

TOWN OF CHESTER Select Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, August 10th, 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 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.

New Business:

- Appoint Varsha Hart to Open Space Committee

Varsha Hart was present and expressed her enthusiasm for joining the committee. She said she works in data analytics and has a passion for helping the community and felt this is a good opportunity to put that to practice.

Brian Forgue made a motion to appoint Varsha Hart to the Open Space Committee. Jill Strong seconded. The motion passed 2-0.

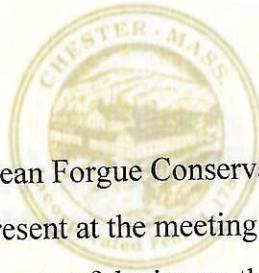
Bob Daley mentioned the committee had held their first meeting, and it was successful. He said they have recruited Amy Kaplan from PVPC to assist in facilitating their meetings and she is going to work on applying for the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition Grant. Bob said that Amy is estimating a nine-month time frame to complete the work to create the Open Space Plan.

- Appoint Liz Massa to Parks and Rec and discontinue Parks and Trails Coordinator Position

Liz confirmed she would have the same tasks essentially and has already met with the other members of the Parks and Recreation Committee.

Brian Forgue made a motion to appoint Liz Massa to the Parks and Recreation Committee. Jill Strong seconded. The motion passed 2-0.

Brian Forgue made a motion to discontinue the Parks and Trails Coordinator position. Jill Strong seconded. The motion passed 2-0.



- Lora Wade, Paul Waite and Sean Forgue Conservation Work and Requirements

Sean Forgue was the only member present at the meeting. He said that over the last couple of weeks, he has been trying to resolve some of the issues the Committee has been facing. He said that he had put together a couple of meetings and with Lora's absence, he has now been working with Paul to get some of their backlog of applications approved and moving forward. He said he is working on getting himself up to speed with how processes work and he is going to step up and try to keep things moving forward.

Town Administrator Report

- SBA Towers Contract Amendment Review Update

Andrew Alward said that at this point, the contract amendment has been reviewed by Town Council and will be reviewed by the Planning Board at their meeting scheduled for tomorrow. He said after that there will be a clearer direction of what is going to be requested in order to move forward with an agreement.

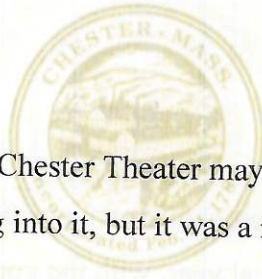
- Town Health Insurance

Andrew has met with a few insurance representatives and so far, it seems like staying with HCGIT would be the most affordable option for the town. He reviewed what it would be like going through the insurance companies directly and because the town has such a small pool of employees covered on the plan, it would end up costing the town more overall.

Andrew said while the trust had very large increases over the last couple of years, they hadn't raised their rates in a long time and they are still the most affordable locally.

- Elementary School RFP

Erica Johnson at PVPC was recommending getting a title examiner and didn't really want to move forward with the RFP without that. Jill mentioned she had discussed it with Erica at one point and she said there were concerns about not having a lot of property information. Andrew said that a lot of information about the property has been provided and felt that this was an unnecessary obstacle. He said he also had a meeting with her and the town attorney who did not have any issues with the way the RFP was presented. Andrew felt that PVPC will not proceed with posting the RFP unless the town gets a title examiner.



Brian mentioned he did hear that the Chester Theater may be interested in buying it. Andrew said they had expressed interest in looking into it, but it was a inquiry, not necessarily a concrete option.

Nick Chiusano expressed concern about the state of the building as it stands today and felt like in five years' time, that building would have no other option than to be demolished.

There was a discussion about the shared septic system and how the town is paying to maintain the property now. There was discussion about the RFP being posted as is by the town without PVPC. There was discussion about having the parking lot in the deed as being able to be used by the Town Hall as well and how restrictive that could be for companies or developers willing to purchase with that stipulation.

Rich Holzman said all of these topics were discussed at length in every meeting that the Old Elementary School Committee had when creating the current RFP. He said that because of internal issues at PVPC, not at the fault of the town, there were severe delays and a change in hands very late in the process.

Brian said he would like to see the RFP posted and feel like that's the next best action step for the town. There was an understanding that the RFP is a little restrictive and may cause a lack of interest from developers. If there is no response, the next action steps for the town could be to take responsibility for demolition. Jill agreed that she would like to see the RFP posted as well.

- Organization of Accounting and Financial System Starting

Andrew stated that the prior accounting firm, Kinsherp CPA, processed the budget approved at Annual Town Meeting, however there were several accounts not created that should have been and some were not titled correctly. There will be some paperwork done with the new Accountant in order to correct those issues, and no other action needs to be taken by the town. There were no issues with the budget or the approval from the Annual Meeting, just the posting of the FY27 funds/accounts.

- MassSave PVPC Building Audit

Andrew conducted a building audit to determine whether any MassSave grant opportunities could support the Town Hall updates needed, such as lighting improvements or heating repairs. There are no useful grants currently available, but some opportunities may become available next year that could be worth applying for. Andrew also said that the town is upgrading Town Hall lighting fixtures to LED as they need replacement.



- Update on Town activities

Andrew mentioned that he has been researching town positions and pay scales. He said he would like to begin reviewing this for next fiscal year, with the goal of better aligning job roles and responsibilities with pay rates for similar positions in surrounding towns. Brian asked about end of year transfers. Andrew said he is waiting for the payment from the Blandford Police department to be allocated to the proper expense accounts. The check was received and placed into a revenue account which didn't seem like the proper place since the check is a reimbursement for services rendered, not necessarily revenue the town is generating. Whip City Fiber was also following up to see if the Board wanted to visit their facility or move forward with more information. Brian said he would be willing to go on any Saturday. Jill said that would work for her as well.

Public Comments and Questions:

Bob Daley asked if a Special Town Meeting is needed to do year end transfers. Brian said that is not needed because it is all money that has already approved during the budget.

Jessica Sakaske asked about Gateway's Athletic Association using Emery field during their soccer season. Andrew said that the Parks and Rec Committee can discuss and determine that. There was discussion about charging a fee for use of the field. Brian and Jessica expressed that they did not want to charge for this specific purpose. There was a mention of wear and tear and maintenance costs of the field and Jessica mentioned Gateway had expressed willingness to pay for the cost of mowing.

Bob Daley recognized Andrew's upcoming one year anniversary as the Town Administrator.

Brian Forgue made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Motion passed 2-0. Meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.



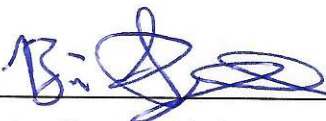
Submitted by



Kim Fox, Administrative Assistant

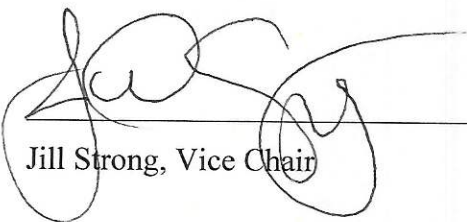
8/24/20
Date

Approved by Select Board:



Brian Fogue, Chair

8/24/20
Date



Jill Strong, Vice Chair

8/24/20
Date

