



**TOWN OF CHESTER
15 MIDDLEFIELD ROAD
CHESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01011**

Monday, March 23rd, 2026

SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES

Selectboard members present were John Baldasaro Craig Gauthier and Brian Forgue. Town Administrator Andrew Alward and Administrative Assistant Kim Fox.

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

Report from Town Departments:

- School Budget Discussion

Dr. Matarazzo and Jason Forgue presented information regarding reductions in state funding and increases in expenses. Although Chester has experienced a general decline in student population, enrollment increased by nine students this year. Several neighboring towns are also seeing significant increases.

Vocational school applications were high this year.

John Baldasaro asked what steps would be taken if the budget didn't pass. Dr. Matarazzo stated the School Committee would need to reconvene and consider reductions, potentially including extracurricular programs such as music, woodworking, and counseling services.

The School Committee reduced each town's contribution to stabilization in order to maintain a 2.44% budget increase. Ongoing advocacy continues for increased state aid for rural schools.

Craig Gauthier asked about students who may not reside in Chester but are counted in enrollment. Dr. Matarazzo stated that proof of residency has been requested, and the next step may involve a public hearing. Letters have been sent with no response. Based on legal guidance, the district must follow established procedures. Larger districts may have staff dedicated to residency verification, which Chester does not.

Andrew Alward asked whether, if students were found to reside in another town, Chester would be reimbursed. Dr. Matarazzo stated this would require further review.



- Sale of Town owned Property

Andrew and Terry Donovan reviewed town-owned parcels to identify properties that are no longer needed. Four parcels are ready for sale, while many others lack recorded deeds.

Brian Fogue asked about the parcel containing Hiram's Tomb, noting it was a gifted property. Andrew confirmed that the abutting property owner is willing to grant a right-of-way and is interested in purchasing the parcel.

Discussion followed regarding parcel size and marketability.

Veronica Marr asked why the parcels would be sold. John explained that many of these parcels are not on the tax rolls, resulting in lost revenue, and the Town has no active use for them. Most were acquired through tax foreclosure.

Brian requested that Andrew consult with the Town's accountants regarding whether proceeds from land sales could be transferred into stabilization, expressing concern about restrictions once funds are deposited.

Jason asked whether properties taken prior to November 2024 must now be sold under updated laws requiring proceeds to be returned to the previous owner.

- Open Space Plan Committee appointment of Bob Daley

Andrew mentioned that Veronica Marr also requested to be on the Committee.

Brian Fogue made a motion to appoint Bob Daley and Veronica Marr to the Open Space Plan Committee. John Baldasaro seconded. The motion passed.

- CDBG App Public Hearing

Erica Johnson from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) presented on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The program is performance-based, and Chester has successfully received funding for many years. Due to income eligibility changes, Chester and Huntington will be the only communities included in this year's joint application. Proposed projects include engineering design for the Maple Avenue water main, housing rehabilitation, social services, and educational programs.



Michelle Kenney from the Hilltown Adult Education Center described services including GED preparation, technology assistance for seniors, and support for small business owners. A representative from the Domestic Violence Task Force discussed services available to residents. Erica also noted increased demand at the Huntington Food Pantry.

Bob Daley asked whether the Prospect Street project would be delayed due to the water main project. Erica stated both projects will proceed concurrently. Remaining funds from Phase II of the Prospect Street project will be applied to Phase III, so additional funding was not requested this year.

Jason requested more information on housing rehabilitation programs, noting limited visibility of projects in Chester. Erica agreed to review the current waitlist and outreach efforts.

Brian Forgue made a motion to authorize PVPC to submit the FY26 CDBG application with Huntington as presented. Craig Gauthier seconded. The motion passed.

Report from Town Administrator:

- Hilltown Community Ambulance Contract

Andrew presented the FY contract, noting an increase of less than 2%, with all other terms remaining standard.

John Baldasaro made a motion to accept the Hilltown Ambulance contract. Brian Forgue seconded. The motion passed.

- Review updated Hall Rental Policy

The policy was updated to allow residents to rent the hall at no cost for events up to five hours, including setup and breakdown. Rentals exceeding five hours will be charged at \$50 per hour.

- Review updated Employee Benefits policy

The policy was updated to include vision insurance, which has always been offered but was previously omitted in error.



- Review Health Insurance opt Out Policy

The Board discussed a policy allowing employees to opt out of Town-provided health insurance if eligible elsewhere. A proposed rebate of \$1,000 for individual plans and \$2,000 for family plans was supported. The policy will be revised and revisited at a future meeting.

- Floodplain FEMA Updates

Andrew reported that FEMA has expanded designated floodplain areas within the Town. This change will require future planning and compliance.

- Update on Town activities

A conference with Senator Paul Marks is scheduled for April 11 in Lenox. Brian said he will attend.

The Water Commission is exploring a partnership with Gateway and PVPC to provide training opportunities for water operators. Certification requires approximately 4,000 hours of experience. Andrew expressed concern about the program's effectiveness, noting limited results over the past two years. Brian expressed support for continuing to pursue workforce development opportunities.

PVPC has proposed a contract totaling \$185,000 for their services next FY. John requested a detailed breakdown of funds secured for the Town versus administrative costs. Andrew noted that such a breakdown has not been provided in recent years.

Veronica Marr asked where updated FEMA floodplain maps can be accessed. Andrew stated they are available on the FEMA website.

Liz Massa asked about the status of Hampden Park on Main Street, as she and Melissa McAuliffe are planning plantings for Chester on Track. Andrew will confirm completion status. Liz also discussed a \$10,000 reimbursement grant for a cardboard compactor, which must be installed by June 30th. She has requested an extension and is awaiting a response. Due to current conditions at the transfer station, installation may not be feasible within the timeframe. The Board discussed potentially deferring the project and saving funds from future grants.

John Baldasaro made a motion to adjourn. Brian Forgue seconded. Meeting ended at 7:36pm



CHESTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN
and ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
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TownofChester.net

Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

4/21/26

Date Signed

Selectboard:

John Baldasaro

4/21/26

Date Signed

Craig Gauthier

4/21/26

Date Signed

Brian Forgue

4/21/26

Date Signed