

**TOWN OF CHESTER
TOWN MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 2, 2026, 6:00 P.M.**

Moderator Frank Kelley opened the meeting at 6:00 PM and stated that it was an honor to serve as Town Moderator. He introduced members of the Selectboard and the Town Clerk, Amie Record. He mentioned Samantha Vertefuille and Julie Hance as part of the introductions and thanked them for their hard work. Moderator Frank Kelley explained that only registered voters present in person could participate in the meeting. Participation through Zoom or by individuals who are not registered voters would not be allowed. He mentioned Bill Dakin and his service to the town as Town Moderator. Bill Dakin received a standing ovation as he has retired as Town Moderator.

Representative Tom Charlton spoke about the state budget. He stated that he wants funding reform and will not vote for the budget unless reforms are made. He noted that some bills have been introduced to raise additional revenue. He also discussed the high cost of medical expenses, identifying UVM as a contributing factor. He mentioned that UVM owns three major hospitals in the state, which impacts healthcare costs. He also spoke about a housing bill that has been developed. He explained that housing legislation can be very complex for small communities, especially towns with fewer than 5,000 residents. The bill would allow towns to purchase off-site manufactured homes. Land use issues were discussed, including Act 181, which was vetoed. There is also an open meeting regarding Act 250.

Senator Joe Major stated that the House and Senate currently have two different proposals under consideration for housing concerns. He discussed ongoing efforts to address food security, as well as initiatives related to farmer reform and investment in local food systems. He also mentioned continued work toward improving healthcare.

Senator Alison Clarkson stated that Vermont remains stable and functional. She emphasized the importance of protecting civil rights and discussed the need for responsible budget management while keeping programs affordable and sustainable. She also addressed ongoing efforts to maintain a sustainable education system, noting that it remains a work in progress. In addition, she mentioned a police pilot program that will begin in Windham County. Senator Clarkson also announced that she will be retiring and thanked the community for the opportunity to serve.

Moderator Frank Kelley explained his role as moderator and reminded participants that any individual wishing to speak must first state their name before addressing the meeting.

ARTICLE 1: To elect Town Officials for the ensuing year as provided by the Public Laws of Vermont. Voting by Australian Ballot.

No Comment.

ARTICLE 2: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Chester in an amount not to exceed Four Hundred Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$430,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid, be issued for the purpose of financing the construction of upgrades to the existing

sidewalks at an estimated cost of \$1,800,000. These funds will provide the required 20% match for an awarded Bicycle & Pedestrian Grant. Voting by Australian Ballot.

Town Manager Julie Hance clarified that the project originated in 2016. Progress had been delayed due to issues obtaining the right-of-way from the railroad, but the town received an easement earlier this year and the project is now moving forward. Additional funding has been applied for, including \$908,000 in additional matching funds to support a \$3 million grant. Peter Hudkins encouraged residents to view the project as an opportunity to help bring business to Chester and support economic development. Arne Jonynas added that the project also reflects the financial challenges the town faces, noting that prices have doubled in many areas, which is affecting the town budget as well as household expenses.

ARTICLE 3: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Chester in an amount not to exceed Three Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$300,000), subject to reduction from the receipt of available state and federal grants-in-aid, be issued for the purpose of paving Flamstead Road, River Street, Library parking lot and patching Depot Street at an estimated cost of \$300,000?

Town Manager Julie Hance explained that the project will be funded by a grant and that Depot Street is a state highway maintained by the state, which has it scheduled for work in 2030. The town had hoped to have certain sections repaired last year, but the contractor was unable to fit the project into their schedule. Instead, they plan to mill out damaged sections and work with a more local company, which should allow the repairs to last several years. Charlea Baker, who lives on River Street, spoke about a section of the road near her home that is badly torn up just before a blind curve. She emphasized that the issue is not cosmetic and said she has been watching the area for months and fears that a crash could occur. Jerene Slivinsky asked whether the paving of Flamstead was referring to the second portion of the project or just crack sealing. Kirby Putnam responded that it would be the second portion, covering about a mile and a half of road. Matthew Gorsky raised concerns about the library parking lot, noting that there are missing patches that make it dangerous to walk and that there is a large bump when pulling out, indicating that work needs to be done. Gary King asked for clarification on whether the vote was an all-or-nothing decision. Julie Hance confirmed that it is a bond vote and that if it fails, the entire Article would.

ARTICLE 4: To see if the Town of Chester will vote to approve borrowing for the purchase of a police cruiser for the Police Department in an amount not to exceed \$70,000. This equipment is replacing existing equipment at the end of useful life and is not an addition to the town inventory.

Article 4 was moved by Debbie Aldrich and seconded by Rick Alexander. Town Manager Julie Hance stated that the town follows a four-year cruiser

replacement cycle, replacing one cruiser each year. This schedule helps maintain trade-in value and prevents the town from having to pay for extensive repairs on older vehicles. The plan involves borrowing the funds and repaying them over a two-year period. Charlea Baker asked whether the town had considered selling the cruiser instead of trading it in. Julie Hance responded that a cost analysis had been conducted and that the trade-in value helps offset the overall cost, which is already factored into the financial figures. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 5: To see if the Town of Chester will vote to approve borrowing One Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) to fund the town's grant match for Route 35 construction and the town's match on Thompson Road easement purchase and preliminary design.

Article 5 was moved by Debbie Aldrich and seconded by Matthew Gorsky. Town Manager Julie Hance explained that the town received FEMA grant funds for the final section of Route 35 that still needs to be completed. The grant will serve as a match for work that has already been done. She also discussed the Thompson Road bridge project off VT Route 103 North, noting that all three bridges involved are town-owned but located within the state right-of-way. The town plans to take advantage of federal funding to replace the Thompson Road bridge on a new alignment and remove the other two bridges. Because of recurring ice jams, the river in that area is wider than the existing bridge, making the project necessary. The town expects to receive about \$4 million for the project but will be responsible for a 2.5 percent match for the design and for purchasing an easement from a nearby property owner. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 6: To see if the Town will vote to raise \$4,461,054.94 to be paid to the Chester Town Treasurer on September 15, 2026, to pay current expenses and any part of the Town's indebtedness.

Article 6 was moved by Heather Chase and seconded by Julie Kelly. Town Manager Julie Hance stated that she had a presentation and PowerPoint to review. The PowerPoint shown during the meeting is attached to the end of these Minutes. She explained that Laurie Roser, the Finance Director, is leaving the town and Deb Epler will be her replacement. Jerry Gleason asked whether the 2026 budget proposal would resolve the deficit, and Town Manager Julie Hance explained that it would not. She said the town needs the audit results to determine the exact figures, noting that results from both 2024 and 2025 are needed. She added that the town may need to increase funding in 2027 or possibly borrow more at that time. Jerry Gleason asked about establishing a bond and whether it could occur midyear or would the funding to recover from the deficit be delayed until the following year. Town Manager Julie Hance responded that a bond request would require a special town meeting. Jerene Slivinsky said she is happy that Deb Epler is returning and was pleased to speak, noting that it had been two years since she last addressed the voters at Town Meeting. However, she expressed concern about the continued increase in taxes

and said she did not want the budget to pass. She stated that a 12% education tax increase is possible and explained that over the past four years the total increases have exceeded 51%. She said the costs are making it unaffordable to live in town and that many residents are struggling. In her view, the Selectboard should not ask for more money and should instead cut services. She added that residents are impacted twice, through both property taxes and income taxes, and argued that the budget should be voted on by Australian ballot so everyone could vote in privacy to express opinions without fear of ridicule. She said she would like the voters in attendance to vote no. Damon Tyler said he enjoys educating himself about civics and asked whether it would be possible to move such matters to an Australian ballot. Town Manager Julie Hance explained that many years ago it was decided that all special articles must be voted from the floor. To change that process, a petition would need to be submitted, and if approved it would not take effect until 2028. At that point, all articles would be moved to Australian ballot voting. Butch Raymond Stearns commented that the blame for the increase should be placed where it belongs, with the education tax. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 7: Shall the voters establish a 1% Local Options Tax on the sale of Rooms, Meals and Consumed Alcohol for a period of 10 years. Revenue from the Local Options Tax will be used to fund the Housing Reserve Fund which is used to support the production of housing and increase opportunities for families and individuals to access affordable homes in Chester.

Article 7 was moved by Steve Dock and seconded by Anne Lamb. Chair of the Housing Commission Joe Karl spoke about the tax. Chair of the housing committee. Read the mission statement. Attached to the minutes. Email joe Karl for mission statement and talking points. Ian Montgomery, operates an Airbnb, stated that he already has to pay a 3% tax and feels that adding another tax would be unfair. Philip Atwood asked Joe Karl to define affordable housing, but Moderator Frank Kelley said he could not do so at that time because the meeting was not intended to be a debate. Bill Lindsay, who regularly attends Selectboard meetings, said that while he was originally concerned, he believes housing—especially senior housing—is very important. He noted that housing contributes to the grand list and suggested considering mixed housing. He referred attendees to page 95 of the 2025 Town Report regarding the Trustees of Public Funds, explaining that while those funds have specific uses, money could potentially be borrowed and repaid. He added that the average person cannot afford the taxes without some form of help.

Scott Blair, owner of Southern Pie Café, said he believes the tax would make it less appealing for people to open businesses in town and described it as “nickel and diming.” He also challenged statements about tourism, saying that 70–80% of the people who visit his shop are locals, and he opposes the tax. Hugh Quinn said there is clearly a housing issue and that the community should work together to solve the problem. As a consumer, he said he has never chosen where to eat or stay at an establishment based on a local options tax and would

be willing to help support the creation of more housing. Steve Mancusso expressed concern about adding another burden to Chester businesses.

Liz Cresci asked what other revenue options were being explored, and Town Manager Julie Hance responded that the Housing Commission and Selectboard have discussed the use of other funds. She noted that short-term rental fees already go into the fund and that the town is always looking for grants. Damon Tyler said he does not support the tax and, as a member of the Economic Advisory Board, believes other solutions should be considered and that the town should stand up for small businesses. Randy Miles said he is not a fan of taxes; while he understands the need, he does not like that the state takes a portion. Caroline Morgan said housing is expensive and noted that while people do not have to go out to eat, if there is nowhere to live there will be no workers.

Linda Diak, who files regular sales tax, said that towns with local options taxes make up the bulk of her sales. Richard Pease-Grant said he was proud to be in the room and to see the community working through issues together. Matthew Gorsky noted that the proposal had been under discussion by the Selectboard and that public comment and solutions had been sought earlier, suggesting that some questions could have been asked before now and that people should have worked more closely with decision-makers.

Sophie Mikkelsen asked what the state does with the 25% portion of the tax that they keep, and it was said that the exact use was not certain. Jerry Ucci said he appreciated the hard work of the commission but warned that while each tax may seem small, there is a new one every year and at some point, it has to stop. Raymond Stearns asked why the state takes 25%, and Frank responded that the town must abide by state rules. Town Manager Julie Hance added that the tax structure is governed by state statute and that a charter change is no longer required to add the tax. Ruth Zezza responded to Hugh Quinn, saying that for many residents who live in town, the added cost would be difficult. Coner Ekland, owner of Stone Hearth, said he also opposes the tax and supports the positions expressed by Scott Blair and Jerry Ucci.

Beverly Boke then moved to call the question. Moderator Frank Kelley explained she could do so after the two people with their hands in the air had a chance to speak. Randy Miles added that as a single percent seems small, however things are tight and that even small increases can make a difference. Scott Blair said that rising food costs have already forced price increases for restaurants and spoke for other restaurant owners in the room not on the voter list that were unable to speak about the tax. A paper ballot was suggested for the vote on the local options tax. Moderator Frank Kelley explained that more than seven registered voters needed to make that request for it to be an option. After determining that more than seven people had raised their hands, the group agreed to vote by paper ballot. The vote was conducted by paper ballot, and the motion failed no 76 to yes 59.

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?

Article 8 was moved by Jerry Ucci and seconded by Will Hoser. There was no discussion. The motion 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?

Article 9 was moved by Matt Gorsky and seconded by Judy Hallberg. Kate Lamphere spoke about the organization and its services. The motion 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?

Article 10 was moved by Jerry Ucci and seconded by Julie Kelley. Liz Cresci spoke about the organization and directed people to page 111 of the 2025 Town Report. The motion 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?

Article 11 was moved by Jeff Hance and seconded by Anne Henshaw. There was no discussion. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 12: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of \$2,400 to Senior Solutions, the nonprofit Area Agency on Aging serving southeastern Vermont, to serve older Vermonters and younger disabled Vermonters with nutrition and wellness programs, application assistance for state and federal benefit programs, Medicare enrollment guidance, long term care Medicaid program care coordination, Volunteer Visitor programs, and more, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691?

Article 12 was moved by Charlea Baker and seconded by Matt Gorsky. Sue Willis spoke about the organization and directed people to page 110 of the 2025

Town Report. The motion 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?

Article 13 was moved by Jerry Ucci and seconded by Joe Karl. There was no discussion. The motion 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?

Article 14 was moved by Anne Henshaw and seconded by Wendy Svec. Jan Rounds spoke about the organization. The motion 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?

Article 15 was moved by Barbara Windham and seconded by Judy Hallberg. Barbara Windham spoke about the organization. The motion 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?

Article 16 was moved by David Armstrong and seconded by Julie Kelley. There was no discussion. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 17: Shall the Town of Chester appropriate the sum of \$4,000 (four thousand dollars) to Meals on Wheels of Greater Springfield, Inc. for continued support and services to the citizens of the Town of Chester in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 2691?

Article 17 was moved by Will Hoser and seconded by Anne Henshaw. Mary Semones spoke about the organization and directed people to page 119 in the 2025 Town Report. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 18: Shall the Town appropriate the sum of FIVE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED SEVENTY DOLLARS (\$5,570) to Neighborhood Connections, Inc. and

Mountain Town Connector to cover the cost of providing services in Chester in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §2691?

Article 18 was moved by Charlea Baker and seconded by Robin Bickel. Thom Simmons spoke about the organization. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 19: Shall the town appropriate the sum of \$5,000 to the Black River Area Community Coalition for continuing to work within the Chester community preventing youth substance/alcohol misuse in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 2691?

Article 19 was moved by Anne Henshaw and seconded by Joe Karl. Michael Bennett spoke about the organization. The motion passed.

ARTICLE 20: 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.

Article 20 was moved by Thom Simmons and seconded by Brian Santiago. Anne Lamb spoke about the organization. The motion passed.

A motion was made by Jerene Slivinsky to adjourn at 9:10 p.m. and seconded by Julie Kelly. The motion passed.

Amie Record
Town Clerk