party stories with those in attendance and explaining there was a true need. Julie agreed. Joe would gather the information

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and encourage them to submit stories and help prepare a presentation with him. Cortlandt asked for an explanation about the local options tax, which Julie explained. Preston thought they should get $60,000 to $70,000 from the tax. Many municipalities have this tax. Lauren suggested they pull information from other towns who have done it and share it so people understand how positive it has been for the towns and most not seeing a downside, including the businesses. Preston said the Chester Telegraph had done an article about it explaining that area towns were not unhappy once they had it and had benefitted from it. Lauren would send the article to Joe. Julie said it showed the number, noting the tax would only be one dollar on a $100 meal. The opposition hasn't been the dollar amount but that it was another tax. Shawn Cunningham found, in talking to businesses in other towns, that it really wasn't that much of a burden. Courtlandt confirmed the article noted the money generated from the tax would be used for housing. Julie added that it was only for 10 years, at which time it would be re-evaluated. Julie said a lot of towns use their local options tax to buy down their budget. Preston said within the quarter the tax is passed, they input it in the system and payment isn't received until the following quarter. Preston thought it would begin assessing in June and they would get their first check in October. Hugh said, as a consumer, he's never made a decision about where he's going to eat or stay based on the tax and assumed most people were the same way. Caroline didn't think it would make much of a difference but said there was a state tax for some lodging and Julie said short-term rentals will get hit with it and thought there were a couple of people from that group against it. Joe saw them being progressive and noted there were towns asleep at the wheel choosing not to have the tax and realizing 8 or 10 years later that they should. Joe appreciated the town and committee being forward-thinking trying to fix the problem. Caroline noted that netting $60,000 yearly was a lot and Lauren agreed. Julie said that amount in addition to $25,000 or $30,000 from the short-term rental fee would give them $90,000 to $100,000 to work with.

Agenda Item 4, Low Income Housing Tax Credit Update

Preston said that Peter had brought up numbers, verbally, and they thought they should come up with some actual numbers. Low-income is based on the income of the county. Preston said some parts of the country have higher income that's low. The average income in the county, per census data, is low. Preston said Peter was right to raise it and it's a true problem. Teachers, policemen, and road crew members may start out too high to get into the program. Preston said once you get in, the benefits are less and less. Preston added that a lot of projects have a blend of income sources so they can use federal tax credits for parts of it. Preston noted the new buzzword was accessible housing if they preferred that over affordable housing. The definition of accessible housing is the gap between market rate housing and the federal government's definition of low-income housing. Preston put senior housing at the bottom. For federal tax credits, it's the same low-income housing formula. Many seniors love to downsize and move into senior housing but they have pensions and retirement funds and other investments that make them ineligible for federal tax credits. Preston thought the exercise was a reality check of what they have to deal with. Caroline wondered without the tax credit if it would be less appealing for a developer. Jason thought developers, like the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, apply knowing what the strings attached are. Jason thought a lot of private developers probably aren't accessing the tax credits. Lauren thought 80% of the occupants needing to fall under the income limits was daunting but 20% at the 50% or 40% or 60% and less didn't feel as impossible. Lauren said they are their local numbers and what people are earning. Though it may feel very low to those earning more, the numbers aren't made up, which means there are a significant number of people

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who qualify and need a place to live. Preston thought people working at many businesses in town would qualify. Preston noted they felt awkward creating the budget because it was somewhat pulled out of the air but they did put in a line of $30,000 for a real estate development consultant because they need help with it. Hugh and Preston met with Skye Morse and Bob Stevens of M&S Development in Brattleboro, who do this kind of thing, and they had a pleasant conversation. They said it would cost $35,000, which is what they were thinking. The local options tax would enable them to hire this kind of help. Hugh said they could look at it and either be encouraged or discouraged. One thing they could take from it was housing following this sort of model, and a certain percentage of the housing had to meet these income limits and the rest of the housing is market rate, the outcome wouldn't be a big Section 8 apartment building. That would help the people worrying about it because it wasn't going to happen. Peter said it was called institutional credit so they would need to be a bank to get it and it was more difficult for a local developer who was building 4 units. Preston said Peter was right but M&T, locally, was happy to be their institutional partner but it would need to be bigger than four units.

Agenda Item 5, Market Study

Julie said they thought they could get 50% of their market study paid for so they weren't talking about a big dollar amount. Julie found there are a couple different types of market studies and they had been focusing on one kind but Hannah talked about another type of study. Julie asked the commission what type of a market study they thought they wanted. Caroline said Hannah had mentioned having a specific one and Julie said they need something very specific to Chester. Developers will need that for certain types of funding. To Courtlandt's point several months ago, if they're going to build it, they need to know that there's a demand for it. It needs to be Chester-specific and not region-specific. Lauren confirmed with Julie that if they're certain it's the type of project they want, they do a market study to make sure it's going to work. Lauren felt they hadn't settled on what type of project they wanted and if they hadn't, she wasn't sure how the first type of study would benefit them unless they were prepared to say that's what they wanted. Lauren noted others may feel differently but she wasn't sure. Preston and Julie were thinking the first option was their only option and if they got the market study on the first project and ended up doing a smaller project, but she wasn't sure. Courtlandt agreed but said they were in a unique position where they secured a funding source and if a market study could tell them what they needed, they could do some unique things and felt they had a lot of options with no understanding of what they needed to do. Julie asked Jason if he had seen the other studies Hannah referred to and he had not. Jason said if Windham & Windsor Housing Trust was going to do a project, Chester would need to do an appraisal before they would buy it and they would need a market study for financing for that specific project. Jason said West Windsor just did a market study for a specific project and it was $6,000. The study should inform what type of units make sense for the area and site and Jason thought it would give them enough information and was worth doing and would help. Jason suggested they pick a property the town owns and the study would inform them what was doable there. Preston said Gus Seeley with the Vermont Conservation Board said the same thing, which was pick your biggest project that the town owns, being the town water tank property, and the market study would be comprehensive enough to cover other things they wanted to do. Julie had sent out standards from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency who are happy to advise them and Preston suggested they contact them. Joe wondered what the cost difference between the two was and Julie didn't know. The first option

was around $8,000 and 50% would be paid by the grant. Hugh said M&S was a real estate development consulting firm and the market study would be included in their service for $30,000. Hugh said they were going to provide a proposal that would show what they would do for that fee. Hugh said they do the project based rather than the town based. Hugh was impressed by M&S and said they weren't a group that would do something and pass it off to Windham & Windsor. They are the real estate development part of the pipeline. They are looking to find projects in Vermont that they can develop market rate senior housing, such as 55 and older housing where they can live comfortably and don't have to maintain, which encourages them to move out of their bigger homes and free them up for families. Hugh thought a senior could sell their house and invest the money and the interest earned may be able to pay their rent without disturbing the principal. If someone is unable to manage their house, they could sell it and have a really nice place that would need to be eaten into to support a rental. Joe asked if M&S could do smaller to larger projects and Hugh wasn't sure. Hugh said they talked mostly about stage one which included hiring them to do the initial consulting work and what they would do and how much it would cost. Hugh thought they would find the developer, own the project and property and then rent it. Hugh didn't think they did housing for people to buy, but rather to rent. Preston asked them what their relationship was with Windham and Windsor and he said they were colleagues and had worked together. Preston thought because Windham and Windsor is the state's delegated contractual agent for the area, to get federal tax credits, you need to work with them and M&S said that wasn't true and that they had done federal tax credits and it was a competitive program and based on the best financials. Preston was still a little unsure whether they would be the developer or whether they would seek a developer. Peter Hudkins said Chester would bring in a property and pay M&S enough to see if the market study and engineering worked and then M&S would become the construction managers and take a slice of the construction and work from there. Peter said it was a typical model but if it was a losing project and wouldn't work or be too expensive, M&S would not be interested. Hugh said the town could burn $30,000, which is M&S's stage one, to find out it was a loser and Peter agreed. Julie said that was what was necessary to find out. Peter said they could also pick one that would win. Bryan said when he was speaking to people at the Fall Festival, mostly what he heard was people who had large homes they couldn't keep up with but didn't want to leave Chester and wanted smaller dwellings here. Hugh said that was what M&S was talking about. Courtlandt said more than once they had mentioned affordability and seniors and the tax credits. Currently the town has senior housing and Pleasantbrook, which was market rate, and he wondered what the need was. If they both had large waiting lists, that put it in another category for him. Coutlandt wondered if they could find that information out and felt the population was small enough in Chester that they should be able to identify the 114 people who need housing. Joe had already reached out to them and they didn't want to offer the information. Courtlandt offered to also reach out. Lauren said several years ago her mother-in-law got on the waiting list and they had told her it could be anywhere from 3 to 9 months depending on when someone left. They were lucky and something opened up within 8 weeks. Lauren has heard from others that they have waited 3 to 6 months. Lauren said they weren't willing to share and Courtlandt wondered what the downside was to sharing and asked who managed Pleasantbrook and it was SK Management. Joe thought the reason they didn't want to share information was because they viewed them as competitors. Julie said the closest place her mother could find when she was looking was in Rutland and the waiting list was 2 ½ years. Some people go on a waiting list for market rate housing early because of the long wait. Julie noted the amount of money made for subsidized

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housing was really low. Bryan noted that Valley Village in Townshend had quite a waiting list. Joe said Chester has 36 units for senior housing. Joe sent an email in October introducing himself, asking how long the waiting list was, the normal length of stay, if they were all one-bedroom units, if there was a demand for larger units, and how often units become available. Their reply was that Chester Apartments is their senior housing for 62 or older or disabled of any age; all units are one-bedroom; waitlist, at this time, is 6 months to a year; they have income guidelines they must follow; leases are one year; 30-day notice to vacate, so they don't know vacancies until received. They offered to send a brochure and application for reference. It was a good response. Jason thought market rate senior housing was a definite need and wasn't sure what other mixes of housing Chester needed. Jason said a market study was necessary to show a developer what was needed. Julie wondered if they wanted to wait for M&S's proposal; they would need to go under contract for $30,000 or $35,000 to move anything along. Lauren said that sounded good to her if they were going to get something that would be useful and thought they would receive enough from the demographic analysis to know what would be useful. Jason wasn't 100% certain but thought they would. Hugh asked Preston what he thought about waiting for M&S to provide them with a proposal and Preston said he would follow-up with them and as a result of this meeting, they are serious about working with them and request a proposal. The others agreed. Hugh said M&S had called it stage one. Peter said they could get a pretty easy proposal because they were looking to become the construction manager and they could show them a project and they will either take it or they won't. Peter thought they would grab right on to the Allard property, because he saw a lot of potential for a multi-phase project. Hugh and Preston had mentioned White and Burke to M&S and they said they absolutely were not them and didn't do what they do. Preston said White and Burke are in Burlington and M&S was closer to home. Julie added that White and Burke is one of the most expensive in New England. Peter said they would do the market study and they'll recommend their engineer and their architect and the structure of people builds from there and they're all friends. Sharon understood selling the $400,000 house to get into a senior rental but selling the big house doesn't help the young people find a place in town, unless it's someone who's in their first home and they want to move to a bigger house and then their house is sold to a first-time buyer. Hugh agreed. Joe said the biggest issue with real estate is the cost to renovate. And a house that's $350,000 requires renovations which often requires another $150,000. Hugh thought most people don't have the skills to move into a house and fix it up themselves and Joe agreed. Joe was bothered by people who over the past 5 or 6 years bought homes and not put much money into them and turned around and sold them for double or more. Joe said younger people are getting into the trades but that trend is slow-starting. Caroline added that two incomes were required to afford it. And if they are unable to fix it up themselves, it's difficult to find people who can. Joe said they wouldn't be able to solve the larger problems but considered advocating for a flip tax for people who flip houses and make money. Lauren appreciated the comment because when she was in the school system, there were at least a dozen people who wanted to accept a job but had to turn it down because there was no place to live. People who had enough income to be able to buy a $350,000 to $400,000 house moved here. Individuals just starting out or who were single or new teachers would accept a job offer but then back out because there was nowhere to rent or buy affordably. Lauren thought things had changed a little and people in the past two years have been able to find a place to rent within 15 minutes of Chester. Joe has been working with a man in Ludlow for a non-profit who finds homes for $250,000 to $275,000 and they're not suitable. Courtlant said there are 5 rental units in the Readex house and it's empty. Lauren asked if it was still for sale

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and Courtlandt said it was. Courtlandt said they were rentable and it wasn't a super heavy lift. Sharon said the apartment above the Masonic Temple which is a 3 bedroom and one and a half baths is going for $2,200 per month plus utilities. Courtlandt said that was a $450,000 mortgage. Jason said White River rents are the same as what his daughter pays in San Diego. Lauren agreed the rent in Chester was the same as high market limits. Caroline said if a place becomes available, you don't have the option of waiting. They will contact M&S and get their proposal for the next meeting. Courtlandt will contact the senior housing and Pleasantbrook.

Agenda Item 6, Board Member Tasks/Old Business

- Joe had reached out to Evernorth of Burlington who replied and pointed him to Peter Paggy, who hadn't replied. Penrose is looking for bigger projects.
- Jason hadn't followed up with Jonah Richards, but had connected with Kevin Purcell, who didn't think he would do a project in Chester but offered to speak with them and help them out. Joe said Jonah worked on smaller units around Lebanon. Jason said he did nice, smaller projects. They will try to get him to attend the next meeting.
- Peter had attempted to contact the person who won the sleigh ride and they had disappeared.
- Sharon had collected $49.01 in her shop for the Housing Commission trust fund.
- Caroline spoke to a guy with Up End This in Barre. He constructs smaller units and the units start at 480 square feet for $105,000. Caroline said he was very informative and is happy to speak to the commission. Caroline said the units were attractive and built for Vermont, and insulated well. Joe said, nationwide, there are pop-up homes all over the place and some are more established than others. It could be viable. Hugh questioned what smaller was defined as. Hugh said at one time, a 1,200 square foot ranch was enough for a family of four. Caroline said it is 1,300 square feet for $287,000. It's wired and complete, like a mobile home, but the site needs to be prepped. There are smaller ones. Jason said they were good. If they were ready to move forward now, the house could be up in 6 months but Caroline wasn't sure that would be the same once he got busy. Caroline said the time and trying to connect made these appealing and there was one in Claremont but this guy was close and could partner with a developer.

Agenda Item 7, New Business/Next Agenda

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- Joe said they've been focused on raw land but, as a committee, they had a responsibility to educate people about accessory dwelling units. Joe said they should spend some time at the next meeting about ideas to make that part of their next agenda. Lauren said it would benefit people understanding the cost. Joe suggested a road map explaining how their property could qualify for an accessory dwelling unit. Bryan would reach out to someone he knows who has a similar business. Joe wondered how, as a town, they educate people to accessory dwelling units but rent to someone full-time. Caroline said that was the incentive for loan forgiveness by renting to someone for 5 years under market value. Caroline said there was a risk to rent and Vermont wasn't supportive and there was always the story of a terrible tenant. Jason suggested having examples of costs of ADUs from different companies available to people and the town creating seed money

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to incentivize people to stop having short-term rentals. Caroline said they could talk about tiny houses as an option.

- Courtlandt asked who owned the armory and Julie said J&L Metrology of Springfield did. They had intended to move their operations here but something happened and they didn't move the business and use the building for storage.

Agenda Item 8, Adjourn

Joe asked for a motion to adjourn and Lauren moved and Jason seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

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