



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

(413) 354-7760

TownofChester.net

Monday, July 7, 2025

MEETING MINUTES

Open meeting – This meeting was held in the Council on Aging room with a virtual option.

Selectboard members were John Baldasaro and Andy Sutton. Also present was Town Clerk Terry Donovan, COA Director Keirsen Broman, Finance Committee Chair Brian Forgue, Board of Health members Liz Massa and Nick Chiusano and members of the public.

John Baldasaro opened the meeting at 6:00pm. There were no warrants, minutes or correspondence signed as this was not a normally scheduled BOS meeting.

Report from Town Departments/Town Business

- Interviews with Town Administrator Candidates

Andrew Alward was the first candidate whose interview started at 6pm via Zoom.

Andy Sutton asked why he wanted to work in Chester. Andrew said he grew up in a small town and appreciates nature and the country environment Chester has to offer. He said he likes the small community vibe, and Chester fits exactly what he's looking for.

Andy asked about what his plan would be for budgeting for a low-income town. Andrew said it would be on of case-by-case basis but would look for grants. He said he was the chair of the COA board and has experience with grants from that role. He managed the process by applying for the grants and making sure funds were received.

Andy asked for an example of a creative idea he's used in his town that has made things more efficient without costing the town money. He said that he worked on finding grants



Andy asked how he envisioned the job of Town Administrator? Andrew said it would facilitate the needs and wants of the town, making sure things get done and are followed through. Keeping a good relationship between the selectboard, town departments and residents.

Andy asked how he would review the Town Administrator job after one year and then after 5? Andrew said he would make sure he is meeting the expectations the board has for him, he understands the nuances of the town, and that the residents are feeling heard.

Andy asked how he would include people who feel left out of town decisions? Andrew said he has experienced this on a selectboard, and he said the best thing is communication and understanding.

Andy asked about his commute. Andrew said it would be a 2 hour drive but is interested in looking for somewhere to live around here to move immediately. He is in a position where he can easily move.

John Baldasaro said Chester is a small community with people having different agendas and asked how he would prioritize who gets the attention with differing opinions. Andrew said everyone would have equal opportunity to voice their opinion and then he would work towards getting a general consensus or working on the solution that makes the most sense.

John said the administrator has the authority to make the decision but would be working on behalf of the board and asked how he would know when he should take the initiative to solve a problem or consult with the board? Andrew said he would mostly act without the board only in an emergency basis. He said he would typically look to the board for insight into the town and guidance in that regard, at least until he was more familiar with Chester.

Andy asked how long he plans to stay. Andrew said his plan is to stay long term. He would move to Chester and would want to take time getting to comfortable with things in the role. He said he's been to Chester a few times and likes the ruralness of the area. He said he believes that people should have reason to stay in the community if they'd like to. He said he would want to hear from the public about what they would like to see and do his best to achieve those things.

John asked if he knows the salary. Andrew said he saw it was \$64,000 and doesn't have an issue with that but would expect his salary would be set during contract negotiations. He is looking for a 3-year contract.

Andy asked if he got the job, when could he start? Andrew said he would need to give a two week notice for his current job, then for contracts to be finalized, so maybe a month or sooner.

Andrew asked the board about how the working relationship between the board and Town Administrator is in Chester and what they're expectations are? Andy and John both said close



communication. Sometimes the board will pop into town hall, call or email and they would just expect that they are included in most things. Andrew said he is happy to keep communication lines open. John agreed that keeping communication open with residents, departments and the board is important.

Andrew asked about the resident participation. John said that it really depends. Lately there has been more participation than usual, with younger people coming into town and then there are the same people who are very involved and will always show up. John said the town meeting participation is pretty good but typically not more than 100 residents.

Andrews asked where they see the town moving forward within the next 5-10 years. John said they want to keep the small-town vibe and looking into more shared services between towns. Andrew agreed there should be a good relationship with state representatives. John said that is something that is lacking and they are open to new ideas.

Andrew asked what they see as his role as being the Town Administrator for regionalization projects? John said that they would expect the TA to spearhead the foundation and build the connections needed to move forward with those.

Prentiss Richardson was the second candidate, whose interview started in person at 6:30pm.

Andy asked why he wants to work for Chester. Prentiss said he appreciates how the citizens care, how involved they are and he appreciates the transparency that Chester seems to have.

Andy asked about the primary challenges he sees for the town. Prentiss said capital purchasing, such as the old school.

Andy asked about how he would prioritize spending and how he would work with the budget. Prentiss said he would prioritize large scale projects, careful purchasing and careful accounting.

Andy asked about his grant experience. Prentiss said he worked on writing grants with his college. He knows how to find applicable grants, what the process is and how to move forward with applying for them.

Andy asked how he would help residents feel heard in town decisions. Prentiss said he wants to make sure he meets people where they're at and personally reaches out to people that may not be as involved in making things more inclusive. He said he would like to encourage transparency and inclusion.



Andy asked about how he would be managing small groups. Prentiss said it would depend on the quality of the worker. He said when working with a high quality worker, he would allow them freedom to do their work without too much invasion, whereas if they were someone that was showing less initiative, he would be more hands on with them.

Andy asked how he would review the job after 1 year vs 5? Prentiss said that after 1 year, he would like to review the budget, town participation, community feedback and Select Board review.

John said the Town Administrator represents the board. He asked how he would interact with residents to make them feel heard. He would make sure to listen to the residents and their concerns, write things down and have patience.

John asked about how he would settle disputes. Prentiss said he likes to have written communication, follow up and updating the board as needed. He said he generally likes to be involved and likes to hear both sides to things. He said he understands things can get personal, but he likes to keep things professional and would like to be someone that residents can come to and make complaints or voice concerns. He said he would work towards knowing when he needs to intervene when it's a typical town complaint.

John asked about his thoughts on AI. Prentiss said the best thing with AI is using it to bounce ideas off and help refine any big project ideas or find resources to help him move forward with projects. He uses Chat GPT, Copilot and sometimes Adobe. He is very aware that it needs to be reviewed rather than just copied and pasted.

John said grants are a huge thing for the town. He asked about any grant opportunities he feels are important. Prentiss said state level grants would probably work best for the town. He said he would be hesitant to try for federal level grants.

John asked about his thoughts on shared services. Prentiss said would like to see a shared town accountant and perhaps the dual role of a treasurer and accountant.

John asked how he would handle a call when someone came to him to ask for something.

Prentiss said that it would depend on what is being presented to him. He said he would typically be comfortable hearing them out, then moving forward with research and follow up.

John asked how comfortable he would feel making decisions with or without the board. Prentiss said if it was an emergency and a decision needed to be made quickly, he would feel comfortable and he would also be comfortable reaching out to the board for verification before moving forward. He said he would keep the board involved and would depend on the expectations of the board.



John said the Select Board typically keeps open communication with the TA. Prentiss said it excites him that there is a lot of involvement, and they wouldn't be standoffish. He said of course if there is day-to-day disruption, he would be transparent about that as it comes.

John asked if he saw the salary. Prentiss said he did see the budget was voted on and would like a contract to solidify his position if he was hired on. He said he has an expectation to start by September and is willing to move and start sooner if needed.

Prentiss asked if there are any projects that were started that have been pushed off that he should be aware of. John said the Water Department is looking into getting state funding to help switch the water plant from surface water to well sources. He said that the town is trying to sell the old elementary school. Prentiss asked about the electric light department. John explained there was a committee put together to look into energy issues and the town very much wanted to keep CMELD.

Prentiss asked about the school system. John said there is a very good relationship with the school system and the town right now. There have been a lot of changes with them over the years and there are some major personnel changes coming up.

Prentiss asked about if there are differences within the board that he would need to deal with or are they unified. John said that they can have differing opinions but they understand they need a 2 to 1 vote. Prentiss asked about shared emergency services and how involved the TA would typically be in that regard. John said the emergency services are pretty well handled and there are no major issues or expected problems there. Fire, police and highway are all responsive and on top of what they need to do.

Prentiss asked how the town's relationship with state government is? John said that there could be improvements with the state level representatives.

Interviews finished at 7:08pm.

There was discussion about when the board will decide on how they want to move forward. John said he liked both candidates, though he thought maybe Prentiss was more prepared for the interview and the nuances of town and Andrew had more real-world experience in local government.



Public Comments

Bob Daley asked what the next steps will be? John said it will be on the agenda for next week to discuss how they will move forward.

John Baldasaro made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andy Sutton seconded and all were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 7:15pm.

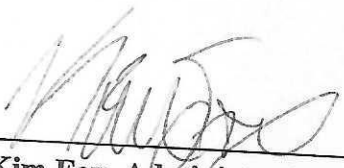


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Respectfully Submitted,



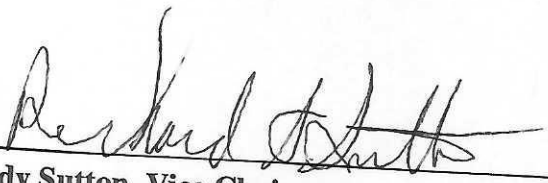
Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

7/14/25
Date Signed



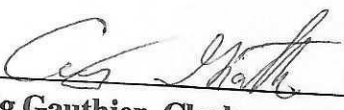
John Baldasaro, Chairman

7/14/25
Date Signed



Andy Sutton, Vice Chairman

7/14/25
Date Signed



Craig Gauthier, Clerk

7/14/25
Date Signed