

TOWN OF CHESTER

Select Board Meeting Minutes

September 21, 2026

Open Meeting: The meeting was held in the Town Hall Auditorium, with a virtual option available.

Select Board members Brian Forgue and Jill Strong, along with newly elected Select Board member Chris Martenson, were present. Town Administrator Andrew Alward, Administrative Assistant Kim Fox, and members of the public were also present.

Brian Forgue opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. The Board signed warrants and minutes and reviewed correspondence.

New Business:

- Health Insurance Presentation

Mark Rogers and Eric Avrumson of NFP, a health and employee benefits advisory firm, discussed alternatives to insurance through HCGIT. Eric explained that fully insured plans, such as Blue Cross or Harvard Pilgrim, place the financial risk on the insurer. He also discussed self-insurance, under which the Town would assume more risk but could realize savings in certain areas. They described other municipalities they had helped through the transition process. Chris asked why rates had increased so significantly. Eric said the cost of GLP-1 medications had been underestimated, resulting in higher-than-expected expenditures.

Brian asked whether NFP had experience working with municipalities that operate enterprise funds, such as CMELD. Eric said several members of the NFP team had decades of municipal experience.

Eric said NFP reviews the Town's insurance coverage history to identify potential cost savings and determine why certain amounts may not have been budgeted properly in prior years.

Brian said the Board wanted to consider the proposal and potentially decide at its next meeting. He asked whether NFP could complete its services before the deadline for notifying HCGIT that Chester would be leaving the trust. Eric said yes, provided NFP received all information needed to complete its assessment.



Rosanne confirmed that CMELD would like to participate and continue paying its share of health insurance costs if the Town moves forward with the consultants. She said the recent rate increases made the proposal worth exploring.

The Board agreed to revisit the matter at its next meeting.

- Discussion of Lora Wade's Removal from the Conservation Commission

Brian Forgue moved to remove Lora Wade from the Conservation Commission. Jill Strong seconded the motion, and all were in favor. The motion passed 3-0.

Bob Daley asked whether any documents had been recovered from her. Brian said the other members of the Conservation Commission had obtained enough material to continue addressing the backlog.

- Water Update

Bob Daley asked whether the Board had any questions or concerns about the Water Department's latest update. Chris asked him to clarify whether he was providing an update or requesting assistance from the Board. Bob identified a need for a grant writer.

He also noted the need for groundwater wells and said the flow from Horn Pond was working well.

The Water Department had been working to clear the Horn Pond access road and hoped to begin installing culverts in October as the next phase of repairs.

Chris asked whether groundwater wells would eliminate the need for Horn Pond. Bob said he was unsure but that it was possible. He noted that 17 private parcels surrounding Horn Pond create restrictions and limitations.

Brian asked whether PVPC could assist with the grants for which Bob was seeking a grant writer. Bob said he felt PVPC could not provide as much assistance to the Water Department as desired. Brian noted that the hilltowns had once shared a regional grant writer, but the agreement ended because some towns did not contribute their shares. Bob said a similar arrangement might be worth revisiting.

Brian recalled that, when the Water Commission last discussed rate increases, it considered gradual annual increases to address departmental needs, inflation, and related costs.

Bob noted concerns about the waterline on Soisalo Road.



- Special Town Meeting Discussion and Approval

A Special Town Meeting is needed because the year-end transfers were not completed by July 15th. Brian confirmed that the warrant contains two articles: one for the year-end transfers and one to correct an over appropriation to stabilization at the Annual Town Meeting in May.

Jill asked whether the figures were accurate given the recent lapse in Town Accountant coverage. Andrew said they were accurate to the best of their knowledge.

Brian Forgue moved to approve the Special Town Meeting warrant as presented. Chris Martenson seconded the motion and all were in favor. The motion passed 3-0.

- Appointment of Krestina Alward-Riley as Interim Town Accountant

Andrew said the Town Accountant had submitted a resignation letter the previous week, effective immediately. Because the position is critical, Andrew said he saw no viable alternative to making an interim appointment.

Jill agreed that it was helpful to have written confirmation from the State Ethics Commission regarding the situation.

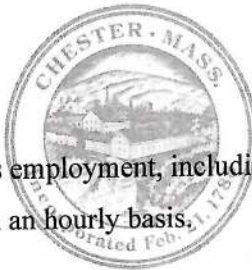
Chris asked whether the position had been posted. Andrew said he had not yet had an opportunity to post the Town Accountant position, but the appointment under consideration was only interim and the permanent position would be posted soon.

Brian said he had confirmed under Massachusetts General Laws that an interim appointment could be made without separately posting an interim position.

John Baldasaro expressed concern about approving the appointment before posting the position, particularly given the family relationship between Andrew and Krestina. Brian acknowledged the optics and said the Town was researching the matter carefully to ensure it was handled appropriately. John asked whether any companies had been contacted. Andrew said using a company would require a contracting process, which would cause delays despite the immediate need.

The Board discussed the status of account reconciliations and how municipal accounting differs from private-sector accounting.

Veronica Marr asked why the Town Accountant had left. Brian said no reason had been provided, but he believed the resignation was related to questions about the status of the accounts.



Chris asked about the terms of Krestina's employment, including her rate of pay. Andrew said she would receive the same rate as Margaret, but on an hourly basis.

Brian Forgue moved to appoint Krestina Alward-Riley as interim Town Accountant. Jill Strong seconded the motion. Chris Martenson abstained. The motion passed 2-0-1.

Old Business

- Policy Approval Discussion

The Board revisited the policy review process discussed at the previous week's meeting. Brian said the best approach would be to have personnel policies reviewed and discussed at the next scheduled staff meeting. Following that collaboration, the Select Board would review each policy for approval before finalization.

Chris asked how often policies are revised. Brian said a new handbook was needed, but the Town had decided to separate the policies so they would be easier to locate and revise when necessary.

Chris asked whether the sick pay policy was revised for state compliance or because other changes were needed. Andrew said it was a combination of both.

Rosanne said she would prefer a paper copy of the policy rather than having to review it only online. Brian confirmed that employees could request paper copies.

Brian Forgue moved to approve the new procedure for approving policies. Jill Strong seconded the motion, and all were in favor. The motion passed 3-0.

Town Administrator Report:

- Time and Attendance Policy Update (Typographical Errors Only)

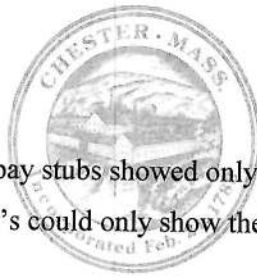
Brian Forgue moved to amend the Time and Attendance Policy as presented. Jill Strong seconded the motion, and all were in favor. The motion passed.

- Update on Town Activities

Chris said he planned to donate his quarterly stipend to a local charity and asked the public to help him identify a recipient.

Members' Reports:

Jill asked about a discrepancy noted in Chipper Dazelle's Highway report between his accrued sick leave and the balance shown on his pay stubs. Andrew confirmed that this was a known issue: more than 200



hours of sick leave had accrued, but the pay stubs showed only 40 hours. Andrew confirmed that it would honor the higher balance because Harper's could only show the 40 hours and not the total the employee had.

Public Comment:

Muriel Hall, Carol Hepworth, and Melissa McAuliffe, representing the Cultural Council, presented a historical banner of Chester's history created in collaboration with the Historical Society.

The Chester Granite Saw property tour will be held on Sunday at 1:00 p.m., rain or shine.

Brian Forgue moved to adjourn the meeting. Jill Strong seconded the motion. The motion passed 2-0, and the meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.