

2023 TOWN MEETING MINUTES

Moderator William Dakin called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The pledge of allegiance was recited. Moderator Dakin explained that if there were no objections non-voters would be allowed to speak on specific articles. There were no objections.

Moderator Dakin read the warning and explained that Articles 1, 2 and 3 would be voted on tomorrow by Australian Ballot.

The Legal Voters of the TOWN OF CHESTER are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Chester Town Hall, Second Floor in said Town of Chester on Monday, March 6, 2023, at 6:00 pm., to act on the following Articles. Voting on Article 1, 2 and 3 will be by Australian ballot on March 7, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Chester Town Hall Second Floor.

ARTICLE 1: To elect Town Officials for the ensuing year as provided by the Public Laws of Vermont. *No discussion.*

ARTICLE 2: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Chester in an amount not to exceed Four Hundred Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$420,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid, be issued for the purpose of providing grant match to complete construction on Route 35, grant match for culvert replacement on Green Mountain Turnpike and paving the Andover Road? Said projects and paving to be financed for a term of 7 years. *No discussion.*

ARTICLE 3: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Chester in an amount not to exceed Four Hundred Fifty Seven Thousand Dollars (\$457,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid, be issued for the purpose of purchasing a dump truck for highway in the amount of \$155,000 to be financed for a term of 5 years; and to purchase an Ambulance in the amount of \$302,000 to be financed for a term of 10 years? *No discussion.*

ARTICLE 4: Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to appoint a town clerk as provided in 17 V.S.A. § 2651e: *Tim Roper moved Article 4 as written. Seconded by Nick Boke. Judith Yogman how is this done now. Town Manager Julie Hance explained that Town Clerk and Treasurer are elected positions now. They would like to change the policy more for the Treasurers position than the Clerk's position. Arne Jonynas explained that the jobs are getting more complicated and involved and there would be more control. Article 4 passed.*

ARTICLE 5: Shall the voters authorize the Selectboard to appoint a town treasurer as provided in 17 V.S.A. § 2651f. *Leigh Dakin moved Article 5 as written. Seconded by Penny Benelli. Article 5 passed.*

Moderator Dakin introduced Alison Clarkson, State Senator. Senator Clarkson talked about work and priorities being done in the House and Senate in Montpelier.

ARTICLE 6: To see if the Town will vote to raise \$3,700,034.80 to be paid to the Chester Town Treasurer on September 15, 2023, to pay current expenses and any part of the Town's indebtedness. *Tim Roper moved Article 6 as written. Seconded by Marilyn Mahusky.*

*Town Manager Julie Hance made a power point presentation. (Copy attached)
Peter Hudkins commended Town Manager Julie Hance and the Board on keeping the increase at only 6%. Article 6 passed.*

Moderator Dakin introduced Heather Chase, State Representative. Representative Chase explained work being done in Montpelier.

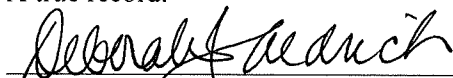
Arne Jonynas presented Certificates of Appreciation to Leigh Dakin, Ben Whalen and Daniel Cook and thanked them for their many years of service to the Town of Chester.

- ARTICLE 7:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$2500 (two thousand five hundred dollars) to support the Chester Fireworks for Independence Day, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 2691? *Heather Chase moved Article 7 as written. Seconded by Mary Semones. Article 7 passed.*
- ARTICLE 8:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of THIRTEEN THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVEN DOLLARS (\$13,807) to help support the home health, maternal and child health, and hospice care provided in patients' homes and in community settings by the Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of VT and NH, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Leigh Dakin moved Article 8 as written. Seconded by Penny Benelli. Article 8 passed.*
- ARTICLE 9:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of THREE THOUSAND AND FORTY FOUR DOLLARS (\$3,044) to help support outpatient, mental health and substance abuse services by the staff of Health Care and Rehabilitation Services, Inc, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Tim Roper moved Article 9 as written. Seconded by Arianna Knapp. Article 9 passed.*
- ARTICLE 10:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of THREE THOUSAND FORTY DOLLARS (\$3,040) to Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) to assist Chester in responding to the emergency needs of the community and providing all available and applicable services to families and individuals in need, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Janet Currier moved Article 10 as written. Seconded by Penny Benelli. Passed*
- ARTICLE 11:** Shall the Town of Chester appropriate the sum of NINE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$900) to the Women's Freedom Center for general budget support to provide services to women and their children who are experiencing emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse and are residents of the Town, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Marilyn Mahusky moved Article 11 as written. Seconded by Penny Benelli. Article 11 passed.*
- ARTICLE 12:** Shall the Town raise and appropriate the sum of ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$1,200.00) for the support of Senior Solutions (formerly Council on Aging for Southeastern Vermont) for help to support seniors and their families who are trying to remain at home and not be placed in a nursing home, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Nick Boke moved Article 12 as written. Seconded by Janet Currier. Article 12 passed.*
- ARTICLE 13:** Shall the Town of Chester appropriate the sum of \$2,250 (two thousand two hundred fifty dollars) for the support of the MOOver Rockingham to provide transit services to the residents of the Town of Chester, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Penny Benelli moved Article 13 as written. Seconded by Tim Roper. Article 13 passed.*

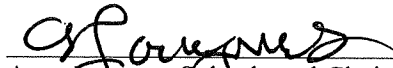
- ARTICLE 14:** Shall the Town of Chester appropriate the sum of \$800 (eight hundred dollars) to support Windsor County Mentors, for youth mentoring services provided to children in Windsor County, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Marilyn Mahusky moved Article 14 as written. Seconded by Cathy Hasbrouck. Article 14 passed.*
- ARTICLE 15:** Shall the Town of Chester appropriate the sum of \$400 (four hundred dollars) to Green Mountain RSVP & Volunteer Center of Windsor County to develop opportunities for people age 55 and older to positively impact the quality of life in the community of Chester through volunteer service, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Penny Benelli moved Article 15 as written. Seconded by Arianna Knapp. Article 15 passed.*
- ARTICLE 16:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of ONE THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$1,800.00) toward the support of the Community Cares Network of Chester and Andover, Inc. a non-profit organization which provides services to senior citizens, helping them to stay in their homes longer safely, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *David Armstrong moved Article 16 as written. Seconded by Jerene Slivinsky. Article 16 passed.*
- ARTICLE 17:** To see if the Town of Chester will appropriate the sum of THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$3,000) to assist in the services of the Chester-Andover Family Center for individuals and families in need, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Cathy Hasbrouck moved Article 17 as written. Seconded by Janet Currier. Article 17 passed.*
- ARTICLE 18:** Shall the Town appropriate the sum of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS (\$1,000) to Neighborhood Connections, Inc. to cover the cost of providing services in Chester in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? *Tim Roper moved Article 18 as written. Seconded Mary Semones. Julie Hance amended Article 18 to read Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$1500.00 to Neighborhood Connections, Inc. to cover the cost of providing services in Chester in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691? Seconded by Peter Hudkins. Town Manager Julie Hance explained that this Article should have read \$1500, not \$1000. The amendment to Article 18 passed. Article 18 passed as amended.*

Meeting adjourned at 7:38 p.m.

A true record.


Deborah J. Aldrich, Town Clerk

William Dakin, Jr., Moderator


Arne Jorjynas, Selectboard Chair

A large, abstract blue ink splash or watercolor blotch serves as a background for the title text. The splash is irregular in shape, with darker blue areas and lighter, more diffused edges, creating a textured, artistic effect. The text is centered within this splash.

2023 General Fund Budget

Town Meeting Review

General Government

- The Town Office continues to run smoothly under the guidance of Debbie Aldrich, Town Clerk and Amie O'Brien, Assistant Town Clerk.
- As things get busier, one change that has been made is the closing of Town Hall from 12-1 for lunch. We are finding that this hour gives staff a much needed break during the day.
- Land Records have now been digitized back to 1982. This allows for a full 40 year search to be done online when needed.
- 2023 will be continued digitization of lands records and vital records.
- The grand list is also available online by parcel through the town's website.

General Government Cont.

- Preston and Cathy do fantastic job holding down the Planning/Zoning office.
- The Planning/Zoning office has been busy this year. Permit issuance has held steady since 2020 with 80 permits being issued in 2022.
- In 2022, the Zoning Administrator position was made full time and changed to a Town Planner.
- This has created more time for Preston to spend assisting the Planning Commission in their work on the UDB changes.
- In 2023, I am hopeful to utilize Preston experience in assisting with economic development initiatives and policy writing.
- In addition, I will be forming a Housing Committee for Chester to assist in assessing the housing needs of Chester and identifying potential development areas within town limits.

General Government Cont.

- The Development Review Board continues to work diligently in their permitting of Conditional Uses, Subdivisions and Variances.
- The Planning Commission worked hard in 2022 in their efforts toward improving the town's zoning guidance documents. These include a new Village Green Zoning District, a community wide survey, reinstatement of legacy uses and adaptive reuse, and the creation/implementation of a Short Term Rental Ordinance.
- I would like thank all those who work in the Planning/Zoning Department. This is not an easy department to work in. Conversations are often difficult and the work is tedious, but the result is so important to the future of the town.



Public Safety

- Fire, Police and Ambulance are adjusting well in their new building which is now finally complete with all final items being completed.
- The PSD held several community breakfasts at the new building last summer, as well as a very popular National Night Out. Look for more events in 2023.
- Chester Police saw some significant changes this year with the retirement of Chief Cloud. Rick served CPD for 20 years and we thank him for his service.
- Chief Thomas Williams has been hired to fill the Chief's position. Tom comes to us with 30 years experience in the State Police.
- In 2023, a Citizen Advisory Committee will be established to work as a bridge between the CPD and the Chester Community. Chief Williams has many great ideas to improve the community policing initiative here in Chester.



Public Safety

- The Fire Department responded to 255 calls in 2022; Details can be seen on page 44 of the Town Report
- The Fire Department was awarded an Assistance to Firefighters Grant in the amount of \$452,380 for the purchase of a new tanker. The town will be required to match just under \$23,000 for this apparatus.



Public Safety

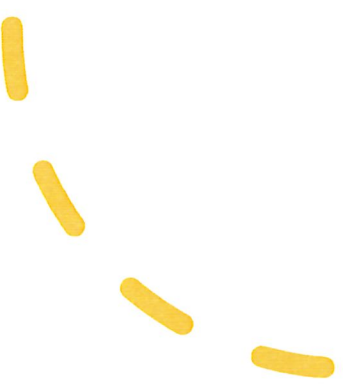
- Chester Ambulance responded to 506 calls in 2022; for details please see page 47 of the Town Report.
- We had 9 individuals complete the EMT certification class held in the new PSB in 2022. There are several individuals in a current EMT class with another class scheduled to begin in May.
- Amanda Silva has left her position as Ambulance Chief to be with her family. The town will begin the process of finding a new Chief in the upcoming months. In the meantime, the admin duties are being filled by Michael Randzio with Jeff Knisley filling in as the acting Chief.
- A new “pilot” position was created in 2022 which has proven to be successful. To fill the need for ambulance day coverage on weekends, a position was created that includes an EMT also being a certified PT police officer. Michael Randzio has filled that PT position for the past several months, which has now become FT.
- We are hopeful to create more of these crossover positions within the PSD.

Public Works

- The Highway Department has had a very busy year.
- Delays in obtaining construction materials still brings many challenges with completing projects timely.
- The renovations to the Highway Garage are finally complete. The paving was completed in 2022 as well. The new space is allowing all equipment to be under cover.
- The Highway crew completed several projects this year, to include a superstructure replacement on bridge 43 on Chase Brook Road.
- The largest project completed this year was the replacement of the large culvert on Popple Dungeon Road with a bridge. This was a \$900,000 bridge funded through a Federal Transportation Grant.
- In addition to bridge and structures work, the highway crew continued its ditch work utilizing funding through the Grants-In-Aid program with the State of Vermont.

Public Works

- 2023 brings several projects to include a large culvert replacement on Green Mountain Turnpike, additional work to Route 35 and culvert replacements on Lovers Lane Road.
- We are hopeful that the Depot Street Sidewalk project will go out to bid at the end of 2023. We are still awaiting a pedestrian easement from the Rail Division which has been difficult.
- We are hopeful that paving for 2023 will consist of Andover Road. We are hopeful to receive a Vtrans Grant that will pay for the larger portion of the project.
- This project will include replacement of several culverts on this section of road as well.



Recreation

- The town was awarded a grant to make improvements to the Skateboard park in 2022
- ARPA funds were used in 2022 to complete the improvements to the Tennis Courts.
- 2023 will bring 4 new dugouts at the Little League Fields, which are in dire need of replacement.
- The biggest project for 2022, was the completion of the Brookside Trail. Work was completed by Woodwright Construction with the assistance of Steve, our Facilities Director.

Recreation

- 2023 will bring 4 new dugouts at the Little League Fields, which are in dire need of replacement
- The Selectboard has recently approved the creation of a community garden to be located on the town lot on Canal Street.
- There is a group of individuals looking to create a dog park potentially on land the town owns on Route 11 West.
- GMP will complete a large project at the Pinnacle this summer/fall to include burying of electrical lines.
- This project will include GMP burying power lines to the tennis courts and baseball fields for future use by the town.

Facilities

- There is a Facilities section of the budget that breaks down Library, Town Hall, Recreation, Historic Buildings and Public Safety Building
- Library Budget is showing an increase to help offset salary increases due to hiring a new librarian.
- The Facilities Director has spent quite a bit of time in the Library getting the heating system worked out for better efficiencies, as well as updating all lighting to LED.
- 2023 will bring work to the sprinkler system in the library which we are hoping to receive grant funding to help with costs.
- Town Hall budget reflects minor renovations to create a small conference room downstairs.
- Recreation Budget includes funds for continued work on the pumps at the pool as well as roof repairs to the pool house.

Facilities


- Historic Facilities line includes dehumidifiers at the Academy Building as well as a grant match for window renovations at Yosemite.
- A grant application has also been approved for window renovations at Yosemite.
- A grant is being submitted to fund the handicapped access ramp and north door at Yosemite as well.
- Energy Grants being released this spring. Hopeful to use for the Academy Building.
- A committee will be formed this Spring to being discussing the future of the Academy Building.

Facilities Cont.

- 2022 was the first year with the new Facilities Director for the town. With the number of buildings and lands the town owns, this has proven to be a very successful addition. Steve has completed seasonal maintenance plans for all buildings, worked to ensure that the PSB and Highway Garage projects were concluded well, performed many construction projects for the town, to include working with John Wright on the completion of the Brookside Trail Bridge.




2022 Budget Wrapup

- The 2022 budget year was a tough year to manage. Continually rising costs in all things construction as well as fuel, made it very difficult to keep costs down.
 - With the assistance of some ARPA funds to cover one time expenses such as cost overruns for the PSB and the tennis courts, the General Fund is ending with a small surplus, just over \$5,000.
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2023 Budget Increase Explained

- Building the 2023 budget was not an easy task.
 - Rising costs have impacted the municipal budgets, as they have our personal finances.
 - Department Managers have reviewed and selected the most necessary projects to complete in 2023. However, the work must continue. Increases are seen across most budget lines.
 - I have reviewed all positive fund balances to determine where reserve funds can be used in 2023.
 - Public Funds are being used to offset some cemetery work, to include the addition to the cemetery shed
 - ARPA funds are proposed for dugouts, ambulance cot & library sprinkler system.
 - Capital Funds are being used to pay the balance of the 2016 bonds; 2023 is the last year of payments
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Capital Plan/Bond Plan

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- This plan shows the current and 2023 proposed debt repayment schedule
 - Capital purchases being proposed in 2023 are a dump truck for highway to be financed over 5 years, grant match for the tanker for fire with no financing, and a new ambulance to be financed over 10 years.
 - You will see on the ballot that these capital items are being proposed as a bond. This is because bond financing has significantly lower interest rates. At the time of purchase, I will shop for the best rates.
 - A \$420,000 bond is being proposed for paving Andover Road; \$80,000 as a grant match for the final portion of Route 35; \$40,000 as a grant match for a large culvert replacement on Green Mountain Turnpike.

Capital Plan/Bond Plan

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- Brief synopsis of the Capital/Bond Plan.
 - Reminder that at this time these are only debt repayment schedules
 - We have begun the creation of an Asset Management Plan. We are at the data gathering stage.
 - Next step is the development of a true Capital Plan and the creation of a Capital Reserve Fund.

ARPA FUNDS

- The Town of Chester has received approximately \$900,000 in funds from the American Recovery Plan.
- Meetings were held to gather ideas from the community on the potential use of these funds.
- Due to cost overruns in 2022 as well as an increasing budget in 2023, approximately half of the ARPA funds have been used to cover:
 - Cost overruns for PSB & Highway Garage
 - Brookside Trail Expenses
 - Recreation Improvements

Water & Sewer Departments

Water & Sewer Departments are not budgets voted on at town meeting. However, they are critical part of the town's infrastructure.

Both departments have a positive fund balance to be used for upcoming projects.

The Secondary Well is being evaluated with improvements to the existing well. A FEMA Grant has been applied for to help pay for a generator for the well.

Funding has been received to complete a lead line inventory for the water system.

Funding has also been received to complete an Asset Management Plan for the Wastewater System.

Upgrades to the Sewer Plant will begin to be considered in 2023

Summary

- The 2023 Budget reflects an increase of \$211,085, approximately 6%
- Although higher than usual increases, it is lower than the National inflation rate of over 9%.
- This budget was developed balancing the needs of the town with the impact to the taxpayers
- Asking for voter support of this budget