

**TOWN OF CHESTER
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TownofChester.net

Select Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 27th, 2026

Open Meeting: This meeting was held in the Council on Aging room at Town Hall with a virtual option.

Select Board members present were Brian Forgue (virtual via Teams) and Jill Strong. Also present were Town Administrator Andrew Alward and Administrative Assistant Kim Fox and members of the public.

Brian Forgue opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. Warrants, minutes, and correspondence were signed.

Rosanne McClaflin, CMELD Interim Manager, was present and also recorded the meeting.

New Business:

- Whip City Fiber Presentation

Andrew Short and Jamie Cincotta from Westfield Gas & Electric/Whip City Fiber presented information about the company and the services it provides. They discussed the number of neighboring towns Whip City Fiber currently services for internet and explained their understanding of CMELD and its role in the town. They also discussed different areas of Chester, including areas where Eversource has existing infrastructure.

Andrew and Jamie explained that the first step would be determining the design needed. Whip City Fiber would complete the design, in-home installation, and project management, and would go out to bid for any materials needed for the installation. They stated that they would handle design and engineering, 24/7 customer service, network monitoring, plant operations, data security, and emergency response.



They noted the system would include generator backup for internet service. If power went out in town, the internet generator backup would engage, allowing residents with their own generators to continue accessing the internet signal. They said Whip City Fiber offers 1,000mbps service which is very fast for multiple devices.

Andrew and Jamie also explained that the town would own the service, meaning revenues would stay within the town. The town would be responsible for the cost of the buildout, and revenues from subscriptions would be used to pay down the debt. Once the debt was paid, the town would retain the revenues.

Veronica Marr asked if Whip City Fiber would be taking over Comcast. Jamie said no, residents would still have the option to choose between both service providers. Chris Martensen asked, if a subscription was \$80 per month, how much Whip City Fiber would retain and how much Chester would retain. The representatives said that generally Whip City Fiber would retain around a \$30 fee, with the remaining subscription revenue staying with the town.

There was a question about the overall buildout cost. Jamie and Andrew said they would be able to provide that information once the design work was completed and the full project scope was known. They presented examples of the devices that would be installed on poles, at homes, and inside homes, and noted that their wiring is fiberglass, compared to Comcast's copper wiring.

Whip City Fiber would own the router so its customer service team could remote in for troubleshooting and repairs as needed although the other devices would be owned by the town. Residents would pay for the service online, and Whip City Fiber would help residents set that up after installation.

Rosanne asked for clarification that the town would take on debt for the buildout cost and subscriptions would pay that back. She asked what would happen if there was not enough interest/subscriptions to pay the debt back and whether that would affect taxpayers. The representatives said the town would set the monthly cost of internet service for residents to pay the debt back. They also said the town could choose to build out service in sections, pay down that debt, and then move on to another section of town. They said other towns have used that approach successfully.

Whip City Fiber invited the Board and Town Administrator to tour their facility.



- Increase Membership of the Open Space Plan Committee from 5 to 7

Brian asked why Farsha Hart was not on the agenda to be appointed. Andrew said he and the Town Clerk had not received confirmation directly from her, which is why she was not included. Brian asked if Jill would feel comfortable making an exception to appointing her at his request. He said Farsha has communicated with other members of the Open Space Plan Committee very frequently. Jill said that she would like to hear from her directly about her interest and have her complete an appointment form like all other board/committee members. She did agree to increasing the number of members of the committee.

Brian Forgue made a motion to increase the Open Space Plan Committee membership from 5 to 7. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0.

- Approve Special Town Election Warrant – Terry Donovan

CMELD lost one of its commissioners, and there was still time to include that position in the Special Election ballot for September 19th.

Brian Forgue made a motion to approve the Special Town Election warrant. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0.

- Appoint Jessica Sakaske to Parks and Recreation Committee

Jessica Sakaske recently submitted her appointment paperwork and has served on the committee in the past.

Brian Forgue made a motion to appoint Jessica Sakaske to the Parks and Recreation Committee. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0.

- Poultry By-Law Review – Liz Massa, Planning Board

Liz Massa reviewed proposed poultry by-law updates from the Planning Board. The revisions included limits for properties under five acres, including a maximum of eight hens, with no roosters, guinea fowl, or other poultry, which is defined in the bylaw.

Brian Forgue made a motion to accept the Poultry Bylaw as read to move on to the Public Hearing stage. Jill Strong seconded. Motion passed 2-0.



Old Business:

- Senior Work Off Program

Brian said he spoke with Blandford's Council on Aging Director and discussed how Blandford had not had the program for a couple of years but was also interested in bringing it back. At a recent meeting, Blandford decided to run the program under the new required specifications. Brian said Blandford's Treasurer and Accountant would likely handle the financial aspect of the program.

Keirsen said she is willing to put in the work to manage the program and participant hours. She said she believes the program is important and does not want the seniors to lose it. She also said she is willing to help with the payroll aspect. Kim Fox said she had concerns about the logistics of paying participants through the payroll system so deductions could be processed while also holding the funds aside to be applied toward their real estate taxes, instead of paying them directly. She said that if the Treasurer and Accountant could do that, then that would be fine.

Brian Forgue made a motion to continue the Senior Work Off Program with ten members. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0.

Town Administrator Report – Andrew Alward

- Employee Sign-Off on Policies

Andrew said he would like employees to complete an annual acknowledgement that they have read town policies to help ensure employees stay up to date on policy information.

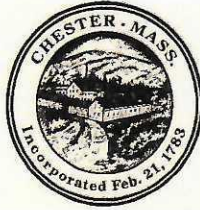
Brian Forgue made a motion to approve the annual employee policy acknowledgement. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0.

- SBA Towers Contract Amendment Review Update

Andrew provided an update on the SBA Towers contract amendment review. It is currently being reviewed by the Town's attorney

- Old Elementary School RFP

Andrew said there has not been much progress since the last update on the RFP. He said PVPC had previously suggested getting a title examiner, and he asked whether the Board wanted to



pursue that. Andrew said he also wanted to consider issuing an RFP for brokerage services, like what he is doing for other town-owned properties.

Jill mentioned that there is a company called Foresight in Pittsfield that could potentially help the town consider whether the building could become a regional public service community building for fire, police, and ambulance services.

- Regional Vocational Transportation Agreement

Andrew said this is the last year of the town's five-year contract with Lecrenski Bros. He said the town would need to begin the negotiation process later this year and wanted the Board to start thinking about it. Andrew said he would communicate with the other town administrators involved as well.

- Employee Health Insurance HGCIT

Andrew said he wanted to consider other options instead of obtaining employee health insurance through HGCIT. His suggestion was to go through insurance companies directly, if possible. Jill and Brian agreed. Brian noted that the town has until December to notify HGCIT if it will be leaving.

- Correcting County Retirement

Andrew said a handful of full-time town employees were notified about additional deductions that need to be paid due to a prior issue with County Retirement deductions.

- AI Governance Policy Review and Approval

Andrew said the AI Governance Policy had been vetted through the town's IT department and gives overall guidance to employees/committee members using AI tools for work purposes.

Members Report

- Letter of Accommodation for Fire Chief Nate Bolduc – Jill Strong

Jill recognized Fire Chief Nate Bolduc for a heroic rescue in town at the beginning of July. She had received a letter of accommodation from Congressman Richard Neal which she presented to Nate.



Public Comments and Questions:

Bob Tingly of 26 Main Street presented the Board with a water filter from his home and asked what was going on with the water. He said the filter was ten months old. He didn't say what exactly he felt the issue was. He asked Bob Daley about the test wells being drilled that were discussed a while ago. Bob Daley said that is still being looked into and that the town water is currently better than it has been in 30 years. He said Bob is welcome to attend any Water Department meetings as they are scheduled. Jill also noted that there is an opening on the Water Commission for the Special Election if he felt inclined to get involved.

Dennis and Lynn Proulx of 187 Route 20 said they have been trying to get a septic tank installed for months and have been held back by Conservation Commission delays. They said had no issues going through Board of Health and their portion of the process. They have sent emails and called many times without receiving responses from anyone on the Conservation. They said their house has been waiting for three months to sell and that they started the process last year.

Andrew said the public hearings that had been published in the Country Journal had to be cancelled because agendas had not been sent to the Town Clerk for posting. Jill said that if the Conservation Commission does not post a meeting this week, she would ask the Commission to attend the next Select Board meeting to resolve the matter. The Proulx's expressed concern since they were moving and would be out of state on August 1st. There was discussion that the Conservation would likely hold a meeting on July 31st as long as an agenda was sent to the Town Clerk's office to be in compliance with MGL.

Liz Massa said the Jacobs Ladder Scenic Byway Committee discussed the possibility that Skyline Trail may be considered as a scenic byway. She said there will be a meeting about the topic in Huntington at some point in the near future for people to learn more information.

Brian Forgue made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0. Meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.



Submitted by

Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

8/13/26

Date

Approved by Select Board:

Brian Forgue, Chair

8/10/26

Date

Jill Strong, Vice Chair

8/10/26

Date