

**TOWN BOARD MEETING**

**August 12, 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 present: Attorney Cassidy, Village of Chester Mayor Bell

**Pledge of Allegiance**

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT 7/22/26 TOWN BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

Supervisor Holdridge asked if everyone had reviewed the minutes from the July 22, 2026. No questions or debate points were raised.

**MOTION** by Council Member Diffley, seconded by Council Member Courtenay to accept the July 22, 2026 Meeting Minutes as presented by Town Clerk Zappala.

The 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 \$641,548.09.

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PLAN & FUND PRESENTATION BY FORMER WARWICK TOWN SUPERVISOR MICHAEL SWEETON**

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Supervisor Holdridge introduced the evening's special guest, former Town Supervisor of Warwick and current staff member of the Orange County Land Trust, Michael Sweeton, noting that he was invited to speak about the Community Preservation Fund that Chester residents will have the opportunity to vote on in the fall referendum. Supervisor Holdridge noted that the Town of Warwick had, over the past twenty years, preserved over 5,000 acres of land using such a fund.

Former Supervisor Sweeton distributed two handouts to the Board and offered an extensive presentation. He opened by describing the placement of the fund on the ballot as "a historic opportunity for the Town of Chester," observing that communities can get overrun, overdeveloped, or take the wrong path, and it can happen very quickly. He emphasized that the Community Preservation Fund does not impose a new tax on existing residents, but rather is a targeted transfer tax paid by buyers entering the community. Buyers are coming to Chester because they like what Chester is, he said. He argued that new homebuyers are in effect contributing to the preservation of the very characteristics that attracted them.

Former Supervisor Sweeton directly addressed what he called the gut reaction and myths surrounding the fund. He anticipated that opponents would argue the transfer tax discourages home sales, and urged the Board to push back with documented results. He noted that while realtors were initially resistant, honest Warwick realtors now acknowledge the preserved open space and character of the Town as a selling point. He also presented comparative real estate data: in 2008, Warwick's median sale price was \$370,000 versus the county median of \$189,000. By 2023, when he left office, Warwick's median was \$450,000 compared to Orange County's \$250,000—a consistent premium of 45 to 50 percent that he attributed in significant part to the preservation program.

He explained the financial mechanics in detail. Warwick enacted the fund in 2006 following a \$9.5 million bond issued in 1999. From 2006 through 2023, the fund generated \$18 million, and by leveraging that local match, Warwick was able to attract an additional \$18 million in grant funding. He noted that the State of New York provides up to 75 percent of farm easement costs, and the federal government provides up to 50 percent on conservation easements, but that neither level of government is willing to award grants to a municipality that cannot provide a matching contribution.

Former Supervisor Sweeton distinguished between outright purchase of land and conservation easements, explaining that Warwick's primary approach was easements: He said the farmer still owns the land, still pays taxes on the land; they just can't build houses on the land. He described the farm-friendly easement format approved by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, which divides a farm into a "farmstead complex" (approximately 10 percent of the acreage, where the farmhouse, farm market, brewery, or other agricultural enterprises can be located) and a "farm area" (approximately 90 percent, where all acceptable farming practices and farm buildings can be erected, but where residential development is prohibited).

He recounted that Warwick currently has 43 farms under easement with only two violations in the program's history: one involving a property line dispute near a subdivision, resolved easily through the building department, and another involving a buyer from Texas who decided he just was going to do what he wanted, resolved when the Town pointed out the federal government was a partner in the easement. He also described an opportunity Warwick seized just before his departure: the acquisition of a former camp abutting the Appalachian Trail, which has since become a real focal place for the Town of Warwick. He added that Warwick currently has four farms in the pipeline with awards already granted and closings in progress.

Deputy Supervisor Tom Becker asked whether easements restrict what a farmer can do in terms of improvements. Former Supervisor Sweeton clarified that within the farm area, any acceptable farming practice including construction of farm buildings and farm worker housing, is permitted by right. He offered to provide sample easement documents to the Board. He also addressed water rights, explaining that farm water use is generally unaffected, but that any municipal use of water resources on an easement property would require agreement by both parties.

Former Supervisor Sweeton discussed the Community Preservation Plan (CPP) itself, noting it serves as the binding road map for all expenditures from the fund. He said none of that money can ever be expended on anything that's not specifically listed in that plan. He described Warwick's CPP as a cataloguing of active farms, water resources, and open space parcels, accompanied by narrative descriptions of their community value. He noted that Chester's draft CPP, prepared by the Community Preservation Plan Committee with the Town planner, is already available on the Town's website. He closed his presentation by urging the Board to use the CPP as a long-range planning document regardless of the referendum's outcome.

Supervisor Holdridge thanked Former Supervisor Sweeton and offered to provide his contact information to any Board member or resident wishing to follow up privately.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Supervisor Holdridge noted that in light of the lengthy agenda, the three-minute rule for public comment would be enforced.

Cindy Smith, Greycourt Road, asked about Woodbury's cancellation of its dial-a-bus contract with Monroe. Council Member Diffley explained that the Monroe–Woodbury contract had simply expired and the parties were unable to reach a new agreement, resulting in termination of service. Ms. Smith sought clarification on the geographic scope of the new proposed Chester–Monroe contract, and Council Member Diffley confirmed it would cover only those portions of the Monroe–Woodbury School District falling within Chester's borders. Ms. Smith then raised questions about the Community Preservation Fund's financing mechanics—specifically, what happens if a landowner seeks a price the Town cannot immediately meet. Supervisor Holdridge explained that the Town has three options: use available funds, leverage grant matches as described by Former Supervisor Sweeton, or bond against future CPF revenues. Ms. Smith also inquired whether a list of target properties was publicly available; Supervisor Holdridge confirmed the draft Community Preservation Plan on the Town's website identifies the properties and their SBL numbers.

Susannah Devine, Bull Mill Road, spoke in strong support of the Community Preservation Fund, noting that the legislation enabling Chester residents to vote on the fund was the product of nearly a decade of bipartisan effort involving local officials, Senator Skoufis, and Assemblyman Maher. She encouraged residents who remained undecided to visit Warwick—which has had its fund since 2006—and noted that Monroe had just this week voted to pursue the same enabling legislation.

Brian Ross, Ridgefield Drive, began by complimenting the bipartisan effort to get the Community Preservation Fund legislation passed. He then raised two issues. First, he asked for a status update on his earlier request to review the Town's false alarm fine schedule, arguing it was too punitive for seniors and fixed-income residents; Supervisor Holdridge confirmed the matter was still being worked on with no update available. Second, Mr. Ross expressed that he felt he had been treated disrespectfully at a prior meeting when he expressed a dissenting view, and urged the Board to engage in broader dialogue with residents. He also referenced ongoing advocacy for a traffic light at a dangerous intersection and thanked Supervisor Holdridge for his support, while expressing disappointment that other Board members had not individually written letters of support to the relevant agency.

Tracy Schuh, Preservation Collective, thanked Former Supervisor Sweeton for his presentation and then shifted to address two development projects on the Chester–Monroe border affecting the Trout Brook watershed. Regarding the first project, Henry Farms, Ms. Schuh described it as a proposed subdivision along Lakes Road across from Camp Monroe Road, whose development history stretches nearly two decades and was partly shaped by a closed-door stipulation agreement arising from litigation. She raised concerns about water quantity and quality, aquifer recharge (noting the development draws water from under the site but exports wastewater to Harriman, preventing local recharge), a water source adjacent to an unlined landfill, traffic impacts at the Camp Monroe intersection, a proposed commercial lot, and habitat fragmentation and flooding into Trout Brook.

Regarding the second project, Meadow Hill, Ms. Schuh described it as a 6-lot subdivision directly adjacent to the recently approved Chester subdivision known as Oak Woods, with a public hearing before the Monroe Planning Board the following Tuesday. She argued that these two projects should have undergone a combined environmental review under SEQRA rather than separate reviews, constituting impermissible segmentation. She noted the projects share a wetland and that water flows from Henry Farms through Meadow Hill, through Oak Woods. She pointed to a historical water test from the Henry Farms area in which drawdown was detected as far as Pike Court in Chester, suggesting interconnectivity in the aquifer affecting Trout Brook neighborhood homeowners.

Ms. Schuh made three specific requests: that the Town engineer review the projects for cross-border impacts; that Chester request the Monroe Planning Board extend the Meadow Hill hearing timeline; and that, going forward, all public hearing notices received from neighboring municipalities be read into the record, shared through the Town's email and social media notification systems, and forwarded to the Chester Planning Board. She also raised the possibility of Chester negotiating to acquire combined open space between the two projects as a trail access point on Lakes Road.

Supervisor Holdridge confirmed that Henry Farms had been on his radar as well, and encouraged concerned residents to monitor the Monroe Planning Board's meeting agendas.

Robert Klein, N. Hudson St., expressed concern that the EMS contract appeared to be a boiler plate. Supervisor Holdridge explained that the contract has been finalized after review by both the Town and Village Boards and Town Attorney. With regard to the deductible on vehicles, Supervisor Holdridge replied it would be \$5,000 and the Town Attorney clarified there is appropriate insurance provisions within the contract in the case of an accident. With regard to Mr. Klein's assertion that the 4% annual increase should be in line with the State's 3% cap, Supervisor Holdridge explained these are two distinctly different standards.

Salvatore Marchese, Creamery Pond Road, a resident of 26 years described an ongoing issue with a large sailboat on a trailer stored, not merely parked, in the street in front of 132 Creamery Pond Road, on wooden blocks, detached from any vehicle, bearing out-of-state (New Jersey) license plates. He stated he had contacted the police department, which told him there was nothing on the books to act upon, and Officer Dunlop had been helpful but confirmed the building department reached the same conclusion. Mr. Marchese argued that a detached trailer with out-of-state plates, stored on a public street for weeks at a time, creates both an aesthetic and a safety hazard, and that the situation recurs annually.

Council Member Cassara acknowledged the issue, noting he is a neighbor and had previously inquired with the building inspector, who has since departed, and received an answer that the trailer has two axles and weighs under 10,000 pounds and is therefore permitted on the roadway. Council Member Cassara questioned how that determination was made without access to the registration. Deputy Supervisor Becker observed that when a trailer is not attached to a truck, it constitutes a road encumbrance. Town Attorney Elizabeth Cassidy confirmed she had been made aware of the matter by Supervisor Holdridge and committed to providing a formal response by the next meeting.

Online public comment by David Turetsky, expressed support for the Community Preservation Fund.

Online commenter, Connie Roach, asked for a comparison of costs between the Monroe partial-Town dial-a-bus contract and the Goshen full-Town contract. Supervisor Holdridge responded that the Goshen contract costs \$33,000 per year for the full Town, while the Monroe contract for the Monroe-Woodbury portion of Chester would have a cost of approximately \$9,000 for a full year—roughly one-third the price.

Online commenter, Doug D expressed opposition to Empress EMS 5-year contract, suggesting the Town should try it for one year first. Supervisor Holdridge responded that the contract includes exit clauses allowing either party to terminate with proper notice, and that the parties are not irrevocably locked in for five years.

#### **AMBULANCE SERVICE AGREEMENT WITH EMPRESS EMS**

Supervisor Holdridge provided a comprehensive background for the public record. He recounted that in 2024, upon taking office, he found the Town in an informal, handshake arrangement with Empress EMS, under which Empress stored a vehicle at Town Hall but was not dedicated to Chester. The Town paid nothing, and ambulance response times averaged 17.5 minutes with a 63 percent first-call response rate, resulting in complaints about 20, 30, 40-minute wait times. The majority of the Town Board and Village Board subsequently voted to create a new EMS tax district and entered into a dedicated 24/7 service agreement with Empress, at a cost of approximately \$915,000. Upon the contract taking effect in February 2025, response times dropped immediately to a 9-minute average and the first-call response rate climbed to 99 percent; results Supervisor Holdridge described as "lifesaving."

He then described the genesis of the new hybrid agreement. Seeking to make services more cost-effective, the Town proposed that if Chester were to own the ambulance vehicle and equipment, thereby having more "skin in the game", would Empress be willing to return the billing revenue to the Town; Empress agreed. Supervisor Holdridge presented the supporting financial data: from January through the end of May 2026, Empress billed a net total of \$423,165.23, averaging \$84,633.05 per month. Projected over the full year, billing could reach \$1,015,596.55, well exceeding Empress's own original estimate of \$786,204 for 2026. Against a total five-year contract value of approximately \$1,303,029.43 the estimated net savings, after billing revenue is returned to the Town, was calculated at approximately \$410,474.57 with actual figures potentially yielding an additional \$230,000 in savings based on current call volumes.

Rob Struck, Executive Director of Empress EMS, was invited to speak. He confirmed that Empress has been providing dedicated service since February 2024 and that average response times have reached 8 minutes and 30 seconds, with a 99.1 percent coverage rate. He cited a rollover accident the previous Monday night in which two ambulances and a paramedic supervisor fly car responded in 2 minutes and 2 seconds and transported five patients without disrupting resources elsewhere in the region. He described the new contract as a new concept that carries risk on both sides: the Town bears insurance risk as vehicle owner; Empress bears risk on revenues and operational costs. He stated that the 4 percent annual increase is driven primarily by ongoing union contract negotiations, with expected salary increases of 3 to 5 percent. The 4 percent is basically going to cover our salary increases in our union contract, he added. He also noted that as of that morning, billing revenues through the end of July had already reached the \$777,000 mark, putting the Town on pace to exceed projections, and that total call volume for 2026 was already over 700,000 with last year's full-year figure at 1,099,000.

Council Member Becker asked whether a union shop could go on strike. Mr. Struck confirmed that under state law, strikes are not permitted in Empress's sector.

Council Member Cassara asked whether revenue would also increase year over year to offset the cost increases, and Mr. Struck confirmed that revenue is driven by call volume (which is growing) and by annual Medicare rate adjustments, typically 2 to 3 percent, as well as insurance reimbursements that trend upward over five years.

Council Member Cassara expressed reservations about both the five-year term and the fixed 4 percent annual escalation, stating longer contracts are not always the best. He said, short contracts turn over quicker and can be renegotiated. He asked whether a three-year term at 4 percent could be explored. Mr. Struck indicated he could bring that back to his team but noted that the original three-year proposal had been priced at 4.5 percent and that the five-year term provided Empress with sufficient revenue visibility to justify offering the lower rate.

Supervisor Holdridge pressed Mr. Struck on whether further negotiation on the term was realistic, given that the question had been asked before. He indicated he might be able to hold the rate at 4 percent for a three-year term, though he could not commit to that at the meeting.

Town Attorney Cassidy clarified that the question of contract term is a substantive contractual matter, not a minor technical correction, and therefore the Board's options were to vote on the contract as presented or table it. Supervisor Holdridge noted the urgency: the state bid vehicle earmarked for the Town had been held by the vendor for over two months, and the vendor had called that Monday indicating he needed to move it. Additionally, the contract does not take effect until the Town's vehicle is delivered and equipped, meaning further delays translate directly to delayed billing revenue. The Board discussed the trade-offs and a consensus emerged to proceed to a vote.

Council Member Courtenay stated he had been part of the negotiation and was comfortable with the agreement. Supervisor Holdridge also noted that ownership of the vehicle provides a degree of independence, if something drastic were to go wrong with Empress, the Town would own the vehicle, giving us options. Council Member Courtenay added that the Town had already seen an 8 percent increase in health insurance costs for employees this year, and that the 4 percent contractual increase was therefore a favorable figure in context.

**MOTION** to approve the Ambulance Service Agreement with Empress EMS for the hybrid service model, wherein the Town of Chester will provide the ambulance vehicle and equipment and Empress EMS will provide staffing, billing administration, and equipment resupply coordination, with all billing revenue returned to the Town on a monthly basis, made by Supervisor Holdridge and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

**Vote Rollcall:**

|                          |     |   |    |         |        |
|--------------------------|-----|---|----|---------|--------|
| Supervisor Holdridge     | Yes | X | No | Abstain | Absent |
| Council Member Becker    | Yes | X | No | Abstain | Absent |
| Council Member Cassara   | Yes | X | No | Abstain | Absent |
| Council Member Courtenay | Yes | X | No | Abstain | Absent |
| Council Member Diffley   | Yes | X | No | Abstain | Absent |

**ADOPTED**

**AUTHORIZATION TO PURCHASE A 2026 T-350 TRANSIT TYPE-2 VAN AEV AWD**

Supervisor Holdridge presented the authorization to purchase the ambulance vehicle itself: a 2026 Ford T-350 Transit Type-2 Van, AEV All-Wheel Drive, at a cost of \$122,215, to be owned by the Town of Chester. He noted it is the same model currently in use by Empress, ensuring no disruption to staff familiarity or service quality. He indicated the financing method—outright purchase versus financing—had not yet been formally determined and that he intended to visit the dealer the following day to obtain hard numbers on both options, after which he would return to the Board for a verbal determination. He anticipated the Town would likely finance the purchase.

**MOTION** to authorize Supervisor Holdridge to proceed with the purchase of the 2026 T-350 Transit Type-2 Van AEV AWD ambulance vehicle for \$122,215 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**

**AUTHORIZATION TO PURCHASE \$2,231.25 UE SCOPE, \$263.55 PORTABLE SUCTION PUMP, AND \$45,498.18 ZOLL MONITOR/DEFIBRILLATOR SYSTEM/EQUIPMENT FOR FUTURE CHESTER-OWNED AMBULANCE VEHICLE**

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Supervisor Holdridge explained that one of the existing quotes was too old, updated paperwork was needed, and the procurement process required further verification—specifically, whether the Zoll Monitor/Defibrillator System qualifies as a sole-source procurement, as its cost exceeds the Town's procurement policy threshold. Town Attorney Cassidy confirmed that two of the three items fall below the procurement policy threshold but that sole-source justification for the defibrillator system must be documented. Deputy Supervisor Becker and Supervisor Holdridge noted the importance of matching the same equipment used by Empress so that any backup or replacement vehicle would be fully interoperable with existing staff training and supply chains. The anticipated funding source is a \$48,000 grant from Senator Skoufis.

**MOTION** to table Item 10 was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Becker.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

**ADOPTED**

**REPORTS**

**CAC Letter of Support on Community Preservation Fund**

Supervisor Holdridge read into the record a letter from the Chester Conservation Advisory Council expressing strong support for the establishment of the Community Preservation Fund and its placement on the November ballot:



June 25, 2026  
Attn: Town Supervisor Brandon Holdridge  
Deputy Town Supervisor Tom Becker  
Town Councilman Robert Courtenay  
Town Councilman Giuseppe Cassara  
Town Councilman Stephen Diffley

Dear Town Board and Town Supervisor,

The Chester Conservation Advisory Council wishes to express strong support for the establishment of a Community Preservation Fund and its placement as a referendum on the November ballot. As our community continues to grow, it is essential that we take proactive steps to protect the natural, historical, and agricultural resources which define it. A preservation fund provides a structured and transparent way to safeguard open space, farmland, and environmentally sensitive areas.

The benefits of such a fund extend to every Chester resident. Preserving open space helps maintain our community's rural charm, protects water quality, reduces flooding risks, and ensures that future generations can enjoy the landscapes that make Chester unique. It also has the ability to strengthen property values, supports local farms, and enhances recreational opportunities, thus creating long-term community stability and enhancing everyone's quality of life.

Equally important is the fact that a Community Preservation Fund can be designed so that it will not place a new financial burden on local taxpayers. Its targeted revenue source, transfer fees on certain real estate transactions, generate meaningful preservation capital without increasing property taxes or imposing new costs on residents. This will allow Chester to protect its most valuable resources in a fiscally responsible way.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Town Board to move forward with placing the Community Preservation Fund for Chester on the November ballot.

Respectfully,  
Chester Conservation Advisory Council

*Martine DiPasquale*

Martine DiPasquale, Chairwoman



### **Moodna**

Supervisor Holdridge noted regular maintenance throughout July, a few emergency calls, routine maintenance work, and the cleaning of a couple of tanks.

Deputy Supervisor Becker reported that a new venting system has been installed for the AIRSEP system at Station 3A, though the air injector has been found to be undersized and is being corrected. He also reported that the Moodna Basin treatment plant (Station 3A, near Camp LaGuardia), which receives effluent from the village and portions of the Town including Sugar Loaf and Surrey, normally processes just under 500,000 gallons per day but during recent storms received over one million gallons in a single day due to infiltration. Deputy Supervisor Becker said this underscored the need to find ways to perform more infrastructure repair work in-house.

### **Highway Department**

The Highway Department completed milling and paving on Pine Hill Road and completed the Nova Chip treatment on Johnson Road through a \$150,000 grant project. Pipe projects continued, road mowing was underway in its second session, and large mowers were deployed to Town parks to clear brush at the request of the Parks and Recreation Department. The department monitored and cleared all drainage during several periods of torrential rain, assisted the water department with shutoff valves and a break repair, continued Town-wide sweeping, and serviced and repaired vehicles from all departments.

### **Town Historian**

Supervisor Holdridge noted that Town Historian Cliff attended public ceremonies, exhibits, and historic preservation meetings throughout July; assisted several residents and Supervisor Holdridge himself with research inquiries; contributed to publications and special projects in Sugar Loaf and related to black dirt farms; and continued his professional education through training courses. Full report at [chester-ny.gov](http://chester-ny.gov).

### **Police Department**

The Department reported 467 incidents for the month, 13 arrests, 29 house checks, and 958 business security checks. Officers also continued child passenger safety seat checks and installations. The Chief attended several trainings. Full report at [chester-ny.gov](http://chester-ny.gov).

### **Animal Control**

Animal control responded to 7 calls for loose, lost, and found dogs; 4 calls for injured or deceased deer; 2 calls for animals in a condemned residence; 1 call for a bear sighting; 1 call for a loose horse; 1 call for a possibly sick fox; 1 call for a deceased goose; 1 call for a dog bite; 1 call for an injured hawk; and 1 call for a whistle pig stuck in a sports net. Full report at [chester-ny.gov](http://chester-ny.gov).

### **Parks & Recreation**

Parks and Recreation served 242 congregate lunches during July, for which the county reimbursed \$2,895 against only a \$112 Town contribution. The Bingo/Philadelphia trip was a success. The Art in the Park event on August 5th drew approximately 60 children, though several Board members believed attendance was higher. Upcoming events include the Wind Creek Casino trip on August 31st, a second Family Field Day event on September 19th at Chester Commons Park, and a Skoufis senior picnic with the Towns of Chester and Warwick tentatively scheduled for September 22nd at Chester Carpenter Field. The department also submitted a grant for lighting upgrades at Carpenter Field's baseball and softball fields.

### **Water Dept.**

Normal operations were reported with the exception of issues at Lake Hill Farms. A water main break at 3 Maple Lane in Walton Lake Estates was repaired overnight. A separate issue at Pine Hill and Creamery Pond Road was also resolved. Fieldcrest remained quiet.

### **Supervisor Holdridge's Half-Year Report**

Supervisor Holdridge presented his half-year report, summarizing the administration's accomplishments through the first six months of 2026. He reported personally assisting at least 25 residents with constituent services cases covering potholes, garbage, building complaints, flooding, and financial concerns. Since the beginning of 2024, the Town has received or been awarded approximately \$1,489,182 in grant funding, supporting the upcoming Family Field Day, senior picnic, Art in the Park event, a future senior hold-down event, approximately \$200,000 in new playground equipment for Chester Commons Park, and new fire department equipment.

On affordability, he noted the signing of a Chester PBA union contract holding salary increases to 2.25 percent, a reduction in Town tax rates for Village of Chester residents in the 2026 budget, the sale of the Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center, the conversion of a full-time position to part-time, the non-replacement of a clerk position, acceptance of more cost-effective energy and cleaning contracts, and improved interest earnings on municipal funds. He also reported that the Town was the first in Orange County to submit its yearly audit and received no new recommendations from its auditing firm—a marked improvement from prior years.

He addressed the effort to keep an ICE detention facility out of Chester, noting that the proposed Pep Boys warehouse location would have cost the Town over \$500,000 in annual tax revenue and presented safety concerns. Sixty-eight Hudson Valley elected officials signed his opposition letter, and the facility was successfully opposed. He highlighted recently passed local laws, including the entity disclosure local law requiring developers to disclose funding sources before Town Boards, and the comprehensive plan and zoning amendments banning data centers and battery storage facilities, establishing a special use permit framework, reinforcing mixed-use zoning in Sugar Loaf, and converting industrial zoning on Lake Station Road to suburban residential.

On quality of life, he cited playground repairs and a security camera at Oak Street Park, proactive pothole remediation on the 17M bridge in coordination with county and state DOT, winter tarps for sports fields, and a speed limit reduction on Sugar Loaf Mountain Road.

Looking ahead, he stated his goals include maintaining taxes below the cap, improving on the small tax reduction already delivered to village residents, expanding dial-a-bus services, completing additional playground improvements, passing new tax exemptions for disabled residents and veterans, and updating infrastructure.

### **Town Clerk's Half-Year Report**

Town Clerk Zappala presented a summary of her office's activity for the first six months of 2026. Her office and staff performed over 240 notarizations, issued over 440 dog licenses, processed 7 dog impoundments, issued 2 transient merchant permits, issued 1 temporary assembly permit to the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation, issued 29 hunting licenses as of June 30th, issued 60 false alarm notices, issued 80 handicap parking permits, issued 12 EZ-Pass permits, and issued 15 short-term rental certificates of authority allowing for the collection of a 4 percent tax on revenues. As Records Management Officer, she responded to over 78 FOIL requests and processed 6 local laws, two of which were sent to the Board of Elections for the November ballot as mandatory referenda—the highway superintendent election and the Community Preservation Fund transfer tax. As Registrar, she has issued 11 marriage licenses, 1 officiant's license, recorded 1 home birth record, 12 deaths, and processed 4 genealogy records. The Town-wide shred event in June served 75 residents and recycled over 4 tons of paper. Total associated fees collected came to \$14,242, of which \$12,205 was remitted to the Supervisor and \$2,038 to other agencies as required by law.

Water District billing for the first six months totaled \$285,430. Town Clerk Zappala added that all three recent boil-water advisories had been rescinded and the water is safe to drink. She noted that many residents who called the clerk's office during the boil-water events were unaware of the Town's emergency notification system, and she urged all residents to sign up through the Town website's home page, along with Constant Contact, and the New York State alert system at [alert.ny.gov](https://alert.ny.gov). Town Clerk Zappala announced a Homeland Security emergency program being offered through Parks and Recreation on September 9th at the senior center at 10:00 AM, and encouraged residents to register.

### **Comptroller Meyer's Half-Year Finance Report**

Town Comptroller Meyer presented a multi-part half-year financial summary. He first confirmed that the previously disputed county sales tax issue has been fully resolved: all overdue payments, including the first and second quarter distributions and outstanding balances, were received—though the Town did not recover interest on the withheld funds, which he acknowledged was anticipated. He also disclosed that approximately two months prior, the Town was the victim of a check fraud scheme. He emphasized that the Town's internal controls detected the fraud within three days of month-end reconciliation, well within the 45-day reporting window. The police were notified, and the bank refunded the full amount within approximately 45 days. He said, the Town has suffered no loss as a result of it but wanted the Town Board to understand we are constantly under threat.

Comptroller Meyer then walked through the half-year financial summary sheets distributed to the Board. Revenue and expense tracking was described as on target, with all major funds sitting at approximately 50 percent of budgeted figures—exactly where they should be at mid-year. The cash position as of June 30th showed: General Fund at approximately \$2,500,000; Part Town Fund at \$2,600,000; Highway Town Wide at

\$1,500,000; and Highway Part Town at \$1,100,000. Looking ahead to year-end projections, the General Fund is expected to close at approximately \$860,000; the Part Town Fund will likely require a short-term internal loan, due to the timing of the fourth-quarter sales tax receipt, which typically arrives in February; Highway Town Wide is projected at approximately \$900,000 (reflecting the decision not to make a large truck purchase); and Highway Part Town at approximately \$330,000.

On the investment portfolio, as of June 30th the Town held \$6,100,000 in NYCLASS, \$1,200,000 in EPIC, and \$3,500,000 at Webster Bank (which includes escrow monies). Current interest rates were 3.5% (NYCLASS), 3.69% (EPIC), and 1.56% (Webster). Comptroller Meyer explained his strategy of drawing down NYCLASS first since it earns less, preserving the higher-yielding EPIC funds as long as possible. He noted that interest rates move in conjunction with federal rate changes and are otherwise fairly stable.

He acknowledged that while most budget lines are on target, some budget amendments have been necessary and expressed confidence that the multi-year trend model being built will yield increasingly accurate budgets. He encouraged department heads to continue proactively identifying needs during budget season to reduce emergency expenditures.

Supervisor Holdridge then invited Comptroller Meyer to share a recent professional achievement: Comptroller Meyer announced that he had been granted the designation of Credentialed Municipal Finance Officer by the New York State Society of Municipal Finance Officers. The Board offered congratulations.

#### **Award of a \$8,481 Dividend Check from PERMA**

Supervisor Holdridge announced that the Town's workers' compensation provider, PERMA, had issued a dividend check in the amount of \$8,481 to the Town due to a strong performance year.

#### **Mortgage Tax Receipts**

Town Clerk Zappala announced receipt of Orange County mortgage tax receipts for the month of July in the amount of \$42,037.30.

#### **DIAL-A-BUS IMA WITH TOWN OF MONROE**

Supervisor Holdridge provided extensive background on the proposed intermunicipal agreement with the Town of Monroe for Dial-A-Bus service. He explained that since his time as a councilman, he has received persistent complaints from residents in the Monroe-Woodbury side of Chester, encompassing areas such as the lower half of Laroe Road, Bull Mill Road, Windridge, Walton Lake Estates, Lake Hill Farms, and streets such as Beverly, Sunfish, Pickerel, Pike, Minnow, Trout Brook, Camp Monroe Road, and Lakes Road and that they derive little benefit from the long-standing dial-a-bus contract with Goshen, which only provides service between Chester and Goshen. The service that we currently have does not take them to Monroe.

He presented the contract terms: the first-year rate is \$9,750, prorated for the remaining months of 2026 to \$812.50 per month, or just over \$4,000 for the remainder of the year. The second year increases to \$11,750; the third to \$12,750; and the final year to \$13,750—an annual escalation of \$1,000. The contract runs for approximately 3.5 years through the end of 2029. The per-ride fare is \$2.00, or \$1.00 for riders age 55 and older or those who are legally disabled. The contract includes protective language on liability and insurance, and allows either party to exit with 90 days' notice, with payments made quarterly rather than in lump sums.

Supervisor Holdridge read two letters of support from Lake Hill Farms residents into the record. Both expressed strong support for door-to-door service, particularly emphasizing its importance for aging residents who can no longer drive, and that the service should have been offered years ago. He also noted that a spring transportation survey he conducted showed 19 out of 20 respondents supported expanding dial-a-bus and public transportation services in Chester.

Council Member Diffley, who was integral in the negotiations with Monroe, spoke to the importance of the service for his neighbors even within his own development. He said there are a lot of people that are original owners in that development or second owners, and they're aging, and not able to drive anymore. He stated that all correspondence he had received was in favor of the agreement, with the only negativity appearing on social media.

Supervisor Holdridge acknowledged public concerns about Monroe as a contracting party in light of the Monroe-Woodbury contract dispute. He stated only that contract negotiations fall apart and that Chester's focus is on protecting the Town and improving the quality of life for its residents. He characterized the agreement as

"a dipping-our-toe sort of contract," and noted that Monroe expressed openness to expanding the service to all of Chester in the future if demand warrants it.

Council Member Cassara asked whether the \$1,000 annual increase covers Monroe's salary and benefit cost increases and equipment wear. Supervisor Holdridge confirmed it does, and Council Member Courtenay added that the Goshen dial-a-bus does not serve the Monroe side of Chester, making this a genuine gap in service.

**MOTION** to approve the Dial-A-Bus Intermunicipal Agreement with the Town of Monroe was made by Council Member Diffley and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **BUDGET AMENDMENT**

Supervisor Holdridge explained that \$4,100 previously budgeted for the Friendly Visitor Program (account A8676.471), which is no longer active in Chester, would be reallocated to the Dial-A-Bus account (A5630.4) to fund the remainder-of-year Monroe contract cost, avoiding any draw on fund balance.

**MOTION** to approve the budget amendment transferring \$4,100 from A8676.471 (Friendly Visitor Program) to A5630.4 (Dial-A-Bus) was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **GASB 75 OPEB REPORT SERVICES CONTRACT**

Supervisor Holdridge presented a \$3,450 contract with Jefferson Solutions to compile the required annual GASB 75 OPEB report for the State Comptroller's Office.

**MOTION** to approve the GASB 75 OPEB Report Services Contract with Jefferson Solutions for \$3,450 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**

#### **BUILDING DEPARTMENT SERVICES**

Supervisor Holdridge presented the formal resolution authorizing Lanc & Tully to provide building department inspection services at a rate of \$135 per hour for 20 hours per week until a full-time Building Inspector replacement is hired. He noted that the Board had previously agreed informally to this arrangement.

**MOTION** to approve the Building Department Services Agreement with Lanc & Tully at \$135/hour for 20 hours per week 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**

#### **SENIOR REC CENTER GENERATOR PROJECT RELEASE OF RETAINAGE**

Supervisor Holdridge explained that a maintenance bond held in escrow related to the Senior Recreation Center generator project could now be released to Gentech, Ltd., as Lanc & Tully had completed their review and confirmed the project was satisfactorily completed.

**MOTION** to approve the release of retainage for the Senior Rec Center Generator Project was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **BID ADVERTISEMENT/NOTICE FOR HIGHWAY GARAGE METAL ROOF REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

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Supervisor Holdridge requested authorization to advertise and issue bid notice for the Highway Garage Metal Roof Replacement Project.

**MOTION** to authorize bid advertisement and notice for the Highway Garage Metal Roof Replacement Project 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**

#### **SENIOR REC CENTER RENTAL FEE WAIVER REQUEST**

Supervisor Holdridge presented a rental fee waiver request from the Chester Historical Society for their Penny Social to be held on October 4th. Deputy Supervisor Becker noted that the Board had previously established a policy under which the Chester Historical Society receives a full fee waiver for this annual event. It was confirmed that the Society had indicated in their request email that they would be responsible for the cleaning fee. After discussion, it was determined that the cleaning fee will be covered by Council Member Courtenay and Deputy Supervisor Becker as has been the previous practice.

**MOTION** to approve the rental fee waiver request from the Chester Historical Society for the Penny Social on October 4th 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**

#### **PARKS & REC DEPT. EQUIPMENT AUCTION REQUESTS**

Supervisor Holdridge presented requests to declare two pieces of Parks and Recreation Department equipment as surplus and authorize their sale through Auction International: A John Deere bucket and a John Deere tractor, both determined to be beyond cost-efficient repair.

**MOTION** to declare the John Deere bucket and John Deere tractor as surplus equipment 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**

**MOTION** to approve sending both items to Auction International 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**

#### **BEST BUDDIES INTERNATIONAL BIKE TOUR AGREEMENT**

Supervisor Holdridge reported that the Best Buddies International Bike Tour had resolved a routing conflict that arose when the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation car show was approved. Best Buddies agreed to reroute the October 3rd tour up the Bypass rather than through Kings Highway, eliminating any road closure requirement.

The Chief of Police reviewed the revised route and indicated his comfort with it. The Board needed only to approve the annual agreement allowing Best Buddies to travel Chester's roadways.

**MOTION** to approve the Best Buddies International Bike Tour Agreement for October 3rd was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

### **BUDGET AMENDMENTS**

Supervisor Holdridge presented various budget amendments covering Town Hall water, Police Department building repairs, Surrey Meadows Water District lab testing, and Lake Hill Water District meters and parts, as outlined by Comptroller Meyer:

| DESCRIPTION                                 | ACCOUNT      | INCREASE/DECREASE | AMOUNT  |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|---------|
| <u>General Fund</u>                         |              |                   |         |
| Town Hall Water                             | A1620.462    | Increase          | 1,000   |
| Town Hall Supplies                          | A1620.411    | Decrease          | (1,000) |
| <u>PartTown Fund</u>                        |              |                   |         |
| Police Building Repairs                     | B1620.461    | Increase          | 6,000   |
| Fund Balance                                | B0599        | Increase          | 6,000   |
| Replace Furnace, received legislative grant |              |                   |         |
| <u>Surrey Meadows</u>                       |              |                   |         |
| Lab Testing                                 | SW2 8330.413 | Increase          | 750     |
| Fund Balance                                | SW2 0599     | Increase          | 750     |
| <u>Lake Hill</u>                            |              |                   |         |
| Meters & Parts                              | SW3 8340.411 | Increase          | 2,300   |
| Fund Balance                                | SW3 0599     | Increase          | 2,300   |

**MOTION** to approve the budget amendments for Town Hall Water, PD Building Repairs, Surrey Meadows Water District Lab Testing, and Lake Hill Water District Meters & Parts as presented was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

### **EVENT REQUEST**

Supervisor Holdridge presented a request from Town Historian Cliff Patrick to attend the Orange County Historical Society's 2026 Annual Meeting at a cost of \$35.

**MOTION** to approve the Town Historian's attendance at the Orange County Historical Society's 2026 Annual Meeting for \$35 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**

#### **WEST SIDE STORY PARKS & REC TRIP REFUND REQUEST**

Supervisor Holdridge presented a refund request of \$175 for Rose Maniscalco for the West Side Story Parks and Recreation trip.

**MOTION** to approve the \$175 refund request for Rose Maniscalco was made by Council Member Diffley and seconded by Council Member Courtenay.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **BINGO PARKS & REC TRIP REFUND REQUESTS**

Supervisor Holdridge presented refund requests of \$115 each for Michael Gardner, Chris Johnson, Regina Petrakis, and Frances Verneau for the Bingo Parks and Recreation trip.

**MOTION** to approve the \$115 refund requests for Michael Gardner, Chris Johnson, Regina Petrakis, and Frances Verneau was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **UPDATED 7/1/26 IRS MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT RATE**

Town Clerk Zappala had notified the Board of the federal IRS mileage reimbursement rate increase effective July 1, 2026, bringing the rate to \$0.76 per mile, an increase of approximately seven cents. Board approval is required to formally adopt the updated rate.

**MOTION** to approve the updated IRS mileage reimbursement rate of \$0.76 per mile effective July 1, 2026 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**

#### **ROAD CLOSURE REQUEST**

Supervisor Holdridge presented a road closure request for the annual block party on Gilmour Way. It was noted that the Chief had not yet formally reviewed this request; however, the Board indicated no objections and noted the event has precedent.

**MOTION** to approve the road closure of Gilmour Way from 12:00 PM to 10:00 PM on September 6<sup>th</sup> for the annual block party was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION – POTENTIAL LITIGATION**

**MOTION** to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing potential litigation and personnel matters was made by Council Member Diffley and seconded by Council Member Becker at 9:15pm.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

Michele Deshler was invited into Executive Session.

**MOTION** to come out of Executive Session was made by Council Member Becker and seconded by Council Member Diffley at 9:45pm.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Deputy Supervisor Becker raised a concern regarding the previously approved road closure for the Sugar Loaf car show. He indicated that an email had been received suggesting a Sugar Loaf business could potentially lose revenue due to the closure, and he expressed a preference to revisit the approval if the matter was unresolved.

Supervisor Holdridge responded that the car show's organizers, the Sugar Loaf Community Foundation, had personally canvassed 24 individual businesses in the hamlet, of which 23 were in favor, including the Tap House. He noted that the business that sent the email had not actually said no to the car show, but simply expressed indifference. He also clarified that the car show's parking would be handled through the firehouse and would not affect the performing arts center's parking lots, as the road closure ends at the performing arts center intersection, leaving two other entrances accessible.

Council Member Cassara added that the car show's organizer is still in active discussions with the committee and has three different layout options under consideration, one of which may not require a road closure at all. Council Member Courtenay echoed Deputy Supervisor Becker's concern about the Sugar Loaf business district as the Town's economic engine. Supervisor Holdridge agreed to follow up with the organizers and report back.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Online public comment, Ed Mullins, asked whether the Town intends to garage the ambulance in a Town-owned structure. Supervisor Holdridge replied there are no current plans for a dedicated building, but the Town is considering a low-cost prefab pole barn or shelter to protect the vehicle from the elements during winter. He emphasized the goal is cost-effectiveness while protecting the Town-owned equipment.

Online public comment from Lydia Cuadros questioned the rationale for the Town purchasing an ambulance. Supervisor Holdridge explained that the ambulance's expected lifespan is approximately 8 to 10 years with proper care, and that projected billing revenue will significantly outweigh startup and maintenance costs. He noted unanimous support from the full Town Board and Village Board as a further indicator of the soundness of the decision.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION** by Council Member Becker, and second by Council Member Courtenay to adjourn the meeting at 9:50pm there being no further business brought before the Board.

The motion carried unanimously.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Linda A. Zappala, RMC  
Town Clerk  
2026-8-12