



CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN
and ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
15 MIDDLEFIELD ROAD
CHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01011

(413) 354-7760

TownofChester.net

Monday, May 5, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Open meeting – This meeting was held in the Chester Town Hall Auditorium with a virtual option.

Selectboard members present were John Baldasaro, Andy Sutton and Craig Gauthier. Also present was Town Administrator Don Humason, Town Clerk Terry Donovan, Finance Committee Chair Brian Forgue, COA Director Keirsen Broman and members of the public.

John Baldasaro opened the meeting at 6:00pm. Warrants, minutes and all correspondence were signed.

Town Business

- John Baldasaro congratulated and thanked all the candidates that ran for the open elected positions during the election as well as the residents who voted.
- Brookside Springs LLC zoning issue

A request for a zoning board of appeals came into Town Hall on December 24th, which a hearing was never done for. According to state law, since a hearing was not held within the allotted amount of time, the request is granted. The applicant Chris Martensen was present and was requesting a building permit to perform renovations and finish the buildings on 14 Johnson Hill Rd. The selectboard agreed to grant his appeal and for his building permit to be granted.



Lora Wade via Zoom said because the last permit was granted in 2020, Chris will need to submit another NOI and follow that process with Conservation Commission in addition to applying for the building permit.

- RFP for Old Elementary School

Eric Weiss presented on behalf of PVPC. He has been working with Andy Sutton to create a Request for Proposal for the Old Elementary School which he presented the draft to the Board of Selectmen. The purpose of the RFP is to find developers willing to buy the building and redevelop it. If a developer buys the property, they would need to present their development plan to the selectboard and the town for approval before moving forward. PVPC will work with the town to find developers. Eric presented the drafted RFP to the selectboard and said there are a series of questions the selectboard will need to answer such as, what level of experience of developer/buyer the town is looking for, what kinds of projects the town is or is not interested in, and so on. Eric said he is not sure how many people will be interested but answering those questions will help them find the right people.

John asked what kind of timeframe he thinks they will be working with. John said he wants to leave the proposal window to be open long enough for multiple developers to express interest. Eric said we can make it a proposal orientated bid so that the town can know what the developers will be proposing for the property before they purchase rather than the other way around.

John asked the public if there was any interest in joining a committee to help search for proposals or writing. Norman Sollie, Veronica Marr, Bob and Ann Daley, Rich Holzman, Chris Martensen, and Andy Sutton volunteered.

- Finance Committee Reviews Proposed FY26 budget

Brian Forgue presented on behalf of the Finance Committee. Brian said a 10.2% increase overall was originally requested but, after working with the FINCOM and Departments, the actual budget number is a 2.4% increase over last year's budget.

A revolving account will be created for the transfer station. The revenue they make should cover their expenses and will stay in their revolving account instead of going to free cash to be carried year every year.

\$60,203 of the education stabilization fund will be going to the school budget.

Treasurer, accounting, IT, and other software costs have increased significantly.

The Finance Committee recommended \$85,000 to cover payment of the fire truck in FY26.



John agreed with most of the budget except for the revolving accounts missing the police revolving account. Brian said he did not include that because it is not generally listed with other revolving accounts and typically is listed under the police department.

\$22,000 will be cut from the budget presented because MIIA's insurance rates are only going up 2.8% and the expectation was much higher.

3% COLA was given to all town employees. In addition, the Library and Fire Chief salaries were raised to be more comparable to other towns.

Craig Gauthier asked why the Town Clerk's assistant request was not granted. Brian said that it was the decision of the committee not to grant that request this year because of it being a tough budget year and having extra students going to vocational school this year. John said that the Town Clerk has been asking for an assistant for years.

Clerk Terry Donovan said her concern is if something happened to her she would not have any coverage. She asked for an assistant budgeted for 4 hours a week at a yearly cost of \$4,000. Keirsen Broman mentioned that \$6,000 voted for new flooring was given back by the COA and asked why that can't be reallocated to the Town Clerk Assistant? Brian said that money went to free cash which was needed. John said it should be put in the budget and then it can be discussed on the town floor during the town vote if needed.

Andy asked about the records clerk for the police chief. Brian said that the position should be revenue neutral because they will be able to issue citations which will bring in money for the department/town.

Tuition for Smith Voc and Westfield Voc went up for each student this year. There is a buffer in vocational because some of the students they expected to transfer are no longer going to or were not accepted.

The Finance Committee bylaw passed for a capital planning committee. They will start discussing this in September and will have written plans for replacing big capital assets like



building and vehicle expenses the town may face. Eric Weiss said he is on the chair of capital planning for Middlefield and would be happy to offer any assistance to the committee.

Rosanne asked how many people are appointed and how to get appointed to the finance committee. Brian said their bylaw asks for 7 members and they currently have 7. He said no one is up for reappointment this year.

Brian mentioned that he was elected Town Moderator in the recent town election. He did confirm with the state ethics committee that it is okay for him to be both the Town Moderator and chair of the Finance Committee. He said that if he feels it is necessary, he will resign from the town moderator position when the next appointments come up.

- Discussion of Town Administrator position

Andy Sutton said he wants to start looking for a new town administrator and wants to put together a committee to search for a new one. He said some people have proposed reducing the hours of the position from 40 hours per week to 20-30 hours. John disagreed with reducing the hours from 40 per week. He said they had it as a part time position in the past and it took awhile to bring it back up to full time.

Don Humason said he has no interest in leaving his role and didn't want the selectboard to feel pressure to find someone right away. He said he would give the selectboard plenty of notice when he was ready to leave and also wanted to stay and train the new administrator when the time came. He said he was considering retirement sometime in 2026.

John agreed it is time to start looking for someone since it can take months to find a quality candidate. Bob Daley offered to be on the search committee. John said posting the job and looking through candidates on LinkedIn or MMA can be good as well.



Town Administrator Don Humason report

- Matt Sutton was introduced as a new police officer.
- No Memorial Day events will be held in Chester this year unless an organizer steps up. The previous recreation committee has disbanded and there is no one to organize the event. The town of Russell has offered to include Chester in their event activities as they do every year.

Keirsen Broman and Stephen Rigazzio from COA volunteered to lead the charge for Memorial Day.

- Vote to change town employee benefit-eligibility status from 20 to 30 hours/week
The state requirements say that up to 30 hours are considered part-time no benefitted.

John Baldasaro made a motion to increase part time hourly restrictions from up to 20 hours per week, to up to 30 hours per week. Andy Sutton seconded and all were in favor.

- Update on Cyber Breach Event

A phishing email was sent from the Police Chief's town email account. The town's IT company Novus Insight and insurance company MIIA are working together on an investigation, recovery and preventive process.

- Update on Request of DEP to Modify Wood Waste Landfill Monitoring

The town pays for this to be monitored every year and there have never been any issues. DEP said it might consider allowing monitoring to happen every other year. The process to request a modification may be long and expensive.

- Update on Completion of Newly Upgraded Phone System

All town departments are now updated with the new phone system. It is working great.

- Don and Andy attended MMA Rural/Western Mass Conference on Saturday in Holyoke

Public Comment

Bob Daley asked if there was any progress with reducing the Novus Insight 20% increase in rates? Don said there was no leeway with that. The increases will cover increased cyber security, which the town needs.



John asked if there was input with CMELD on the budget. Rosanne said that she believes Lori Fieldstad would be working with Diane on coming up with a budget. Lori was present via Zoom, she said that she plans to be in a couple of days this week to work on that. She said she will need time to get up to speed since she was just elected on the light commission.

Veronica Marr asked about Comcast and the contract negotiations. John said he had a meeting with them and he's working on getting better broadcast systems for the BOS meetings and discussing the franchise fee. He said discussions are ongoing.

Liz mentioned the compactor for the transfer station does have rot and there is concern it may break down soon and it's a very expensive machine. The BOH has started looking for prices on a new one in case it's needed.

Bob said he received an email from APEX to meet at the train station prior to the next phase of the Prospect Street project on Thursday. He asked if some of the selectboard could be present. John said he didn't think they would be able to divert the grant money from the project to the water main issue.

Keirsen brought up an issue of the town POW flag being taken down and replaced without the town's permission. Keirsen asked if we can take it down and replace with another POW flag. Craig Gauthier said he will take it down and we will need a purchase a new one.

Rosanne said she can purchase one using CMELD's flag fund. There is no knowledge of who took down the flag but if anyone knows anything to please report to the police, selectboard, and/or the town administrator.

Craig asked Brian about the Assessor Clerk's training only being budgeted for 4 weeks. He said that Kendall Bennett felt that would not be long enough. Brian said it was a tough decision and a cut that didn't come lightly. John said there's the option to get through the transition period and see how that goes. He said since there hasn't been an official change of hands yet, they can do things a different way if needed, like voting to reallocate funding a STM or town meeting.

John made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andy Sutton seconded and all were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:28pm.



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Respectfully Submitted

Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

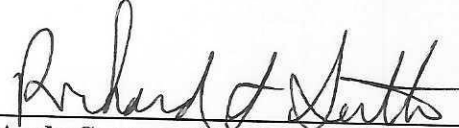
Date Signed



John Baldasaro, Chairman

5/19/25


Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Vice Chairman

5/19/25

Date Signed



Craig Gauthier, Clerk

5/19/25

Date Signed



CHARLES "CHIP" DAZELLE, HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT
CHESTER HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
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***5-5-25 Selectboard Report
from the Highway Department***

- 1] Street sweeping all done
- 2] Road grading has been started
- 3] Line painting company has been contacted for lines before Chester on Track
- 4] E-mailed Liz about the field across from the ball field her burn piles and all the ruts to be fixed, she says she will have it fixed and cleaned up
- 5] Water break by tracks below Prospect Street
- 6] Freightliner is back from the shop between new stuff wrong and years old, hopefully it is set now
- 7 Red 550 should be done at Richie's soon and have a full fleet again
- 8] Dead trees by ballfield will be down by Chester on track. just waiting for Tim with a date

-Charles "Chip" Dazelle,

Chester, The Gem of the Valley
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