

TOWN BOARD MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING

June 24, 2026

6:45 PM

Call to Order

Supervisor Holdridge called the Town Board meeting to order at 6:45pm.

Attendance

Town Clerk Zappala called the roll:

- Supervisor Holdridge: Present
- Council Member Becker: Present
- Council Member Cassara: Present
- Council Member Courtenay: Present
- Council Member Diffley: Present

Determination of Quorum: Yes X No

Also in attendance: Town Attorney Cassidy

Pledge of Allegiance

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT 6/10/26 TOWN BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Supervisor Holdridge asked if everyone had reviewed the minutes from the June 10, 2026. With no questions or debate points raised, the Minutes were accepted.

MOTION by Council Member Courtenay, seconded by Council Member Diffley to accept the June 10, 2026 Meeting Minutes as presented by Town Clerk Zappala.

Motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

SUMMARY OF BILLS

Supervisor Holdridge reported that the Town would be paying bills in the amount of \$362,036.68.

PUBLIC HEARING ON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AS AMENDED AND INTRODUCTORY LOCAL LAW 10 OF 2025

Opening Statement by Town Attorney:

Before the public hearing was formally opened, Town Attorney Cassidy delivered an extensive opening statement for the record, providing a detailed procedural history of the comprehensive plan process.

Attorney Cassidy explained that in 2024, the Town Board established the Comprehensive Plan Committee, which worked with the Town's Planner, Kristen O'Donnell of Lanc & Tully, to prepare a draft comprehensive

plan. The Town Board accepted referral of the plan from the committee on January 6, 2025, and directed the planner to prepare draft zoning amendments so that both documents could be reviewed simultaneously. The draft comprehensive plan and zoning amendments were formally introduced as Introductory Local Law 10 of 2025 on July 23, 2025. The Town Board declared itself lead agency under the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and classified the proposed plan and amendments as a Type 1 action.

Attorney Cassidy noted that a public hearing was held on October 22, 2025, followed by a ten-day written public comment period. Following that hearing, the Town Board and its consultants reviewed the comments and made revisions where appropriate. A written response to all comments was made available on the Town's website. Attorney Cassidy further noted that proposals concerning religious uses were referred to Special Counsel Harris Beach Murtha, whose legal opinion was also published on the Town's website.

Attorney Cassidy read key excerpts from the special counsel opinion into the record: "Under the relevant case law, it is well settled that a municipality cannot wholly exclude, ban religious uses within a zoning district, or effectively ban the use via a zoning amendment. Nor can a municipality not list a religious use as a principal, accessory, or specially permitted use within a zoning district, which has been found to be tantamount to an outright exclusion of a religious use. Rather, as courts have repeatedly held, the proper and legal way to regulate such uses is through the special permitting review process."

Based on that opinion, Attorney Cassidy explained, the Town Board maintained its approach of regulating religious uses through special permit, but made modifications to the special permit standards for religious uses in accordance with special counsel's recommendations. She further noted that on May 27, 2026, the Town Board amended the draft comprehensive plan and Introductory Local Law 10 of 2025, and that a redline document identifying all changes had been published on the Town's website.

Attorney Cassidy then addressed a comment letter that had been inadvertently omitted from the Town's written response to comments. The letter, dated September 19, 2025, was submitted on behalf of VA Lake Station Holdings LLC, and took the position that lots proposed to be rezoned from Industrial Park (IP) to Suburban Residential 2 (SR-2) cannot reasonably accommodate residential development. Attorney Cassidy stated clearly for the record that the Town did receive the letter and considered it as part of its deliberations.

She then read into the record an addendum to the Town's response to that letter, after confirming with the Board that all members had reviewed and were comfortable with the addendum language.

Letter # 26: John C. Cappello, Esq. J&G Law on behalf of VA Lake Station Holdings LLC, dated September 19, 2025

The letter and its attachments take the position that property owned by VA Lake Station Holdings LLC (SBL 17-1-21) should continue to be zoned as light industrial. The letter argues that it is impractical to develop residential uses on the property.

Response: The Comprehensive Plan Committee has recommended that the zoning along Lake Station Road be changed from IP to SR 2. The Town Board notes that Lake Station Road is predominantly residential with residential zoning (SR1) immediately to the South and existing residential development adjoining to the east (19 Lake Station Road). The proposed zoning change is consistent with the surrounding residential character. The Town Board further acknowledges the efforts by the Town of Warwick to modify its zoning nearby zoning from OI (Office Industrial) to SM (Suburban Residential Medium Density) along Kings Highway. See Introductory Local Law 2 of 2026.

The Town is also concerned with impacts of industrial use on traffic on Lake Station Road. Lake Station road is a two-lane road with no shoulders with limited site distance. There was recently a collision at Kings Highway and Lake Station Road. This concern is reflected in the 2023 review of the nearby Davidson Drive Industrial Development. There, the project was designed to direct traffic to Bellvale Road which is a larger collector road and away from Lake Station Road which is classified as a local road to decrease the impact of truck traffic on Lake Station Road. Unlike the surrounding industrial development which have frontage or access on Kings Highway or Bellvale Road, the parcels selected for rezoning do not have that same ability. The Board is further concerned with the expansion of warehouse uses when there are a number of existing but vacant warehouse spaces in the Chester Industrial Park.

The Town notes that VA Lake Station Holdings had made an initial appearance in January of 2024 after the development moratorium was first introduced. The Town further notes that while the letter states that VA Lake

Station was told to delay its application, it does not identify who made such request or the context of that request.

Attorney Cassidy then addressed the public, encouraging commenters to focus their remarks on the amendments published the prior month, as identified in the redline. She reminded participants that the Board would be taking down comments and questions but would not be responding that evening, instead considering all input during deliberations prior to taking action.

Supervisor Holdridge then offered a summary of key highlights from the comprehensive plan and proposed zoning amendments, noting he had previously shared these in a video and on social media. He highlighted the following prospective provisions: a ban on data centers and large-scale battery storage facilities; the introduction of the Town's first-ever special use permit framework; a significantly more detailed land disturbance permit framework; strengthened regulatory language regarding daycares, religious institutions, bed and breakfasts, fast food businesses, and solar projects; the rezoning of multiple Lake Station Road lots from industrial to suburban/residential; and the reinforcement of mixed residential/business zoning usage in Sugar Loaf. Supervisor Holdridge closed by thanking the volunteer members of the Comprehensive Plan Committee for approximately two years of dedicated service to the community.

MOTION to open the public hearing at 7:00pm on Comprehensive Plan As Amended and Introductory Local Law 10 Of 2025 was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

Motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tracy Shuh, Pickerel Road, addressed the Board, thanking all who participated in the lengthy process. She stated that the comprehensive plan had been shaped by public feedback and that residents had been clear from the beginning about their priorities: protecting community character, managing responsible growth, and ensuring development aligns with the Town's long-term vision. She noted her own participation as a member of the Comprehensive Plan Committee and acknowledged that while not every issue may have been fully addressed to everyone's satisfaction, the progress made so far does matter. She indicated she had emailed additional recommendations to the Board earlier that day in light of ongoing public concerns about certain zoning changes, and asked that they be considered thoughtfully.

Looking ahead, Ms. Shuh emphasized that the real test of the code would come when projects appear before the Planning Board, urging the Town Board to actively monitor how the code is applied rather than treat it as a filed document. Oversight cannot be passive, she said, adding that continuing education for both the Planning Board and Town Board is essential and that Board members cannot rely solely on consultants. She stressed the importance of field visits, staying current on best practices, and applying standards consistently. She characterized adoption of the amended plan as a milestone, but not the end: "Comprehensive plans and Town codes are meant to grow with us."

Supervisor Holdridge added, for the public's benefit, that he views the comprehensive plan as a living, breathing document — akin to the country's constitution — and that its accompanying recommendations are ones he intends to follow in the months and years to come.

Veronica Mott, Bellvale Road, addressed the Board, expressing appreciation for the two years of hard work reflected in the plan and acknowledging it as a meaningful community resource. She provided a series of specific, page-by-page suggestions and observations:

She recommended adding to the historical component of the plan a description of the artillery encampment in Chester, which she described as a major Revolutionary War military site active from June through November of 1779, serving as a continental army artillery park, supply depot, armory shop, and ammunition laboratory. She suggested this addition would be appropriate on page 6 of the document, noting she would follow up with the relevant text from the Orange County Historical Society.

Ms. Mott raised the question of whether a detention center should be added as a prohibited use of space, noting it as inconsistent with the vision of the community given recent public outcry.

She flagged that the county park on Laroe Road — tentatively identified as Goose Pond Mountain or a park in that general area — should be listed in the natural resources section on page 15 as a Chester resource, even though it is county-owned.

She praised the night sky provisions in the plan, noting from personal experience that she had spent approximately six months working with a nearby warehouse facility to update its lighting, and the results — that her entire two-acre property is no longer illuminated at all hours — had been very positive.

She pointed out that page 31 still references a "689-seat Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center on Creamery," which she suggested may need updating. On page 33, she noted that the plan should reflect plans to renovate or replace playground equipment at Oak and Chester Commons, not only Carpenter Park. She also noted that the plan's reference to the Chester Public Library as a potential community center is complicated by the fact that the bathrooms remain non-functional, making the space currently unusable for that purpose.

Ms. Mott also noted that the sidewalk system description in the Sugar Loaf infrastructure section on page 60 appeared outdated, as sidewalks were completed after the initial draft was written. She further noted that the map of the Sugar Loaf Historic District on page 63 may no longer be labeled as "potential" given subsequent formal designation. She also took issue with a photograph on page 65 that she felt had no connection to Sugar Loaf.

She asked whether excavation and mining remain part of the Town's zoning framework, and was confirmed that they do. She concluded by recommending that Chester Commons and Oak be added to the parks and recreation section on page 74. Attorney Cassidy noted several of Ms. Mott's corrections as items that could be administratively corrected in the document.

Marion Holdridge, Sunfish Lane, addressed the Board and opened with a general statement about the responsibilities of elected officials, particularly the duty to ensure that local laws and ordinances are properly administered and enforced. She noted that the community had been discussing certain issues since 2019 — specifically the noise ordinance — and expressed her view that the situation had worsened in the intervening years.

She directed her remarks principally toward Camp Monroe, posing a series of pointed questions for the record: whether the camp is registered with the Town for transient lodging; whether it holds short-term rental permits as required by Town law; whether it is paying the Town's short-term rental tax as other bed-and-breakfast operators are required to do; whether current laws are being enforced — which she answered herself, stating the answer is "no," because occupants have lived there year-round for six years since COVID, when the camp allegedly went to the county to obtain a special permit to use a dormitory as a hotel; whether buildings are being inspected, which she also said was not occurring, as everything had been placed on hold after a threat to sue the Town if it did not acquiesce to zoning changes; and why short-term rentals in multifamily buildings are being permitted when Town law does not allow it.

Ms. Holdridge referenced a petition with over 200 signatures that she stated had been submitted months earlier, arguing that residents who live and vote in Chester are concerned that the Town Board is not protecting their property rights or values. She stated, the rule of law does not mean that we surrender zoning powers, referencing the special counsel opinion. She concluded, the job as elected officials are to protect the rights of all the people in the Town who voted for each and every one of you. If you change the zoning laws, you are legitimizing bullying, threatening, and breaking of the laws that are already on the books, and the people of Chester will remember what was done to them when election day rolls around.

Monica Warog, speaking on behalf of AYPa Power regarding the Hambletonian Energy Storage Project, acknowledged the Board's position restricting battery energy storage development in Chester, but urged the Board to consider the broader regional grid stability context. She cited the New York Independent System Operator's 2026 first-quarter short-term assessment of reliability, which she said officially declares a near-term reliability need for the lower Hudson Valley. She noted that the impending retirement of the 532-megawatt facility in Zone G would trigger a regional supply deficiency of up to 639 megawatts by 2030, and that large load demand in the zone is forecast to reach 110 megawatts by 2030. She stated the downstate grid currently relies on fossil fuels for 72 percent of its capacity, and characterized the Sugar Loaf substations as a critical electrical gateway to relieve a severe transmission bottleneck. She described the Hambletonian project as designed to operate as a dynamic node between upstate generation and downstate load. She closed by stating, it is unfortunate that the Town is unable to embrace its necessary role in supporting the regional grid at this time, but indicated that AYPa Power remains committed to ultimately meeting these energy needs in a safe and responsible manner.

Susan Miller, 15 Paradise Lane, spoke in support of the Lake Station Road rezoning from industrial to residential. She described the community's two-year engagement in efforts to ensure that no access for tractor-trailer trucks is permitted on Lake Station Road, which she described as too narrow and too residential for industrial traffic. She noted that the Planning Board had agreed with that assessment. She thanked the Board for the direction the plan is taking, specifically noting the prohibitions on data centers and battery storage as evidence that the Board cares about residents' quality of life. She encouraged the Board to put the people here first rather than corporations with legal resources to fight on their behalf.

Supervisor Holdridge briefly confirmed for Ms. Miller that the plan does, in fact, change the zoning of the relevant Lake Station Road lots to residential, so industrial uses would no longer be permitted there.

A question was submitted online from Sean O'Brien, who indicated his property directly abuts the property under discussion. He described experiencing ongoing trespassing issues and expressed concern about the impact of large-scale industrial development on the quiet, natural environment that drew his family to Chester. He stated he is concerned that additional large-scale development in this location will bring increased traffic, noise, and activity that are not consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. He asked the Board to prioritize the quality of life, safety, and character of the neighborhood. A follow-up online comment from Mr. O'Brien confirmed his understanding that the lots are being rezoned to residential.

An additional online question was posed by Ed Mullins, asking whether any zoning changes were proposed for the industrial zone on the property across the railroad tracks from the Lake Station Road parcels. Supervisor Holdridge clarified that that area is within the Town of Warwick's jurisdiction and therefore not subject to this action.

Sarah Katz, of the Chester Agricultural Center, directed a process question to the Board. She explained that the Agricultural Center is approximately one-third of the way through a federal grant that would allow them to improve an agricultural building on Meadow Avenue, and that they need a building permit to proceed. She had previously understood that a waiver request might be appropriate while the development moratorium remains in effect. She asked whether the Board would accept such a waiver application at this time.

Attorney Cassidy responded that a waiver application would certainly be accepted, but expressed hope that the entire question would be rendered moot by anticipated Board action in July, noting she expects the comprehensive plan and zoning amendments to be finalized at the July 8th meeting. Supervisor Holdridge similarly encouraged Ms. Katz to hold out a bit longer given the anticipated timeline.

A second question from the online attendee inquired whether any zoning changes were proposed for agricultural lots behind the factory off Kings Highway. Supervisor Holdridge confirmed that no zoning changes were proposed for that area.

Continuation of Public Hearing

Attorney Cassidy then informed the Board of a procedural matter: notice to adjoining Town Clerks, as required by the Town Code. She recommended that the public hearing be continued to July 8th to allow the statutory notice requirement to be satisfied. She reminded participants that while they are welcome to return on July 8th to participate, there is no need to repeat comments already made that evening.

MOTION to continue the public hearing to July 8, 2026 was made by Supervisor Holdridge and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

Motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

PUBLIC COMMENT

Supervisor Holdridge noted for those who attended only for the comprehensive plan hearing that they were free to depart, though they were equally welcome to remain.

Ryan Senning addressed his comments specifically to Council Member Cassara, noting that Council Member Cassara is his neighbor in Sugar Loaf, a member of the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation that championed the sidewalk project in Sugar Loaf, and someone with a background in engineering and construction. Mr. Senning asked Council Member Cassara to share his assessment of Consorti Bros.' \$84,000 bid for the Carpenter Park

ADA improvements before the Board considers awarding them another contract — even as the lowest bidder — given Consorti's prior involvement in the Sugar Loaf sidewalk project. He specifically asked whether Council Member Cassara had done a comparative analysis of what Consorti was contracted to deliver versus what was actually completed, whether the scope was fully met, whether the timeline was acceptable, and whether the Town got what it paid for. He framed his concern by saying, the value of a public works project can't be measured by whether they check the line items off — the quality of execution, the adherence to the timeline, the disruptions to the community, whether the work finished was actually what was expected. He added, all of that matters equally.

Council Member Cassara responded, acknowledging that the Sugar Loaf sidewalk project was managed by Engineer John Queenan and that he had not personally reviewed the documentation relating to that work. He noted that he was not on the Board and did not observe the construction at the time, and acknowledged that, given his area of expertise, he would have done some things differently. He committed to looking into the matter but indicated he would be taking the engineer's recommendation on Consorti for the Carpenter Park project. Mr. Senning thanked the council member for the response.

Meryl Newler addressed the Board as a follow-up to comments she had made at the May 13th meeting regarding the cost of cellular endpoint water meters. She presented a detailed financial breakdown: the new meters cost \$200 each, budgeted for 1,049 meters Town-wide, totaling \$209,800. Additionally, Wi-Fi service costs \$1 per month per meter, equaling \$12,588 per year. Ms. Newler further stated that although she was previously told the batteries in the meters would last 30 years, she had researched the matter and found they last approximately 10 years, at which point replacement would be required at a current cost of \$260 each — totaling \$272,740 — plus \$125,880 in Wi-Fi charges over 10 years. She contrasted this with the cost of a software update for the existing meter system, which she said is only \$2,000.

Ms. Newler further noted that the new meters sit on top of the old meters, reading them and transmitting data via Wi-Fi to an app and to the Town, and asked rhetorically why we need a meter to read a meter and to pay more for it. She also questioned the fairness of charging the opt-out fee during the current phase, while the old software still needs to be maintained for approximately two more years for the remaining 600 meters. She asked specifically why Lake Hill Farms residents should pay two extra years of opt-out fees. She recommended stopping the installation of additional endpoint meters, removing those already installed, and returning to the existing system. She also posed a question about the long-term disposal plan for the lithium-ion battery-encapsulated endpoint meters when they require replacement, drawing a parallel to battery storage units.

Supervisor Holdridge responded that the questions have been answered and there is a disagreement between Ms. Newler's conclusions and those of the Board and the water department. He stated the matter has been explained at multiple budget meetings. Ms. Newler maintained that she did not believe anyone had examined the full long-term expense of the project. Supervisor Holdridge acknowledged the disagreement.

Brian Ross, Ridgefield Drive, addressed the Board on two subjects. On the first, he reported that grass cutting along the road leading up to Ashford Estates, where he lives with 18 other families, had not occurred since the one instance he complimented the Highway Department for in May. He described the current state of the roadside as an eyesore and a health hazard, noting poor sightlines going up the hill, proximity to homes with children, and risks from bugs and ticks. He stated that when he called the Highway Department, he was told they only have one truck and maybe by mid-June. He asked for some form of a schedule rather than a specific date, noting that even knowing a general week would allow neighbors to stop borrowing each other's equipment to manage the growth themselves. He also acknowledged his neighbors had laughed at him for previously complimenting the department.

Supervisor Holdridge acknowledged the Highway Department does have a rough schedule but explained that with one truck and a whole Town to cover, including ongoing paving, grading, and sewer work, specific dates are difficult to commit to. He noted the department avoids giving hard dates to prevent being perceived as unreliable if an emergency intervenes. He indicated he would follow up with the department about the Ashford Estates area specifically.

On his second matter, Mr. Ross described his research into the intersection of Academy Avenue and State Route 94 in the Village of Chester, where he has been advocating for a traffic signal. He reported learning from the New York State DOT that a stop sign cannot be placed on a state road, it must be a traffic light, and that the process for obtaining a traffic light involves an eight-point checklist. He said he had personally canvassed every business along the route, including Alan's Falafel, the Mexican restaurant, the pizza place, the hair salon, and Chris's Barbershop, and obtained signed petitions from all, along with signatures from their customers who were present at the time. He acknowledged that the matter is technically a Village issue and asked whether Supervisor Holdridge could provide a written letter of support from the Town that he could bring to the Village

Board meeting. Supervisor Holdridge agreed to provide a personal letter of support and asked Mr. Ross to send him the petition so it could be referenced. Mr. Ross thanked him and noted the chances of obtaining a traffic light from the state are not great, but that trying is necessary.

Christine Maurer, Creamery Pond Road, addressed the Board about the practice of holding executive session or attorney-client discussions at the start of meetings rather than after regular business is conducted. She noted that in her prior experience, meeting with the attorney before the regular public meeting under attorney-client privilege allowed the Board to address sensitive matters like lawsuits and payment disputes without making the public wait through a long meeting before reaching those items. She asked the Board to consider returning to the 6:45 PM start time with the executive session placed before, rather than after, regular business.

Supervisor Holdridge noted that the meetings used to start at 7:00 PM and that he had moved the start time to 6:45 PM. He explained that the Board had previously experimented with executive session at the beginning of meetings but the majority of Board members felt the meeting flowed better with executive session at the end. He indicated he was open to revisiting the question if Board members had changed their view.

Attorney Cassidy clarified the distinction between attorney-client consultation (where the attorney can advise on the law, but no deliberation occurs) and formal executive session (which must occur within a noticed public meeting and is subject to statutory criteria, such as personnel matters and contract negotiations). She confirmed that, as a practical matter, calling the meeting to order and proceeding directly into executive session is legally permissible, and that any votes resulting from executive session discussions must still be taken in public.

REPORTS – \$205,000 PLAYGROUND GRANT AWARD FROM SENATOR SKOUFIS

Supervisor Holdridge opened the reports section by expressing gratitude to Senator James Skoufis for awarding the Town of Chester a \$205,000 grant for playground improvements at Chester Commons Park. He noted that Council Member Courtenay and he had been in discussions with the Senator for quite some time, with significant resident support. Supervisor Holdridge characterized the award as a major milestone, noting that while additional funding will ultimately be needed to fully realize the park's vision, \$205,000 is a substantial start. He expressed hope that the improvements would be operational by 2027.

Supervisor Holdridge also reported the following:

- He attended a Parks Advisory Board meeting and the inaugural meeting of the Community Preservation Fund Advisory Board, which will oversee opportunities to preserve open space, water resources, historic areas, and natural resources pursuant to the Community Preservation Fund legislation recently passed in Albany. He noted that Warwick used a similar fund to preserve over 5,000 acres of open space over 20 years and expressed that as his long-term aspiration for Chester as well. He referenced the prior year's preservation of 13 acres off Camp Monroe Road and Lakes Road as the beginning of that journey.
- He attended a meeting with Sugar Loaf residents and the Highway Department regarding railroad ties on Kings Highway, and reported that the county plans to repave Kings Highway in late summer. He noted the Town is working to ensure the paving extends as curb-to-curb as possible to maximize parking space in the hamlet.
- He attended a meeting regarding future EMS opportunities, noting the Town is close to finalizing an arrangement that would save a significant amount of money on the 24/7 EMS service established in 2025.

Parks and Recreation Department Report: The department served 2,273 meals for congregate dining in May, with \$2,566.97 reimbursed from Orange County, leaving a total Town cost of \$91.51 for congregate dining that month. Weekly mowing and building maintenance are ongoing. Art in the Park is scheduled for Wednesday, July 29, 2026, from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at Chester Commons, funded in part by a \$5,000 Orange County grant — bringing total grant funding over the past two-and-a-half years to over \$1,500,000. The event will be primarily oriented toward children, with the remaining half of the grant directed toward a senior event still in planning. The department also reported a successful senior trip to Washington, D.C. Registration is ongoing for theater and film camps: Session 1 is July 13–24, with a registration cutoff of July 6th; Session 2 is August 10–21, with a cutoff of August 3rd. Supervisor Holdridge urged residents with children or grandchildren to sign up promptly, as a minimum enrollment is required for the camps to run. The July 4th celebration will be held on July 11, 2026 at the Maple Avenue field, with festivities beginning at 5:00 PM, a drone show at dusk, followed by fireworks.

Council Member Diffley reported that Supervisor Holdridge and he have been in discussions with the Town of Monroe to bring dial-a-bus service to the Monroe-Woodbury side of Chester, addressing a gap in transportation access that has been raised by residents. Hard numbers have not yet been presented, but Council Member Diffley indicated details should be forthcoming.

Council Member Courtenay had no formal report but echoed Supervisor Holdridge's gratitude to Senator Skoufis, expressing that the Senator has been very open to helping the Town and that Council Member Courtenay intends to continue pursuing available grant funding through that office.

Deputy Supervisor Becker reported that a new AirSep system, utilizing an air compressor to inject air and other chemicals into sewer effluent from the Moodna Basin plant, was activated on June 23, 2026. The system is designed to eliminate odors that have been a significant problem for the airplane park in the Town of Monroe. Deputy Supervisor Becker noted that the previous system had stopped working approximately one month earlier, and expressed optimism that the new system will perform even more efficiently, addressing Chester's contribution to the odor issue and leaving Monroe and South Blooming Grove to address their respective portions of the problem.

Council Member Cassara did not submit a report this meeting.

RESOLUTION TO AMEND WATER RATE TO \$11 PER 1,000 GALLONS PURSUANT TO TOWN OF CHESTER TOWN CODE 95-19

Supervisor Holdridge introduced the resolution, explaining that the proposed amendment would increase the Town's water billing rates from \$10.00 to \$11.00 per 1,000 gallons, effective January 1, 2027. He framed this as part of a long-term policy discussion that has taken place at many prior meetings. Two years prior, the Board instituted a more substantial increase to \$10.00 per thousand gallons. This incremental \$1.00 increase is intended to continue a trajectory of shifting the funding of water districts away from taxation and toward usage-based billing.

Supervisor Holdridge explained the underlying policy rationale in some detail: water district taxes are currently spread across the entire district as a kind of subsidy, with all residents paying through their tax bills regardless of individual usage. By increasing billing rates and correspondingly reducing the tax levy, the Town aims to have residents pay more accurately for their own household's consumption rather than subsidizing neighbors with higher usage, such as those with pools or irrigation systems.

Deputy Supervisor Becker provided additional policy context, explaining the current system's structure and the goal of making water billing revenue fully cover the cost of water delivery, maintenance, and infrastructure, rather than supplementing it through taxation. He noted that this approach gives residents the ability to control how much they pay by managing their own usage.

Council Member Cassara expressed opposition. He pointed out that in Sugar Loaf, the rate was \$4.50 per thousand gallons two years ago, was doubled to \$10.00 at that time, and is now being proposed to increase to \$11.00, with further annual increases apparently planned up to \$15.00 per thousand gallons by 2031. He stated, he doesn't see the reason why we're making these cost rates go up so high. You're making everything unaffordable in Chester, it is bad timing and not a good idea. He asked for concrete evidence that district taxes were going down to offset the billing increases, and requested to see how his own tax bill had changed since the rate was doubled.

Supervisor Holdridge responded that the tax reduction effect has been factually demonstrated, and directed Council Member Cassara to consult the Tax Assessor's records for any specific parcel to verify the correlation. He acknowledged the affordability concerns raised but reiterated that the policy is intended to empower residents to control their costs through their own consumption choices.

Council Member Becker explained that the Village had years ago restructured its water billing from a minimum charge of \$40 for the first 20,000 gallons to a straight per-gallon rate, such that a customer using only 10,000 gallons pays only for those 10,000 gallons. He stated that all of the Village's water system revenue is now derived from water rates rather than taxes. He indicated he had advocated for the same approach at the Town for five years and expressed his support for the direction now being taken.

Ryan Senning, asked a clarifying question to confirm that the proposal does not change the total cost of providing water service, only the mechanism by which that cost is funded, shifting from taxes to usage-based billing. Supervisor Holdridge and Deputy Supervisor Becker confirmed this was precisely correct, with

Supervisor Holdridge noting that the change is particularly beneficial for elderly residents on fixed incomes who use very little water and are currently subsidizing neighbors in larger households.

Meryl Newler observed that the Village of Chester's current rate is \$6.50 per thousand gallons for village residents and \$9.00 for those outside the village, and questioned why the Town is moving above those rates toward \$11.00 and eventually \$15.00. She also raised the concern that water district taxes, when paid as part of a property tax bill, are deductible on federal income taxes, whereas a separate water utility bill is not. Supervisor Holdridge acknowledged the deductibility point but countered that allowing residents to strategically delay tax payments for deduction purposes creates a funding lag that destabilizes the water district's ability to pay for maintenance, salaries, and infrastructure without resorting to improper borrowing. He reiterated that the long-term health of the water system requires consistent, timely funding through billing rather than irregular tax payments.

A resident of Windridge Water District asked for more general information about the age and maintenance history of his local water infrastructure. Supervisor Holdridge offered to arrange a meeting with himself and Deputy Supervisor Becker to personally explain the resident's specific district.

MOTION to adopt the resolution amending the water rate to \$11.00 per 1,000 gallons pursuant to Town of Chester Town Code §95-19, effective January 1, 2027, was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried 4-1.

VOTE: AYES(4): Holdridge, Becker, Courtenay, Diffley, NAYS(1): Cassara

ADOPTED

CARPENTER PARK ADA WALKWAY IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT BID RESPONSES

Supervisor Holdridge provided background on this agenda item, noting that the Town was awarded approximately \$95,000 through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program administered by Orange County approximately two years ago, in 2024.

The open bid process has now concluded, and three bids were received:

- Consorti Bros. — \$84,110.27
- Jorrey Excavating — \$149,540.00
- Legacy Supply — \$398,800.00

The Town's engineer, Lanc & Tully, reviewed the bids and recommended awarding the contract to Consorti Bros. as the lowest responsible bidder and the only bid within the project's grant budget. Supervisor Holdridge described the scope of the project: the walkway will extend from the existing concession stand path, wrap around the left-field ball field all the way to the playground and swing set area, continue down to the T-ball field, and loop back from the swing set to the parking lot and bathrooms, creating a fully ADA-accessible circuit around the entire park.

Mr. Senning's earlier public comment regarding Consorti's performance on the Sugar Loaf sidewalk project was addressed during this agenda item. Council Member Cassara, who had acknowledged uncertainty about the details of Consorti's prior performance, confirmed he would review the matter but indicated he would defer to the engineer's recommendation. Council Member Cassara further asked whether the engineer would be present on-site throughout the project to ensure compliance, and Supervisor Holdridge confirmed that Lanc & Tully would be engaged throughout the project duration for inspections. Council Member Cassara also noted the approximately \$10,890 remaining within the grant budget as a buffer for potential change orders, which Supervisor Holdridge confirmed was viewed by the engineer as an appropriate contingency.

Supervisor Holdridge also previewed two additional phases of planned improvements at Carpenter Park: a separate grant of approximately \$100,000 to renovate the bathrooms at the park (already awarded), and a pending grant application to resurface the parking lot and install ADA-compliant lighting. He noted that CDBG funds are uniquely restricted to Carpenter Park as the only eligible location within the Town's boundaries under the income requirements of the federal program.

MOTION to accept the bid from Consorti Bros. in the amount of \$84,110.27 for the Carpenter Park ADA Walkway Improvements Project was made by Supervisor Holdridge and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT CENTRAL AIR INSTALLATION REQUEST

Supervisor Holdridge presented a request from the Highway Department to approve the installation of central air conditioning. Quality Heating and Cooling submitted the lowest bid of \$26,025.00, which is more than \$6,000 below the next lowest bid and comes in under the \$30,000 amount that had been budgeted for the project. There was no debate on this item.

MOTION to accept the bid from Quality Heating and Cooling in the amount of \$26,025.00 for the Highway Department central air installation was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Supervisor Holdridge noted that budget amendment documents had been distributed to all Board members. Council Member Cassara indicated he was reviewing them for the first time that evening and asked for additional explanation. Town Comptroller Neil Meyer was invited to explain the amendments.

Comptroller Meyer explained that most of the budget amendments pertain to equipment purchases recorded in the 200 budget line; items such as a chlorinator for one of the water districts and a control panel for Lake Hill Farms Water District. He noted that some purchases had been budgeted in 2025 but, for various administrative reasons, were not charged in that fiscal year. As a result, those appropriations rolled back into fund balance at year-end. The current amendments re-appropriate those funds from fund balance back into the relevant budget lines for 2026 — a standard accounting correction.

In the General Fund (A Fund), the amendments include utilization of fund balance to cover additional repairs at the Senior Center Building, which exceeded what had originally been budgeted. Comptroller Meyer noted that the 2025 budget was intentionally lean, leaving little flexibility to transfer funds from other lines. He characterized the use of fund balance for such unanticipated expenses as precisely its intended purpose. He also indicated that overall, the Town is tracking under budget in a number of areas in 2026, and he characterized this as a relatively light year for budget amendments. The affected funds include: the General Fund, Walton Lake Water District, Lake Hill Farms Water District, Surrey Meadows Water District, and Sugar Loaf Water District.

MOTION to accept the budget amendments as listed was made by Council Member Diffley and seconded by Council Member Becker.

Description	Account	Increase/Decrease	Amount
<u>General Fund</u>			
Senior Center Building Repairs	A1621-461	Increase	3,000
General Fund Appropriated Fund Balance	A0599	Increase	3,000
Additional Senior Center Repairs Approved by Board			
<u>Walton Lake</u>			
Walton Lake Principal	SW1-9710.600	Increase	15,137
Walton Lake Interest	SW1-9710.700	Increase	3,779
Walton Lake Fund Balance	SW1-0599	Increase	18,916
Correct Budgeting Error for Debt			
Walton Lake P&p Equipment	SW1-8320.200	Increase	4,300
Walton Lake Fund Balance	SW1-0599	Increase	4,300

Surrey Meadows

Surrey Meadows P&p Equipment	SW2-8320.200	Increase	5,400
Surrey Meadows Fund Balance	SW2-0599	Increase	5,400

Lake Hill

Lake Hill Control Panel	SW3.8330.200	Increase	375
Lake Hill Appropriated Fund Balance	SW3.0599	Increase	375
Lake Hill P&p Equipment	SW3-8320.200	Increase	9,000
Lake Hill Fund Balance	SW3-0599	Increase	9,000

Sugar Loaf

Sugar Loaf P&p Equipment	SW4-8320.200	Increase	3,400
Sugar Loaf Fund Balance	SW4-0599	Increase	3,400

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

SUGAR LOAF COMMUNITY FOUNDATION VOICES OF LIBERTY TEMPORARY ASSEMBLY PERMIT REQUEST

Richard Logothetis, representing the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation appeared before the Board to request approval of a Temporary Assembly Permit for a special community event called Voices of Liberty, to be held at Sugar Loaf Crossing, 1405 Kings Highway, on July 3, 2026, with a rain date of July 5, 2026.

Mr. Logothetis explained that the event has been organized to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. The Foundation commissioned an original play written specifically for the occasion, with a hired writer, director, and actors, depicting events surrounding the signing of the Declaration of Independence and how the Sugar Loaf, Warwick, and Chester village areas were part of that broader historical moment. He noted that the Town of Chester technically did not exist at the time; it was part of Warwick, but acknowledged the region's deep connection to the era, and referenced the earlier comment from Veronica Mott about the Revolutionary War artillery encampment in Chester's history.

Mr. Logothetis noted that the event would also include more entertaining programming in addition to the theatrical performance, and that the Sugar Loaf Engine Company would be in attendance providing hot dogs and pretzels, with planning for handicapped parking. Event hours were confirmed as 5:30 PM to 8:00 PM, with the possibility of running slightly longer depending on the performance.

Town Clerk Linda Zappala confirmed that all administrative requirements for the permit had been met. Supervisor Holdridge also noted that a flyer and event announcement are available on the Town's website for those seeking more details.

MOTION to approve the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation's Voices of Liberty Temporary Assembly Permit for July 3, 2026 (rain date July 5, 2026) at Sugar Loaf Crossing, 1405 Kings Highway, was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Cassara.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

EXECUTIVE SESSION – PERSONNEL

MOTION to enter executive session and attorney-client privilege for the purposes of personnel at 8:30pm was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

MOTION to adjourn the executive session and attorney-client privilege at 9:05pm was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

NEW BUSINESS

Appointment of Part-Time Police Officer

Supervisor Holdridge introduced an item not on the agenda: the appointment of Mr. Amoresano to fill the part-time police officer position vacated by Officer Balgobin. The appointment was noted to be effective the following day.

MOTION to appoint Mr. Amoresano to the part-time police officer position, effective June 25, 2026 was made by Council Member Cassara and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

Following the vote, Town Clerk Zappala administered the oath of office to Officer Amoresano.

Introductory Local Law 4 of 2026 — Community Preservation Fund Transfer Tax

Attorney Cassidy presented a resolution to introduce Introductory Local Law 4 of 2026, a local law imposing a three-quarters of one percent (0.75%) real estate transfer tax on the conveyance of real property interests within the Town of Chester, with revenues deposited into the Town of Chester Community Preservation Fund.

Attorney Cassidy explained that this is the third of three local laws required to implement the state legislative authorization for the Community Preservation Fund. The first law, creating the fund and the advisory Board, has already been adopted. The second, the project plan, is anticipated to be introduced in July. This third local law provides the financing mechanism for the fund. She noted that if adopted by the Town Board, the local law is subject to a mandatory referendum, anticipated to appear on the November 3, 2026 general election ballot.

Attorney Cassidy read the full resolution into the record.

RESOLUTION TO INTRODUCE INTRODUCTORY LOCAL LAW 4 OF 2026, A LOCAL LAW IMPOSING A THREE QUARTERS OF ONE PERCENT (.75%) REAL ESTATE TRANSFER TAX ON THE CONVEYANCE OF INTERESTS IN REAL PROPERTY IN THE TOWN, WITH THE REVENUES DERIVED FROM THIS TAX TO BE DEPOSITED IN THE TOWN OF CHESTER COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUND FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRESERVING THE NATURAL, SCENIC, AND HISTORICAL TREASURES WITHIN THE TOWN

WHEREAS, The Town of Chester possesses a rich heritage of scenic, agricultural and natural resources, the preservation of which is vital to the future economic success and quality of life of the community. To further the objective of preserving the natural, scenic and historical treasures, the Town Board of the Town of Chester finds it necessary to establish a dedicated fund for their conservation. The Town has established a Community Preservation Fund pursuant to Town Law § 64-L and now seeks to implement a transfer tax in the amount of 0.75% on real estate transfers within the Town of Chester as authorized by New York State Tax Law Article 31-A-4.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Introductory Local Law 4 of 2026, entitled A LOCAL LAW IMPOSING A THREE QUARTERS OF ONE PERCENT (.75%) REAL ESTATE TRANSFER TAX ON THE CONVEYANCE OF INTERESTS IN REAL PROPERTY IN THE TOWN, WITH THE REVENUES DERIVED FROM THIS TAX TO BE DEPOSITED IN THE TOWN OF CHESTER COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUND FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRESERVING THE NATURAL, SCENIC, AND HISTORICAL TREASURES WITHIN THE TOWN is hereby introduced.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of the aforesaid introductory local law be laid upon the desk of each member of the Board, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Board hereby declares lead agency and further declares that this action is a “Type II” action under the State Environmental Quality Review Act and no further environmental review is required.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a public hearing shall be held on July 22nd, 2026 at 6:45 P.M. or as soon thereafter as may be heard in Town Hall, located at 1786 Kings Highway, Chester, NY 10918

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Clerk shall cause public notice to be published in the official newspaper as is required by law and shall further refer the proposed local law to the Orange County Clerk, Commissioner of Finance and Orange County Department of Planning.

MOTION to introduce Introductory Local Law 4 of 2026 and set a public hearing for July 22, 2026, was made by Supervisor Holdridge and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

Introductory Local Law 5 of 2026 — Conversion of Highway Superintendent to Appointed Position

Attorney Cassidy presented a resolution to introduce Introductory Local Law 5 of 2026, a local law to change the office of Highway Superintendent from an elected to an appointed position. She noted that the local law also establishes a two-year term for the appointed position and includes a provision allowing the position to be filled by a resident of Orange County who is not necessarily a Chester resident, for the purpose of drawing a wider applicant pool.

Attorney Cassidy read the full resolution into the record.

**RESOLUTION TO INTRODUCE INTRODUCTORY LOCAL LAW 5 OF 2026,
A LOCAL LAW TO CHANGE THE OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT FROM AN
ELECTED OFFICE TO AN APPOINTED OFFICE**

WHEREAS, The Town of Chester desires to eliminate the elected position of Superintendent of Highways and replace it with an appointed position of Superintendent of Highways. By doing so, the Town Board anticipates it will be able to assert greater oversight and accountability in the operation, function, and responsibility of upkeep and maintenance of Town highways, attract a wider applicant pool for the position of appointed Superintendent of Highways, and minimize the risk of vacancies and ensure continuity in leadership.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Introductory Local Law 5 of 2026, entitled A LOCAL LAW TO CHANGE THE OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT FROM AN ELECTED OFFICE TO AN APPOINTED OFFICE is hereby introduced.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of the aforesaid introductory local law be laid upon the desk of each member of the Board, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Board hereby declares that this is not an action subject to environmental review.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a public hearing shall be held on July 22, 2026 at 6:45 P.M. or as soon thereafter as may be heard in Town Hall, located at 1786 Kings Highway, Chester, NY 10918.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Clerk shall cause public notice to be published in the official newspaper as is required by law.

MOTION to introduce Introductory Local Law 5 of 2026 and set a public hearing for July 22, 2026, was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

Council Member Cassara voiced his opposition directly, stating this has been an elected position for a long time, and it should remain an elected position.

The motion carried 4-1.

VOTE: AYES(4): Holdridge, Becker, Courtenay, Diffley, NAYS(1): Cassara

ADOPTED

Supervisor Holdridge then clarified the broader context for the public: a regular election for a one-year term as Highway Superintendent is still proceeding this November on the existing elected basis, as persons have already been collecting petition signatures. Regardless of the outcome of the referendum, there will be an elected Highway Superintendent starting at the beginning of next year serving through the end of that year. If the referendum passes, that will be the final election for the position and an appointed superintendent would take over by the beginning of 2028. If the referendum fails, elections will continue, with the next one being for a three-year term.

Supervisor Holdridge indicated the Board's intent is for the position to be unclassified and not subject to civil service testing, while still establishing rigorous minimum qualifications through the local law and job description process, consistent with how other appointed positions such as the comptroller and building inspector have been handled.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Vincent Maniscalco, via online, asked when the Board would work on a grant for new curbs in Surrey Meadows, or alternatively consider lowering property taxes for that district, noting that Surrey Meadows 1 looks great and Surrey Meadows 2 is in poor condition, and that Lake Hill Farms also looks great.

Supervisor Holdridge responded that he has been looking for a curb grant for Surrey Meadows for some time and that, unfortunately, grants specifically for curbs are rare. He stated that he regularly includes curbs on his wish lists sent every couple of months to the grant writers, Senator Skoufis' s office, Assemblyman Maher's office, county offices, and Congressman Ryan's office, and that the grant writers are continuously reviewing available programs. He also noted that the Board has discussed the possibility of directly budgeting for curbs if a grant does not materialize, and committed to pursuing the issue as soon as the budget and grant landscape allow.

Ed Mullens, via online, asked whether an appointed highway superintendent position would be subject to civil service requirements. Supervisor Holdridge addressed this as noted above in the discussion of Local Law 5.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Council Member Courtenay, and second by Council Member Diffley to adjourn the meeting at 9:20pm, there being no additional business brought before the Board.

VOTE: AYES(5): Holdridge, Becker, Cassara, Courtenay, Diffley

ADOPTED

Respectfully submitted,

Linda A. Zappala, RMC
Town Clerk
2026-6-24