

Chester Finance Committee Meeting

2/19/2026 COA Room

In Attendance: Sr. Judith Dalesandro, Florence Bolduc, Mary Ann Pease, Bob Daley, Joe Ryan and Jon Williams

Absent: Nick Chisvano

Guests: Brian Forgue and Andrew Alward and Craig Gauthier

Meeting called to order by Flo at 5:30.

Prior meeting minutes reviewed and approved, signed by Flo who will get them to Town Clerk.

#1) Fin Com was informed a new accountant for the town had been hired. She starts in 2 weeks. Margaret McClellan.

#2) Balance in Free Cash is approximately \$100,000.

#3) Andy Myers, Board of Assessors gave the budget presentation. His presentation included a salary survey of comparable towns, Chester current assessor budget vs. Blandford's. Assessor budget models, previous years assessors budget, tax recap sheet and the Division of Local Services Growth value chart.

He stated the help wanted ad for a principal assessor has been out for a couple of weeks.

He explained he has been putting in a lot of hours weekly since last fall entering data in the computer which had not been done previously. Correcting many errors. It has been a long laborious process to get trained on the system and get accurate data into the system.

They are switching to the Patriot System which many surrounding communities use. Jon, who is also on the assessor's board spoke up and stated he sees himself as a processor, this requires the board as a group to review all items presented to the board and that the DOR signs off on all work being done in the assessor's office.

The assessors are looking for FY 27, \$55,225 with the hope of getting a Principal Assessor. If this is unattainable the town may have to employ an assessing service and this could run up to possibly \$99,405.

Bob, asked if the assessors were looking at the possibility of this being a shared position with another town.

State owned land payments were also discussed; how low they are and inaccurate the amount of land shown by the state is.

#2) Brian gave an update on the Gateway School budget. Initial meeting was cancelled due to a lack of quorum. Rescheduled for 2/25/26.

The superintendent sent a letter to the school committee members regarding a \$1.6 mil difference in anticipated cost and anticipated income.

Grant applications are being submitted for budget shortfalls. Due to a Union at the school, 1st thing to be cut would be physical expenses not personnel.

Chester may have 5 less students in FY 27.

Barr Foundation looks good for FY27.

The Blind program at Gateway, (only such program in western mass) is set to get 3 more students.

New roof on the school was adequately planned for. The school debt is paid off.

These payments are now going into Stabilization Fund.

#3) Began going thru budgets for departments that had been given to Andrew by the smaller departments on master sheet.

#4) Bob Daley stated that the Water Department is having a public hearing on 3/11/26 regarding progress of the H2O Dept and a rate hearing.

Bob asked that the Water Dept be placed on the agenda for the next Fin Com meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15PM

Next Meeting 3/5/36 at 5:30 COA

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ann Pease

Florence A. Beale 3-12-2026