

1 **TOWN OF CHESTER**
2 **PLANNING COMMISSION**
3 **May 16, 2022, Draft Minutes**

4 **Commission Members Present:** Peter Hudkins, Barre Pinske, and Cathy Hasbrouck at Town Hall;
5 and Tim Roper and Hugh Quinn via Zoom.

6 **Staff Present:** Preston Bristow, Zoning Administrator at Town Hall; and Susan Bailey, Secretary,
7 via Zoom.

8 **Citizens Present:** Arne Jonynas, Chester Telegraph, and Jason Rasmussen via Zoom and Steve
9 Mancuso and Bill Lindsay at Town Hall.

10 **Call to Order**

11 Chair Hugh Quinn called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m. which was later than scheduled due to
12 technical difficulties.

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14 **Decisions Made:**

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16 They agreed to the approach Jason documented and reviewed in the meeting with the following
17 updates:

- 18 • Workshop #1 tentatively scheduled for the 6/20 Planning Commission meeting.
- 19 • Move Workshop #3 ahead of Workshop #2.
- 20 • Explore options for how best to do outreach and education.

21
22 **Action Items:**

- 23 • Jason to follow up with Londonderry on how they collect community feedback
24 on Planning Commission related topics.
- 25 • Hugh to follow up with Amie to see about feedback options from the town
26 website.

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28 **Agenda Item 1, Add or Delete Items on the Agenda, if necessary.**

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30 Hugh moved to change the agenda to only include items 3 and 4. Tim seconded Hugh's motion.
31 A vote was taken, and it passed unanimously.

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33 **Agenda Item 3, Citizens Comments**

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35 Hugh asked for comments and there were none.

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37 **Agenda Item 4, Bylaw Modernization Next Steps.**

38 Hugh turned the meeting over to Jason Rasmussen.

39 Jason had given the members a 3-page draft document which was based on what was in the grant
40 application as well as material so they could discuss their approach and the timeline.

41 He began with a rough timeline. The town received a grant through the state from the Agency of
42 Commerce and Community Development. They have through January of 2024 to get the grant

1 work done. The grant states zoning adoption would occur in that timeframe. Jason said this was
2 the kickoff meeting so they would have a basic gameplan. They were supposed to have 4
3 workshops. He wanted to know their thoughts on that and when they should take place. He
4 mentioned having one per month over the next 4 months while continuing to work on zoning at
5 the same time, if possible. Between May and September of 2023 would be reasonable to prepare
6 drafts in that timeframe. Towards the end of the grant cycle, they would need to get serious about
7 adoption, though it could be done incrementally. He asked for any questions regarding the timeline.

8 Although it was an aggressive timeline, Hugh was in favor of doing it parallel with the workshops
9 but at the same time, not waiting for the workshops to be finished to start the bylaw work.
10 Workshops can be tricky, involve coordination, involvement, and can take time. To the extent they
11 could do it and press ahead with some of the bylaw updates at the same time, he was in favor of it.

12 Jason responded they could revisit it in a minute or two, but he wanted to walk through some other
13 stuff and see if they were on the right track. In talking with a couple folks, he thought they would
14 do an incremental adoption approach. The plus side to that approach is they would be breaking it
15 into smaller more understandable chunks. The downside to it is they would go through more
16 hearings and steps but thought it was a good way to go. The Village Green District was under
17 review now and the legacy use/adaptive reuse was next. He thought they may take a similar thing
18 and look through general use standards first and get that adopted and then move on to review
19 procedures and then look at the Village Center District and work their way out from the center of
20 town. Jason asked if the incremental adoption approach worked for everyone and if there were any
21 concerns with it.

22 Peter liked it. He asked Jason if he would make the workshops incremental with each section they
23 were working on. Jason said they should discuss it. The workshops aren't for the Village Center
24 and another one for the rural areas and wasn't like that. Peter said it was for general standards.

25 Jason said they could tailor things if they wanted but he wanted to talk more about the workshops
26 he thought the grant was envisioning. Jason's understanding of the workshops is that they were
27 more general town wide topics. He asked for any other thoughts regarding the incremental idea.

28 Tim's only concern was the time factor. Hugh pointed out it was an aggressive timeline. They
29 would need to stay focused and agree it was worth sticking to in trying to drive it through under
30 the guidelines of the grant. Jason said it was on them to manage it, so it worked. Jason said the
31 grant was geared more specifically to housing, but they could do other related things, and more
32 specific to walkable Village Center areas. It was not necessarily geared for the rural parts of town,
33 but they wanted to get it all done. He suggested giving it a shot even though it was a tight timeline.

34 Jason wanted to talk about education and outreach under Task 1 towards the bottom of the first
35 page. He said there were four workshops, and he could talk more about each one, but they were
36 thinking they would be no longer than 1 ½ hours as people start to lose their focus after that. The
37 first half hour would be a presentation and the rest would include conversation and dialogue and
38 trying to get input. The thought was to present educational materials to get people thinking and
39 then tease out of that conversation where there are principles or ideas for where Chester wants to
40 go with those things in mind. At the end of each of the four workshops, they would come up with
41 a summary to guide their work for the remaining period for the grant.

42 Jason said the first one would involve looking at the town plan, the Main Street Master Plan, the
43 Zoning for Great Neighborhoods document, and other things that are out there. Jason added

1 including the zoning audit that was done several years ago or for lack of a better term, Brandy's
2 Draft, and including water/sewer infrastructure. He said they should look at all of that and compare
3 maps and at the end of the workshop, discuss how they want to make changes based on everything.

4 Jason addressed workshop number two. The Keys to the Valley project was a housing study done
5 by three regional planning commissions in New Hampshire and Vermont which looked at housing
6 needs. They look at the findings from that report and try to update it with newer data and talk
7 specifically about what Chester needs for housing. And then what is necessary in zoning to help.

8 Got the third workshop, they hoped to get the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust to meet with
9 them and discuss what they see as housing needs and trends and what are the regulatory barriers.
10 Years ago, Jason had been told by the Rockingham Community Land Trust that Chester Zoning
11 didn't allow for enough density to allow projects to work financially. He thought hearing from
12 them would help them to consider zoning changes.

13 The final workshop would be to get realtors and builders and those sorts to a meeting and tell the
14 Commission what their thoughts are on these topics.

15 Hugh said when he looked at the workshops, there had been a lot of work done by previous
16 planning commissions, the zoning audit, and the work Brandy had done which was now two or
17 three years old and things are changing so for him pulling that information forward to see what
18 still applies and refreshing it with some of the new things that have come out in the last year or so
19 made a lot of sense. He asked Tim where he thought the survey, he was envisioning, fit in to
20 provide another angle of input to the work they would do.

21 Tim thought it was a great question and he hadn't thought about how it could mesh in with this.
22 He had the 2008 survey and had started drafting a new one with an eye toward getting it approved
23 by the full Planning Commission and out into the community as quickly as possible so they can
24 use the feedback. He asked Jason how it meshed.

25 Jason thought it could mesh and could be one of the pieces of information they analyze. One area
26 of concern he had was with workshops 3 and 4. Some of the folks are busy and he wondered
27 whether the survey could be used to get input from realtors, builders, the housing trust, or other
28 folks like that. He thought if they couldn't come to the workshops, the Commission could try
29 something else. He thought the survey would be good information to learn what people think about
30 housing and how it would work in Chester.

31 Tim thought it would also help them streamline what they do in fashions that will allow the process
32 to move more quickly if people are on board with what they are doing publicly and hopefully it
33 would go through the hearings and Selectboard process more smoothly.

34 Jason wanted to start doing one a month beginning in June. He asked if that sounded good, or if
35 there were any objections.

36 Hugh thought the first workshop could be heavy which meant there would be a lot to unpack,
37 including looking at the town plan, the Master Plan, the future land maps and trying to reconcile a
38 lot of information that would be the basis for how they decide to look at the bylaws. He felt when
39 he considered workshops one through four, that one was the heavyweight and the others, maybe
40 not so much. He wanted Jason's feedback if that was true, and if so, and it turns out an hour and a
41 half and they still have more to do, he didn't want the structure of the workshop to prevent them
42 from doing the necessary work.

1 Cathy asked if they wanted to give individual commission members one the documents to focus
2 on before the meeting. Jason liked the idea and thought it was interesting. Cathy said they were all
3 important and the zoning audit had a lot of stuff in it, and it pointed out stuff that may have already
4 shifted but it was looking at the current bylaws and suggesting modifications. She suggested there
5 be one member who studies it intensely and can help speak to it when it comes up in the rotation,
6 it may help. Jason thought it was a good suggestion.

7 Jason asked how they felt about the order of the workshops. He wondered if some of the housing
8 data being first would help. He said they could shift things around if it helped.

9 Peter said he had never seen The Keys to the Valley documentation. Cathy said it was online. Peter
10 said he was sure it was, but it was the first he had heard about it. Peter had heard being on both the
11 DRB and the Zoning Board, that for the Windham County Trust and the Rockingham Land Trust
12 density always an issue with them. They were unable to make a project big enough to make it
13 work. Peter thought they could combine workshops 2 and 3. Cathy thought they could put 3 before
14 2 if they had information about what doesn't work now. Peter agreed. She said they could look at
15 what doesn't work now and then look at the data in The Keys to the Valley and make clearer what
16 kinds of housing they should try to accommodate.

17 Jason thought it sounded like number 1 would remain number 1. He said he needed to talk to the
18 housing folks to make sure they were available. He thought number 3 should come next so it would
19 be the new number 2 followed up by The Keys to the Valley. He asked if he was capturing that
20 correctly and Peter, Cathy, and Hugh all agreed he was.

21 Jason asked if there was anything else on the workshops. He thought Hugh's point was good to try
22 the first one and see how it went. It is loaded so an hour and a half could be tight but thought they
23 should try it.

24 Barre asked if there was much town housing goals in the plan and what the reference was. Cathy
25 said Chapter 6 was housing. Barre asked when they had done it. He thought it was a long time ago.
26 Cathy agreed. Barre said basically they were reviewing it to try to update it and make it more
27 relevant to what is going on now to solve these problems. He was looking as using the workshop
28 more as a reference moving forward but it was more to update that.

29 Jason thought they would be looking at the existing documents: the Town Plan and the Master
30 Plan and all of that and what it says about zoning. Because the grant is focused on housing, they
31 would look at it, including what the land use chapter says about housing and zoning and what the
32 housing chapter says, etc. He said it would be like a literature review to see what everything was
33 saying they should consider. Then they could talk and decide together what they want to focus on.

34 Peter thought the hard part of it was the housing part of the Town Plan had been done 15 years ago
35 or longer. Cathy and he had talked about it and possibly with Jason when they were doing the
36 Village Green. He thought it would be tough to use the data in there because it was so out of date.

37 Jason thought it was less about that kind of information but more about what they want to happen
38 in this part of town. He thought they needed to determine what the policies are that the town has.
39 He agreed with Peter that it may be a little dated and they would need to look at Zoning for Great
40 Neighborhoods and some of this newer information about how to go about doing it in the modern
41 context. He didn't want to dwell on old stuff in the plan, but the zoning does need to be in
42 conformance with the town plan, so it was part of the exercise.

43 Hugh agreed and when he thought about how to break the problem down, at a minimum, whether

1 the town plan is right or wrong, the zoning needs to align to it. There are a certain number of gaps
2 and things that need to be fixed for everything to be whole. They needed to make sure the work
3 got done. He thought it was possible there was something in the Town Plan that needed to be
4 changed based on everything that has happened recently, but he didn't want to take on a rewrite of
5 the Town Plan while they do the realignment. He wanted to get the realignment done, get the
6 bylaws to align to the Town Plan. And if they identify things that are an area of weakness in the
7 Town Plan, it will need to be another turn of the crank to figure out how to fix it. It was his opinion
8 and he welcomed others points of views.

9 Jason thought it was good advice and they needed to focus on zoning. Jason had found something
10 in the Town Plan that he suggested they work on and keep a running list of those things. He asked
11 if there was anything else before they continued, and Hugh said it looked good to him.

12 Jason said the nuts and bolts of it were under Task #2 where they were drafting zoning updates.
13 They talked about doing it incrementally which he thought was clear. One question he had was
14 regarding outreach to affected neighborhoods. Jason thought if they started with general use
15 standards, it was town wide. The idea was once they got to the Village Center District; they were
16 considering changes there. He thought it sounded like they wanted to reach out to people in the
17 Village District and let them know what they were thinking. He asked if that sounded like a good
18 idea and thoughts on how best to do it.

19 Peter thought two years ago they had done the Stone Village which included a meeting at the
20 Pinnacle with just that district. It was great to hear what they wanted and didn't want. He realized
21 it would take a lot of meetings if it were done by district, but the feedback was good. Jason thought
22 it was worth doing and asked if everyone agreed.

23 Tim thought they should consider, if possible, to include all the outreach methods Jason had
24 included. He thought face to face meetings with homeowners and residents were terrific and the
25 more they could get, the better. He thought they miss a lot of people if they just rely on that.

26 Jason asked if he was saying all the outreach they were considering, which included: flyers, posting
27 drafts on the website, media, and front porch forum. Tim thought as much as they could pull off,
28 they should try to. Having a website that is kept updated with pertinent information and the ability
29 to leave feedback would be a great tool. Jason asked if it should be the town website or something
30 else. Cathy thought they should put it on the town website with a dedicated page. She didn't think
31 it would be helpful for them to go somewhere else than chestervt.gov. Tim said they didn't need
32 to decide that now, but he found the town website clunky. He wasn't sure what others thought. He
33 thought something more modern looking and intuitive to use and invited feedback would be nice
34 but may just be a pipedream.

35 Hugh thought to the extent they could do as much interaction with the community was great. He
36 had seen some places where you could read the stuff that is relevant to where you live in a way
37 that's understandable, and people could leave comments. He couldn't remember where he saw it
38 and wasn't saying they should have the capability to do everything. For him, the balance was as
39 much community interaction as possible but that can't let the logistics and mechanics of doing it
40 slow the process down to the point where they're not getting any work done because all they're
41 trying to do is figure out how to manage the community feedback channel. Hugh thought they
42 needed to balance that so that they do the best they can to get feedback because if they don't get
43 the feedback now, they will get it later when it goes to the Selectboard. There was no avoiding
44 having the conversation or surfacing the things people are concerned about. It was only whether

1 they were able to do it early or late. If they can do that without making it such a burden that they're
2 not able to move forward he was in favor of it.

3 Jason thought there were four workshops and a bunch of community outreach things. If there are
4 5 or 6 districts that they are doing incrementally, it adds up to a lot of months and meetings devoted
5 to outreach. He thought they may need to think about it a little.

6 Barre said having done a lot of PR over the years, writing up nice little articles with a nice little
7 picture and sending it out there can get a lot of traffic. He thought if they were succinct about it
8 and put it out there, it would be seen. He wasn't worried about it.

9 Tim didn't want to derail the conversation and spend a lot of time on it but thought it was important
10 to him to find practical and useful ways to draw more people into the discussion. He could only
11 see two people in the audience and didn't know who else was there, but he saw Bill Lindsay and
12 Steve Mancuso who are loyal about attendance, interested, and give feedback which was great.
13 But there are 3,000 other people that they rarely hear from. He wanted to hear from more renters
14 because what they were discussing greatly impacts the rental market or the people in that market,
15 as well as landlords. He opined they tend to draw in folks who are either upset about something
16 and come in with a chip on their shoulder, which he understood because it was important, or they
17 get the folks who just feel comfortable enough to stand up to the microphone and share their
18 opinion. He asked how they draw more feedback into it to help guide their work without bogging
19 it down. It was a bit of a conundrum, he thought.

20 Jason said it was tricky. Providing easy access to draft documents is important, so he thought
21 people could access it and read it if they wanted. He thought it would be nice to have the feedback
22 loop and suggested having an article that they were updating the Village Center District and what
23 they thought it should be and asking for comments. He thought they should proactively seek
24 people's input.

25 Hugh said to Tim's point, currently, a lot of their communication is one-way, not allowing for
26 feedback. The only way feedback could happen is attendance at a meeting and in the work they
27 are about to do, is to provide an electronic channel, and not Facebook, but a way for someone in
28 the community to be able to respond in a feedback section on a website. Many people are only
29 comfortable speaking in that forum. Because they don't attend a meeting doesn't mean they don't
30 have passion but rather it may mean they don't have a channel to collect their feedback and, in this
31 day, and age, some kind of electronic channel is almost table stakes, in his opinion. He didn't want
32 to try to solve the problem in this meeting but was on board to try to do something like that to
33 move it forward.

34 Tim asked if it made sense to get that piece defined ahead of doing a lot of work with the workshops
35 and everything else. Tim liked what Jason said about giving people easy access to the draft
36 documents. It may be a simple website with publicity to let people know that it's there and a
37 mechanism for them to post. They could yell at them or love them or whatever, but he wanted as
38 much feedback as they could get. He suggested they may want to delay it a little and get some help
39 in what that would look like and get some expertise in doing that.

40 Barre said he would get in big trouble, but he listens to a lot of leadership-oriented things, not that
41 he was a big fan of TED Talks, and all the stuff he listens to talks about being able to take charge,
42 make things happen, be confident, and make decisions. As an appointed board, he thought it was
43 their job. For employees or peers to have confidence in you, you must come across confidently,

1 knowing what you're doing, and having specific reasons for it. That certainly doesn't preclude
2 outside input and information and all the stuff they were discussing. But he also felt if they were
3 so concerned about the tail of the dog, it's hard for the dog to do what it needs to do. It was a tricky
4 thing because they want to care about people's feelings but if people are busy living their lives and
5 relying on them to be leaders and they are asking how they want to wag the Commission, they are
6 being a little confusing and not so confident nor leadership oriented. He said with Jason having
7 these leadership skills, he tells them what they should do, gives them options, and then tells them
8 they're going to do it his way anyway and then we do it his way, so he knows how to do it.

9 Tim said he didn't disagree with that but there was a lot of balancing that needed to be done. And
10 to Hugh's point, if people don't participate in the process and then they put something before the
11 Selectboard to get town wide approval, and they haven't had any input to it beforehand, then out
12 come the pitchforks and torches. They have already been through that, and he wanted to avoid
13 repeating it if there was a way to.

14 Barre thought if they made a press release it would likely end up in The Chester Telegraph, The
15 Eagle Crimes [sic] and The Vermont Journal. And if it's on their website and in their minutes and
16 so forth it's really their obligation. If it's so important for them to have input, they would need to
17 state that initially in the press release and then deal with the reality of it. If people don't want to
18 attend the meetings and offer input, that's their prerogative. They can't force them to do it. The
19 other thing is it's weird when you're trying to do something of this level of importance and you
20 don't have a room full of people, to him that showed a little side of success to. If you do something
21 and nobody is complaining, maybe you're doing something right. He thought they should have
22 more confidence and not slow down what they're doing to make sure everyone knows what is
23 going on. He thought if they made an honest effort to do it, that was their obligation, and they
24 didn't have to exceed it.

25 Cathy had thoughts about gathering input. The last time she had looked at the Londonderry bylaw
26 project, which was probably three months ago, they had developed a mechanism where they are
27 showing people the bylaw and offering them the ability to comment electronically. Cathy asked
28 Jason if he had seen it. She didn't know if they could steal it or if it was a common application.
29 She never learned how to program on the web, so she wasn't sure of the level of difficulty to set
30 something similar up. It seemed like a good way to gather input. The other successful way to gather
31 input was walk around town and talk with people directly.

32 Jason thought everyone had good thoughts. He had looked at the Londonderry draft documents
33 but didn't recall seeing a commenting tool but would check it out. Cathy said it stated to click here
34 to see the Londonderry bylaw and then showed the document and gave the ability to click here to
35 say what you thought.

36 Barre said there were a million types of forums, and Instagram and Facebook were popular with
37 respect to social media, but they have forms for everything, including chainsaw carving and cars.
38 Cathy said it wasn't a forum but was focused on here's the text of the bylaw and what do you think
39 of this text. Barre said those formats were based on the same type of a website as Facebook or
40 Instagram or any of these types of forums where you put in the copy and then people can comment
41 on it because it works in that way. If they signed up for a forum, like a political forum or something
42 similar which has a format, all that stuff can happen. They don't need to write code for that.

43 Hugh suggested Jason take an action item and follow up on Cathy's feedback about what
44 Londonderry is doing to see what is going on. Hugh was happy to speak with Amie since she runs

1 the town website and ask her if it was possible to post the drafts and allow people to comment to
2 it. She may say it's easy and takes 10 minutes. Hugh thought, at the very least, they should take a
3 little time to see what people were doing, especially if it was the next town over and rob it if they
4 can, if that made sense. And it wouldn't hurt to talk with Amy since it's only a phone call or
5 conversation and then they could follow-up on this outreach topic and see whether they get
6 anything good from it.

7 Jason thought that sounded good and thought they needed to do a good job with it but there was
8 also a lot of work they needed to do. He wanted to make sure they got that good feedback loop but
9 also stayed focused on crafting some zoning they all thought was good.

10 Hugh wasn't a fan of serial anything so nothing should be done in series unless it was a hard
11 dependency. They need to figure out a way to collect community input, but it doesn't have to stop
12 all the work streams while figuring it out. He thought there could be a situation if they got far
13 enough down the road and hadn't figured out a way to collect feedback that it became a problem
14 but that wasn't now, and he didn't want to create artificial dependencies that would slow them
15 down and wait until it became critical that they had to deal with it before they could make
16 meaningful progress. That way they could keep the parallel work streams going to the extent
17 possible.

18 It made sense to Cathy.

19 Steve Mancuso said getting people involved was easy if they realize they personally have a dog in
20 the fight. The document they have is dealing with their future, their businesses, their retirements,
21 their livelihoods, and their quality of life in Chester. He thought when they realize that they will
22 be outspoken and offer some input. The Commission just needs to make them realize it. Steve said
23 they posted the proposed bylaws several times and people couldn't read it because it was extensive
24 legalese, making it difficult to read. Once they start to point out things within it and take the
25 workshops to piece out the proposed bylaws enabling more understanding, they will have more
26 input. Steve said next Monday night there would be a room full of people at the American Legion
27 all with their own dog in the fight. He suggested the Commission come and explain all the good
28 things they were trying to do for business.

29 Hugh thanked Steve.

30 Jason said they may have raised more questions on the outreach than answers. He said they would
31 look at what Londonderry was doing and some of the other options and would come back and talk
32 more about it before any decisions were made and see what worked for the Commission. He said
33 it would be more like going to a community event, especially outside events with COVID. He
34 thought they could see what worked best for them. At a basic level, to make sure there was easy
35 access to the stuff they were working on as they were working through it. And then what was the
36 best way or ways to get people to read it.

37 Jason mentioned deliverables at the end of the document which were reiterating outcomes.
38 Tonight, was the kickoff meeting and they were going to have workshops and written summaries
39 of the workshops, etc. The question was, if doing incrementally with the zoning changes, the part
40 where they were going to facilitate a public meeting to review the draft at the end, may or may not
41 make a lot of sense. Maybe they were just reviewing the draft sections and there would be multiples
42 of those. He asked if it worked for everyone.

43 Peter assumed that's what he was talking about with the incremental approach talking about

1 community involvement. They would take each section and say that's what they are working on
2 now rather than spread it out. He thought it would communicate better that way. The way he read
3 the incremental approach meant that they would have a public hearing for each one of the six
4 sections providing feedback on each of those and then passing them on to the Selectboard. He
5 liked that kind of approach and thought it would be easier for people to understand rather than a
6 massive document.

7 Jason thought it sounded like they agreed the draft was decent. They needed to flush out a couple
8 of things but other than that, he thought it was what they are working towards. Initially, they would
9 flush out outreach methods and then start to pull together Workshop #1. He asked if it sounded
10 good.

11 Hugh thought it was a good summary of the takeaways and thanked Jason for doing it.

12 Jason asked if it made sense for a Workshop #1 to take place the second meeting in June. They
13 agreed. Jason said they would start pulling things together and doing flyers and other things if they
14 wanted to get the word out.

15 Tim thought press releases to all the local papers were helpful. He wasn't sure people looked at
16 their agendas, except for a few regulars. Jason thought the first workshop may be a little heavy,
17 but they should invite folks. He thought the others may be a little more interesting. Tim agreed.

18 Jason thanked them for their time and said to shoot him an email or call him if they had questions
19 or concerns after the meeting.

20 Hugh thanked Jason for putting it together and getting everyone up to speed.

21 Tim also thanked him.

22

23 Hugh thought they did a good job salvaging one of the most important topics they were trying to
24 get through even with all the technical difficulties.

25

26

Agenda Item 5, Adjournment

27

28 Hugh moved to adjourn the meeting and Cathy seconded. A vote was taken, and it passed
29 unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.