

TOWN BOARD MEETING

September 9, 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: Absent
- Council Member Cassara: Present
- Council Member Courtenay: Present
- Council Member Diffley: Present

Determination of Quorum: Yes X No

Also present: Attorney Cassidy

Pledge of Allegiance

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

RESOLUTION TO ACCEPT 8/26/26 AND 8/31/26 TOWN BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge asked whether all members had had the opportunity to review the Minutes from the August 26th and August 31st meetings. All members confirmed they had, with no questions, debate points, or comments raised.

Motion to accept the Minutes from the August 26, 2026 and August 31, 2026 Town Board Meetings was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Cassara.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

SUMMARY OF BILLS

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge announced that the Town would be paying bills in the amount of \$167,251.58.

FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORT – UPDATE FROM PETE GUASTAMACCHIA

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge introduced Pete Guastamacchia, Chairman of the Chester Fire District Board of Commissioners, who appeared before the Board to provide an update on the district's ongoing construction and renovation projects.

Commissioner Guastamacchia opened by thanking the Board for their continued support. He identified himself as one of seven commissioners serving on the Chester Fire District Board. He recalled that approximately one year prior, he had appeared before the Board to request approval of a \$12,000,000 bond for the renovation, expansion, and construction of district firehouses, which the Board had approved.

Commissioner Guastamacchia provided background on the structure of the Chester Fire District, with its three firehouses: Walton Engine and Hose, located in the Village; Sugar Loaf, and Troutbrook Engine and Hose, located on the south side of Chester on Lakes Road. The Commissioner also referenced the Commissioner's Building, situated in front of the Sugar Loaf Firehouse on Kings Highway.

Culvert Project

Commissioner Guastamacchia reported on the culvert project located across the street from the post office and behind the Commissioner's Building. He stated that the project is on target and moving along well, with an anticipated completion by the end of the month. He acknowledged that there had been considerable public curiosity and concern surrounding the project, particularly from residents who observed the extent of the excavation. He addressed a recurring question regarding why a simple cylinder replacement was not performed, explaining that thorough studies had been conducted and that the Army Corps of Engineers and multiple engineering firms had been consulted. He reassured the public that the scale and shape of the new culvert does not mean a proportionally greater volume of water will flow through and threaten the post office. He stated, the design was the best solution to manage water flow and protect the remaining roadway on the fire district's side. He noted that the Town had responsibility for the remaining portion of the roadway.

Commissioner Guastamacchia disclosed that the culvert project cost \$886,336, and emphasized that none of those funds came from the \$12,000,000 bond — the entire cost was drawn from the district's buildings and grounds budget, with no additional burden to taxpayers beyond that line. He further stated that the district has submitted bills to FEMA and has been approved in principle for reimbursement, though no funds have yet been received. He noted that a FEMA representative has been assigned to the district, working in conjunction with a liaison and the district treasurer, but that the FEMA portal provides limited status updates. He added that the process has been ongoing for nearly five years.

Troutbrook Engine and Hose

Commissioner Guastamacchia reported that the new bond-funded structure at Troutbrook is currently housing the three pieces of apparatus previously stationed there. The units were never taken out of service. He acknowledged that the quarters are tight. The cost allocated from the \$12,000,000 bond for the Troutbrook project was \$9,352,000.

Walton Engine and Hose

Commissioner Guastamacchia reported that the Walton firehouse received a complete interior renovation, including bay floors, bathrooms, and showers, amenities previously absent. The project cost approximately \$901,000 and is expected to be completed by the end of the month.

Sugar Loaf Engine Co.

Commissioner Guastamacchia noted that the Sugar Loaf firehouse is receiving a building extension for future apparatus, an additional office, an additional bay, and a modernized interior, including showers and bathrooms, which previously did not exist. The cost for the Sugar Loaf work was \$1,747,000.

Budget Compliance

Commissioner Guastamacchia concluded by noting that the district completed its current budget without exceeding it, is not requesting any additional funds from taxpayers. He emphasized his primary purpose in appearing was to inform the public and the Board of where district funds have been spent.

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge thanked Commissioner Guastamacchia for attending and invited him to appear before the Board at any time to provide public updates. No questions were raised by the Board members. Commissioner Guastamacchia reminded those present that the Board of Commissioners meets twice monthly — on the first and third Tuesdays — and that the next meeting is on the 15th at 7:00 PM. All are welcome to attend.

Town Clerk Zappala asked a clarifying question regarding the FEMA reimbursement status, specifically whether the district had received formal approval or whether approval was still pending. Commissioner Guastamacchia clarified that the district has been told to anticipate full reimbursement and that bills have been submitted through the FEMA portal, but that no funds have yet been received and that nothing is guaranteed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brian Ross, Ridgefield Rd., addressed the Board with questions relating to grants the Town has applied for or may apply for.

Mr. Ross referenced the Minutes of the April 22nd meeting, in which Congressman Pat Ryan's office formally recommended the Town's Walton Lake Estates water infrastructure project, valued at \$1,250,000, in a federal grant program. He noted that the amount requested was \$1,000,000 and asked whether there had been any updates and what the implications would be if the grant is not awarded.

Supervisor Holdridge responded that unfortunately no update had been received. He explained that if the grant is not awarded, the necessary water infrastructure improvements will still need to be completed eventually. He acknowledged that budgeting for the full cost at once would be incredibly harsh on the residents, and indicated that the Town would likely bond the project and pay it off over time.

Mr. Ross inquired whether the grant writers working on this application are the same firm retained for other Town grants. Supervisor Holdridge confirmed that the firm is Millennium Strategies, which handles grants for the Town.

Mr. Ross then raised the New York State Open Space Conservation Grant Program, noting that the deadline for applications had passed in April of that year, and asked whether the Town had applied. Supervisor Holdridge explained that the Town did not apply due to a lack of matching funds at the time. He stated that the Town is hopeful that the passage of the Community Preservation Fund referendum, which is on the November ballot, will provide a source of matching funds to make future applications viable.

Peter Rollins, Gregory Drive, Goshen, New York, Department of New York Disabled Veterans Service Officer. He stated he had been invited to speak on behalf of 100 percent disabled veterans in the area. He thanked the Board on behalf of veterans for taking care of disabled veterans in the community.

Mr. Rollins briefly described the complexity of the VA rating system, explaining that individual service-connected disabilities, including loss of limbs, are rated at specific percentages that are then combined through a formula that reduces the cumulative rating, making it very difficult to reach a 100 percent permanent and total designation without sustaining multiple, severe injuries or illnesses. He spoke briefly from personal experience, noting that he had undergone 27 surgeries and lives with cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. He noted that Goshen has only 16 qualifying members in the program. He expressed hope that taxpayers would understand and support the exemption, acknowledging that some may question why certain veterans receive benefits that others do not.

Supervisor Holdridge provided context, explaining that New York State recently enacted a law allowing municipalities to opt in to a property tax exemption for veterans who have been designated as 100 percent disabled by the VA. He stated that a local law introducing this exemption had been introduced at the prior meeting and that a public hearing on the matter would be held at the next meeting on September 23rd. He added that the law should pass with flying colors.

REPORTS

Supervisor's Report

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge opened his report by noting that he had held a Town hall the previous evening, at which the only attendee was Council Member Cassara. He reflected that last year approximately ten to twelve residents attended a similar Town hall focused on the budget, and that the absence of residents this year could mean one of two things: either residents have no concerns, which he acknowledged as unlikely, or residents are simply too busy. He encouraged residents to reach out to him directly by phone, text, email, Facebook, or in person at his office, reiterating that he takes the responsibility of managing public funds seriously. He also

announced his upcoming 3rd Annual Budget Presentation on the tentative 2027 budget, to be held in the second week of October, and encouraged residents to attend.

He reported that he has now met with all department heads regarding the budget cycle, with the exception of the Planning Department. The building inspector candidate interviews have now concluded as of that evening and that a decision is expected shortly.

Upcoming Events:

- 2nd Annual Family Fun Day – September 19th, 12:00 PM, Chester Commons Park. Last year the event drew hundreds of children and families, featuring a barbecue, sports, and activities.
- 3rd Annual Senior Picnic – September 22nd, 11:00 AM, Carpenter Community Park. RSVPs to be submitted through the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Breakfast with Brandon – September 26th, approximately 9:00–11:00 AM or 10:00 AM–12:00 PM at a local diner. An opportunity for residents to speak directly with Supervisor Holdridge on a weekend morning.
- Town Clerk Zappala announced the Bellvale Farms Open House would be held on September 19th from 2:00 to 5:00 PM at 359 Gibson Hill Road, featuring a barbecue, hay rides, and other activities, and that the public is welcome to attend.

Animal Control

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge reported the following Animal Control activity for the period: 6 calls for loose, lost, or found dogs; 2 calls for injured or deceased deer; 1 call for a person bitten by a dog; 1 call for a snake inside a residence; 1 call for a snake at the front door of a Town building; 1 call for a snake in a tree; 1 call for a groundhog stuck in a sports net; 1 call for a stray cat; 1 call for a white bird with a tag on its leg; and 1 call for a bear sighting. Supervisor Holdridge thanked Animal Control and the Police Department for handling the full range of incidents. Complete report online at Chester-NY.gov.

Empress EMS

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge reported 111 total responses, 81 transports, and 115 total dispatches. There were 4 instances of no unit available, attributed most likely to simultaneous call volume. The average response time for the dedicated Chester unit was 8 minutes and 14 seconds; additional Empress units averaged 18 minutes and 13 seconds; and the overall average response time across all units was 9 minutes and 17 seconds. Call volume by unit showed 100 calls handled by the regular unit and 11 by additional units, 9 for second calls and 2 for third calls. ALS calls numbered 27 and BLS calls numbered 66. Supervisor Holdridge noted a resident's request for a future breakdown of average response times by ALS and BLS call type and indicated he would work to provide that data. Complete report online at Chester-NY.gov.

Water Department

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge summarized the Water Department report across multiple service districts. Test results for all districts were completed in July and submitted to the Department of Health in August. Laboratory testing took place on August 5th and 19th. Notable activity included:

- Sugar Loaf: Replacement of an old meter at 53 Wood Road; an emergency water main break on Wright and Mary Road caused by fire department activity hammering the mains, which blew the bolts out of a steel street valve, requiring replacement of the street valve and a section of pipe with assistance from Moodna and Highway.
- Lake Hill Farms: Replacement of a fire hydrant; replacement of bolts on two street valves at the intersection of Lincoln and Tyler with assistance from Moodna Highway and TAM; replacement of an entire service line at 40 Lincoln Road due to multiple leaks and previous patch repairs.
- Walton Lake Estates: Replacement of a stem and riser at 7 Poplar Drive with highway assistance.

Surrey Meadows and Fieldcrest: Nothing to report. Complete report online at Chester-NY.gov.

Police Department

Chief Doellinger reported 14 arrests during the period. The breakdown of charges was as follows: 9 individuals charged with motor vehicle offenses related to suspended driver's licenses or registrations; 1 charged with criminal contempt in the 1st and 2nd degrees and harassment in the 2nd degree; 1 charged with criminal mischief in the 4th degree; 1 charged with creating an unreasonable noise; 2 charged with solicitation without a permit; and 1 taken into custody on an outstanding bench warrant.

Noncriminal activities included: 33 medical calls; 17 residential and commercial burglary or fire alarm responses; 17 reports of suspicious persons, vehicles, or activity; 16 animal complaints; 11 welfare checks; 4 motor vehicle crashes with injuries; 13 motor vehicle crashes without injuries; 4 crashes involving deer; 186 uniform traffic tickets issued; 12 house checks; and 903 business security checks. Multiple community policing activities were also performed by officers during the month. No trainings occurred in August.

In connection with the solicitation arrests, Supervisor Holdridge took the opportunity to remind residents about the Town's no-knock registry, administered through the Town Clerk's office. Registration places a sticker at the resident's front door indicating that unsolicited visitors are not welcome. Complete report online at Chester-NY.gov.

Town Historian

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge summarized a detailed report from the Town Historian, noting that the Historian remains very active. Activities during the period included: responses to public inquiries involving historical research collaborations with the Vermont Historical Society and the Rutland Railroad Historical Society; an as-yet unsuccessful attempt to identify a mid-19th-century photograph of the Chester Railroad Depot; a response to public inquiries regarding rumors that the famous Dutch Quarry Cave fluted point was for sale at auction. The Historian clarified that the item in question was a modern resin replica; research involving Peter Townsend; collaboration with the Village of Chester; Revolutionary War 250th anniversary planning activities, including attendance at a stakeholders' meeting at the 1841 Courthouse in Goshen; and several other outreach projects. Complete report online at Chester-NY.gov.

Highway Department

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge reported that the Highway Department has continued catch basin repairs and cleaning, additional drainage pipe projects, and blacktop patching throughout Town, some stemming from pipe replacements, others addressing general areas of concern. Road mowing continues throughout Town. Trimming work at Carpenter Park was completed at the request of the Parks and Recreation Department to the Board's satisfaction. The department continues to monitor drainage closely amid ongoing heavy rain events. Vehicle mechanics continue routine servicing and repairs. Supervisor Holdridge noted that it is now the appropriate time to begin inspecting and evaluating trucks for winter readiness.

Planning & Zoning Boards

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge noted that the next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for October 7th and the next Zoning Board of Appeals meeting is scheduled for October 8th.

Council Members' Reports

Council Member Cassara and Council Member Courtenay indicated they had no reports.

Council Member Diffley reported that he had the pleasure of attending an emergency preparedness presentation hosted by members of the Air National Guard and Army Reserve at the DC Center, presented under the auspices of the New York State Department of Homeland Security. He described it as very informative. He announced that another session would be held the following evening at 6:00 PM at the 911 Center in Goshen and strongly encouraged interested residents to attend.

EDUCATION REQUEST

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge presented an education request totaling \$1,060 for the Town Comptroller: \$885 for eight various trainings and webinars to be held between September 23rd and December 10th, and \$175 for the 2027 Association of Towns Annual Training School. No questions or debate points were raised by Board members.

Motion to approve the education request in the amounts of \$885 for eight various trainings and webinars and \$175 for the 2027 Association of Towns Annual Training School was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

BUDGET AMENDMENTS – LAKE HILL FARMS & SUGAR LOAF REPAIRS

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge presented budget amendments of \$3,000 each for the Lake Hill Farms and Sugar Loaf Water Districts, to cover the costs of various repairs as documented in the Water Department report. No questions or debate points were raised.

Description	Account	Increase/Decrease	Amount
<u>Lake Hill</u>			
Transportation / Distribution Repairs	SW3 8340-431	Increase	3,000
Fund Balance	SW3 0599	Increase	3,000
<u>Sugar Loaf</u>			
Transportation / Distribution Repairs	SW4 8340-431	Increase	3,000
Fund Balance	SW4-0599	Increase	3,000

Motion to approve the budget amendments of \$3,000 each for the Lake Hill Farms and Sugar Loaf water districts was made by Council Member Cassara and seconded by Council Member Diffley.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

NEW BUSINESS

Public Assembly Permit – Sugar Loaf Car Show

Supervisor Brandon Holdridge noted that the application had come in late. The Sugar Loaf Car Show, scheduled for October 3rd, requires a public assembly permit. Supervisor Holdridge noted that the applicant's documentation is expected to be submitted shortly, and that once received, the application would be reviewed by the Police Chief. No questions or debate points were raised.

Motion to approve the public assembly permit for the Sugar Loaf Car Show on October 3rd was made by Council Member Cassara and seconded by Council Member Courtenay. The motion carried with all present members voting in favor.

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

ADOPTED

EXECUTIVE SESSION – LITIGATION & PERSONNEL

Motion to enter into Executive Session for the purposes of discussing litigation and personnel matters was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Cassara at 7:25pm.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

The Board entered into Executive Session. Upon conclusion of the Executive Session:

Motion to exit Executive Session was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Cassara at 7:35pm.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

PUBLIC COMMENT

Online commentor, Charlotte Henry, stated that you are doing an amazing job. Supervisor Holdridge accepted the compliment with thanks, and noted that it likely reflected well on the entire Board.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Council Member Courtenay and seconded by Council Member Diffley at 7:35pm, there being no further business brought before the Board.

The motion carried.

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

ADOPTED

Respectfully submitted,

Linda A. Zappala, RMC
Town Clerk
2026-9-09