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**TOWN OF CHESTER
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
May 13, 2026, Minutes
DRAFT MINUTES**

Commission Members Present: Bob Flint, Bryan Santiago, Damon Tyler, Preston Bristow and Julie Hance at Town Hall; Carl Henshaw via Zoom. Absent: Phil Perlah

Visitors Present: Barre Pinske and Mark (no last name) at Town Hall.

Call to Order

Preston Bristow called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Agenda Item 1, Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting (March 25, 2026)

Bob moved and Brian seconded a motion to approve the minutes. The motion carried, unanimously, and the minutes were approved.

Agenda Item 2, Citizens Comments

Barre Pinske mentioned a regional comedy showcase in Bellows Falls and added that the comedy show at his place is doing well. Barre noted Arne Jonynas of the Select Board, and the DRB Chair, and Mark attended. Comics from almost every state were around and 20 comics were coming to the Bellows Falls Opera House. Barre said arts and culture were starting to work and that Evan had not put his name on anything he was doing. The Bellows Falls show is next Thursday at seven o'clock.

Agenda Item 3, Review and Approve Economic Development Surveys / Website

Preston noted the purpose of the special meeting was to review and approve economic development surveys and websites. Damon has been working on it but their .gov domain has been problematic.

Damon gave a presentation. Changes to the website should be easy because they're using AI. The website had a picture of Chester which was well received. Damon will use the AI transcription to determine what everyone's feedback is. Feedback can be given once the website pages go public. There was no feedback on the home page that he presented. The surveys' page was shown and Damon discussed creating QR codes for the surveys. Questions and language could be changed. Julie asked about the pre-selected answers in three of the surveys: the Young Family, The Farmers, and the Senior Resident surveys. Damon would ask AI to make sure the survey answers aren't pre-selected. Regarding titles, Bob wasn't sure everyone would know what residence leakage was and also questioned vacation visitors and suggested clarifying the survey titles to more clearly represent what they're covering. Damon said the Resident Leakage Survey was regarding what Chester didn't have and why they left. Carl suggested calling it "What are we missing?" The others liked that and Damon would make the change. Barre said part of the

47 problem is people will travel to Claremont for shopping because there's no sales tax. Barre told
48 an anecdotal story about a shopper leaving a Chester business and going to New Hampshire to
49 buy the item because the business was unable to remove sales tax. They talked about profit
50 margins in the context of chainsaws and four-wheelers. Bob referenced retail category studies
51 comparing Vermont to New Hampshire indicating the results favor New Hampshire. Barre
52 thought this supported his argument for artisans being able to offer something unique. For the
53 Vacation Visitors survey, which is for people who have visited Chester, Damon said businesses
54 could offer QR codes asking shoppers to provide feedback. Julie suggested "Visitor Experience"
55 which the others liked and Damon would change the title. Mark asked if Vermont offered periods
56 of time when things could be purchased tax-free and Bob wasn't aware of Vermont doing that.
57 Julie noted she and Phil had wondered about the Property Owners survey--specifically, the
58 purpose of the first question. Damon said AI made this survey and it consisted of a single
59 question. Damon suggested getting rid of the Property Owner survey until they can form their
60 own list of questions. Bryan suggested everyone complete one survey and provide feedback
61 rather than all of them doing all the surveys. Carl suggested they set aside surveys they feel need
62 work and assign them at the end of the meeting. Carl preferred multiple eyes because it
63 generated ideas. Preston worried about surveys being too long, but this survey was too short.
64 Julie agreed and thought the question felt odd; the rest of the surveys she liked. Damon said the
65 survey actually consisted of multiple questions and then read them. Damon suggested adding a
66 question about what attracted property owners to Chester. Preston suggested removing trail
67 development as an option for what attracted people to Chester and suggested zoning regulations,
68 Act 250, or something similar instead. Carl suggested adding an option to fill in your own
69 answer to the question of what would raise your property value. Bob pointed out that the
70 question dealt with reasons to invest money into your property, not what would raise the property
71 value. Damon said they would remove it for now and add a question about what they love about
72 Chester and what brought them here. They would also add a question about how long they have
73 lived in Chester and how often they visit their property. There were no objections with the
74 Missions page. Damon asked about objectives. Barre said when he thinks about cultural hurdles,
75 he thought fear of property taxes increasing was one and wondered if it was a legitimate concern.
76 Julie said most everyone was concerned. Barre was concerned about people on fixed incomes.
77 Preston said it was a question they could ask but there wasn't much they could do. Julie said the
78 economic development side was growing the town which didn't mean they were growing the
79 expenses, but the grand list, and business structure. With more housing, Barre said the value of
80 housing would be able to stay. Julie said they may be objectives, goals, or missions. Damon said
81 they could add a question that asked what they were most worried about regarding their property
82 in Chester. Carl wanted a question about welcoming an opportunity to downsize to be able to
83 stay in Chester. Julie said it was a good question the Housing Commission could gain a lot from.
84 Preston could relate and said there was no simple way to downsize. Carl noted most people
85 would want to stay in their community if it was an option. The others agreed and the availability
86 of senior housing was a concern. Downsizing to a condo could be more expensive than their
87 current homes. Bob said for what they were doing now, the wording was fine. Julie wondered if
88 info@chester.gov was an actual address and would confirm it with Amie. Because it is a town
89 website, Bob wondered if any non-discriminatory language needed to be at the bottom of every
90 page. Julie wasn't aware it was required. Damon noted there was nothing in the terms of service
91 or privacy policy and suggested asking about a generic privacy policy in terms of service. Julie
92 noted that nothing in municipal government, for the most part, was private. Except for minor

93 changes, everyone was okay with the first version. Damon said there weren't a lot of town
94 photographs so he would start taking some. Julie noted Samantha and Amie had started a
95 database of town photos and would connect with them. Carl had Googled the info email and said
96 Google didn't recognize it but there was a URL to contact Chester, so they could use that. Bob
97 would provide Julie with a generic photo release form. Carl wondered if they had a list where
98 people worked. Carl said they needed to tap into groups such as seniors, people who live and
99 work in Chester but aren't really engaged in the community, and young people. Bryan wondered
100 if they would have a print marketing campaign with QR codes to direct them to the surveys and
101 Julie thought they should. Bryan suggested having fun and encouraging language and making it
102 exciting. Carl wanted a little iconography about people who actually participated to incentivize
103 others and complimented Damon for the work he had done with the website. Damon said they
104 took the site on his personal account and moved it to a town-owned site. Damon wondered what
105 parts of the site they wanted to adopt and move forward with, such as Business Directory and
106 Activity Calendar. Bryan thought a virtual map would be helpful and Damon suggested
107 embedding Google maps. They also agreed that keeping an activity calendar current is a huge
108 task.

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Agenda Item 4, New Business/Next Agenda (May 27, 2026)

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112 Barre had done Evan Parks' radio show on Friday and Evan had a complete list of everything
113 going on which he researched himself; Barre was impressed. Barre thought Gary Coger also did
114 a radio show. Bryan said the people who don't want the town to change and grow because they're
115 worried about property taxes seem to be the same people that are complaining things are closed
116 and he didn't know how to put them together.

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118 Bryan also wondered how people could have so much junk in their yards. Preston said Chester
119 has a junk ordinance but they haven't been very successful and Vermont has said the courts aren't
120 the format to enforce what doesn't look good. Enforcement can't be based on aesthetics but
121 rather safety, health, or the fact they are experiencing financial gain by buying or selling salvage.
122 Vermont does not allow for more than three unregistered vehicles on a property but only one
123 state employee is responsible for enforcing that for the entire state and they have been to Chester
124 a few times. Julie said the only ones, in her time working for the town, which they have been
125 able to clean up have taken years. Preston has spoken to people in Springfield, who have had
126 actions thrown out by the court repeatedly and have come to the conclusion that they're wasting
127 time. Bryan found it humorous that many of them have no trespassing signs up. Julie said there
128 are two properties, on Routes 10 and 11, that they are going after but would take a long time.
129 Bryan said when people come from out of town, they notice it and it affects their perception of
130 Chester. Preston has asked people to clean up their properties but many don't want to part with
131 the junk. Barre thought it was cultural or mental illness, and thought hoarding was part of the
132 culture. Julie said the challenge was they didn't have the support of the state or the laws. Preston
133 said the League has talked about coming out with a new junk ordinance that may be more
134 enforceable but hasn't seen it. They needed to show some level of growth and prosperity because
135 that would help everyone. They discussed change happening, which was inevitable, and they
136 needed to plan it. Carl thought there was an argument for if they don't change, it would mean
137 higher taxes. Barre noted he had been in Chester for 20 years and had junk in his yard and

138 thought they were up against fear and making people feel valued was important and it was all
139 cultural.

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141 Julie wanted the business directory to be the next piece. They would discuss at the next meeting
142 how they're going to let people know about the survey.

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Agenda Item 5, Adjourn

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146 Bob moved to adjourn and Julie seconded the motion. A vote was taken and passed,
147 unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.