Town of Chester Budget Committee Meeting
September 14, 2026
Draft Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:
Rob Varsalone, Chair
Kathy Guilmette, Vice Chair
Ron McKinnon
Greg Bobish
Dana Theokas, Selectboard Member Ex-Officio
Nick Liguori, Chester School Board Ex-Officio

Budget Committee members absent:
Alex Lawner
Sabrina Harris
Buddy Menard

Others present:
David LaVita, Selectboard Member (arrived at 7:23 p.m.)
Phil Gladu, Chester Fire Chief
Chester PACT

I. Meeting to Order

Mr. Varsalone called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. He announced that Agenda items would be taken out of order.

II. Roll Call

III. Public Comment

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

IV. Old Business

a. July 15, 2026 Letter from Fire Chief Gladu

Chief Gladu stated that comments made during the July 13, 2026 Budget Committee meeting regarding staffing and per-diem scheduling were inaccurate. He reviewed documentation submitted to the Selectboard and Budget Committee, and explained how per-diem scheduling works.

Selectboard Member Theokas said there were concerns that multiple people were coming in on low-volume per-diem shifts, and there was no coverage Friday through Sunday. Chief Gladu explained individuals come in for training and to work on probationary requirements. The schedule was adjusted as of July 1 so that two regular-shift people and an officer (when available) are on at a time. The Committee noted the expectation of the warrant article passing was that it would provide the opportunity to provide 24/7 coverage.

The Committee asked how other towns are utilizing per-diem positions and if Chester could learn from this. Chief Gladu said this was discussed during a recent area chiefs' meeting.

The Committee asked for an update on per-diem coverage, as they had seen no information since June. Chief Gladu said he provides the Town Administrator with information on percentage coverage each month. He explained the process and timing to train new per-diem personnel.

The Committee asked what the impact on per-diem coverage would be if another full-time firefighter were hired. Chief Gladu said this would afford him more flexibility and help with administrative responsibilities of the department. He noted the per-diem positions have reduced the number of calls he responds to. They discussed the impact of the two new full-time officers, and how these positions would affect the budget moving forward.

The Committee asked if there was a difference in equipment costs for per-diem positions versus full-time/call positions. Chief Gladu said the only difference between a per-diem and full-time position is benefits.

A copy of the documentation Chief Gladu submitted to the Budget Committee and Selectboard is attached to these minutes.

V. School Board Update

Mr. Liguori said the Board held a CIP workshop, noting their intent to keep spending and improvements level year to year. He reported on facilities projects completed over the summer. The roof work will be put off for a year so that both roofs can be done at the same time. An audit of the electrical,/mechanical/HVAC systems was completed and recommendations offered.

The Board will be discussing the School Resource Officer (SRO) position with the Selectboard, as there is still interest in the Chester Academy community in this position. The Budget Committee questioned the results of the surveys that reflected this interest.

Mr. Liquori reviewed HB1300, which will establish a tax cap on school spending. The Board intends to educate taxpayers on the impact this bill will have, if it passes.

Information on test scores should be available around the start of Q4.

VI. Selectboard Update

Selectboard Member Theokas noted the impact of recent and upcoming personnel changes in the Town offices. The Board is working with Town departments to align their strategic plans with the Town's Master Plan in terms of prioritization and application of those plans to the CIP. The Committee asked about establishing goals and measuring progress toward them, and asked to see a report on KPI and goals.

Selectboard Member Theokas noted the Board is reviewing opportunities to improve budgeting and planning. The Committee asked about the plan to fill the Town Planner position and Selectboard Member Theokas explained the intent to hire a planning coordinator and to contract with a Town Planner. There are continuing discussions around staffing.

The Committee stressed the need for oversight to avoid overspending in this fiscal year and the group discussed how this is being addressed. They questioned whether planning was being done for the excavator use to maximize rental costs.

The Committee questioned the status of the parking lot repair work. Selectboard Members Theokas and LaVita agreed to provide more information on this.

The Committee stressed the need to assign and track action items assigned to Board members. Selectboard Member Theokas noted the Selectboard strives to respond to the Committee's requests, but is also managing priorities.

VII. New Business

a. FY27 Town July and August Financials

The Committee reviewed the Financial Director's summary of the YTD financial report.

b. Initial Discussion of FY28 Town and School Budgets

The Committee reviewed the current budget, and what a 1% through 3% increase would look like. They noted the need to provide services within a budget that takes into account inflation and increasing expenses, yet is something the taxpayers can absorb.

The Committee discussed the need for policies that illustrate their position on issues, such as the UFB and the wage matrix, and members offered to create drafts. Chair Varsalone noted the Committee's ability to present petition warrant articles to suggest structural changes in the way the Town operates in relation to the budget.

The Committee reviewed the proposed budget process and calendar.

VIII. Minutes

Review of the July 13, 2026, minutes was tabled.

IX. Member Comments

Chair Varsalone noted the opportunity to have a Clerk position on the Committee. He will send out an email to the full Committee for input.

X. Upcoming Meetings

a. October 19, 2026
b. November 9, 2026
c. December 14, 2026

XI. Adjourn

Selectboard Member Theokas made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Bobish seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Hanggeli
Recording Secretary

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Philip Gladu
Chief of Department

July 15, 2026

To the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee,

This letter will serve as an informational letter to the Budget Committee and any Board of Selectmen and is in reference to the Budget Committee meeting held on July 13, 2026. All members are encouraged to thoroughly read through this letter. With any follow up questions and comments please follow the proper channels and we will gladly support.

During the meeting, a discussion was started concerning the Chester Fire department in regard to staffing and per-diem scheduling. The Fire department related conversations starts at 56:40 in the video posted on the Chester PACT channel.

At time 57:28, comments were made concerning the emergency call log. A copy of the department's Manpower Analysis by Incident for the period covering July 1, 2025, to June 30,2026 is included as an addendum to this letter. This analysis includes all of the calls for service from the first twelve month of the per-diem staffing. The analysis includes the type of incident, number of times that particular incident type was responded to, and average number of Chester Fire personnel in attendance. If the committee requires additional information, please do not hesitate to contact the Fire Chief and we will provide additional information as needed.

At time 58:00, comments were made on the number of personnel staffing the station, and the structure of how the Chester Fire Department schedules the staffing. The following are some bullet points that outline how the staffing works:

- Each "shift" is allotted two personnel. These majority of the shift are staffed with a certified Firefighter/EMT. There are a few people that are staffing shifts with only a single certification, and those individuals are working towards their second certification. Dual certifications with Fire and EMS certifications are given preference towards the shifts.

  Unlike similar per-diem fire departments in the area, we do not allow a member who only has one certification (i.e. only a firefighter, or only an EMS certified employee) to staff a piece of equipment that is structured for the certification they do not have. To further clarify, members who are only EMS certified will not take a fire truck to a call without also being staffed by a member with a firefighter certification. Similarly, we do not allow single certified firefighters to respond to medical emergencies without also responding with an EMS provider. This prevents inexperienced members from being placed in a situation outside of their qualifications.

- There may be some confusion as to additions to the schedule (i.e., more than two people on a shift) that may be causing confusion. The department has many new members that require training to become confident and competent employees of the Chester Fire Department. These new members are coming to the department on their time to work on their probationary book requirements. When they are at the station (and not on the pre-determined schedule), they are primarily focused on training for their upcoming qualification tests, internal training and familiarization with equipment, apparatus, and department operations. They are available for emergency calls for service if asked to respond but they are not included in the staffing for the day. When they have completed the time allotted to train, a training sheet is filled out and signed by an officer of the CFD to be compensated.

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- "Officer" slots on schedule:

  Currently this can only be filled by Lt. Sheley, and this is an operational deficiency as it has been brought up multiple times to the Budget Committee and the Board of Selectmen to expand the command staff (please see more below).

  The Chester Fire Department currently operates with a very slim chain of command (a fire chief and one lieutenant). This is a major operational deficiency and the need to expand the command staff needs to be addressed. To better operate and smoothly run a fire department (and any organization), you need a clear chain of command with clear roles and responsibilities. Currently, the two officers in the chain of command are task saturated which results in a need for further growth in the chain of command will better distribute workload and allow the command staff to focus on tasks at hand. The span of control for the ratio of command staff to members is allowing for operational deficiencies. Further growing our chain of command from within will also allow for more daily firefighter/EMS provider slots to open up, and more officer shift coverage slots to be taken, thus creating a more complete daily schedule. Growing our chain of command from within will also produce a healthy and productive work environment for the future growth of CFD. A solution to expanding the chain of command within the CFD was brought forward to the Board of Selectmen.

- The definition of "per-diem", as referenced by Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "by the day", meaning that our members are requesting shifts as they are available to work them. This is very different from a part time place of employment that creates a schedule for an employee to work. A part time place of employment creates a set schedule for an employee, and they are expected to work the specific days as they are told. The Chester Fire Department operates in a Per-Diem structure as a part time structure will not feasibly work. Per-diem members are expected to work the minimum shifts as set forth in our per-diem shift coverage policy (please see attached), but they are not told to work a schedule with specific days. While the per-diem structure for the CFD is relatively new, it was born out of the need for coverage and call responses due to the lowering commitment of the on-call members. Our per-diem members have full time work obligations outside of the CFD (as is common in all similarly structured fire departments). Most of our per-diem staff are full time employees of large fire departments in the area and work on a rotating schedule (i.e. 24hrs on, 72hrs off), and this does not allow a member to work a set schedule at the CFD. Our per-diem members who are full time firefighters bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the department that cannot be recreated in any way. Enticing other full time firefighters around the state to work per-diem for the CFD is a strong operational goal of the CFD. As of July 1st of 2026, motions have been made within the organization to be more stringent on following the maximum (not minimum) staffing as noted above. Members are, however, able to do split shifts (i.e. 0800-1600), this will allow another member to pick up the remainder of the portioned shift (i.e. 1600-2000). This could be causing confusion within the budget committee on scheduling.

- Further information on staffing:

  Currently, the gaps of shift coverage are primarily caused by the fact that we do not have a large enough per-diem staff on hand. The goal of the CFD is to hire more qualified per-diem members to continue to fill up our daily staffing. As stated above, our members have full time obligations and are only able to fill the shifts at CFD as they are able to. The low (as compared to the average for the area per-diem departments) starting rate of pay for a

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per-diem member at the Chester Fire Department is a deficiency and is a strong reason why we are having struggles hiring fully qualified members. During the Budget Committee meeting, the question was raised on how many hours a member can work as a per-diem member. A per-diem member of the CFD is permitted to work up to 53 hours a week, or 106 hours in a pay period (bi-weekly pay period) which was vetted through the New Hampshire Department of Labor and town council. When a member is working a per-diem shift, they are expected to go on all calls for service that are dispatched.

At 58:40 seconds into the recording of the budget committee meeting, it was mentioned that 24/7 coverage was promised to the residents of Chester. The only way for the Fire Department to have true (uninterrupted) 24/7 adequate coverage, the Town of Chester will have to budget for 4 full time lieutenants, and 8 full time firefighter/EMTs, A-EMTs, or Paramedics. This would including a benefits package and the need for an overtime budget. While this is the prime adequate level of staffing to provide the residents of Chester with true 24/7 Fire Department coverage, the Town of Chester is not financially prepared for this additional cost.

The future of the Chester Fire Department and how it operates will not be solved in one day, as the old saying goes "Rome was not built in a day". It is the hope of the Chester Fire Department that relations between the local government and the staff of the CFD will remain an open channel. Continued support from the local government and the taxpayers of the Town of Chester will be key for the future success in supplying a high quality level of care and coverage for the town.

If any member of the budget committee or the Board of Selectmen would like further clarification, please feel free to contact the department and we will be happy to have further discussions. As always, you all have an open invitation to stop into the station during normal business hours, on a day when we have staffing, and we will happily show you some of our daily tasks and duties to keep the CFD operationally prepared to serve the residents of Chester.

Very Respectfully,

Philip Gladu, Fire Chief

Loran Sheley, Lieutenant

Ethan Hughes, Firefighter/EMT

Manpower Analysis by Incident

Chester Fire Department (NH)

Date Range: From 07/01/2025 to 06/30/2026

Incident Type	Incident Count	Number Attended	Average Attended	Total Length (hrs)	Average Length (hrs)	Average Man Hours	Total Man Hours
Dumpster / Other Outdoor Container Fire	1	2	2.00	0.55	0.55	1.10	1.10
Other Outside Fire	1	3	3.00	0.40	0.40	1.20	1.20
Chimney Fire	1	1	1.00	1.51	1.51	1.51	1.51
Confined Cooking / Appliance Fire	1	4	4.00	1.21	1.21	4.84	4.84
Structural Involvement	3	11	3.67	10.85	3.62	13.82	41.46
Electrical Hazard / Short Circuit	1	2	2.00	0.89	0.89	1.78	1.78
Electrical Power Line Down / Arching / Malfunction	13	29	2.23	3.18	0.24	0.51	6.65
Carbon Monoxide Release	2	7	3.50	1.78	0.89	3.40	6.81
Gas Leak / Gas Odor	4	14	3.50	1.45	0.36	1.04	4.14
Odor	3	8	2.67	0.94	0.31	0.78	2.34
Smoke Investigation	10	26	2.60	4.47	0.45	1.17	11.69
Abdominal Pain / Problems	2	5	2.50	0.70	0.35	0.77	1.54
Allergic Reaction / Stings	2	6	3.00	0.79	0.40	0.96	1.91
Back Pain (Non-Trauma)	2	9	4.50	1.14	0.57	2.67	5.35
Breathing Problems	13	31	2.38	7.76	0.60	1.47	19.15
Cardiac Arrest	1	3	3.00	0.90	0.90	2.70	2.70
Chest Pain (Non-Trauma)	10	20	2.00	5.26	0.53	1.06	10.62
Convulsions / Seizures	4	12	3.00	2.44	0.61	2.23	8.90
Heart Problems	2	5	2.50	1.19	0.59	1.48	2.97
No Appropriate Choice	1	2	2.00	0.36	0.36	0.72	0.72
Overdose / Poisoning	2	8	4.00	0.81	0.41	1.62	3.24
Psychological Behavior Issues	6	18	3.00	3.40	0.57	1.58	9.48
Sick Case	15	37	2.47	8.65	0.58	1.55	23.21
Stroke / CVA	9	24	2.67	4.60	0.51	1.34	12.10
Unconscious Victim	7	19	2.71	3.57	0.51	1.24	8.70
Unknown Problem	5	14	2.80	1.47	0.29	0.69	3.45
Assault	2	5	2.50	0.63	0.32	0.70	1.41
Choking	1	3	3.00	0.53	0.53	1.59	1.59
Fall	31	73	2.35	15.29	0.49	1.05	32.53
Heat / Cold Exposure	1	5	5.00	0.61	0.61	3.05	3.05
Hemorrhage / Laceration	5	14	2.80	1.76	0.35	0.86	4.29
Motor Vehicle Collision	8	16	2.00	4.86	0.61	1.47	11.74
Other Traumatic Injury	2	6	3.00	0.65	0.33	0.81	1.62
Medical Alarm	1	4	4.00	0.13	0.13	0.52	0.52
Cancelled	40	112	2.80	5.24	0.13	0.36	14.46
Accidental Alarm	18	44	2.44	4.53	0.25	0.59	10.67
Malfunctioning Alarm	1	3	3.00	0.48	0.48	1.44	1.44
CO Alarm	2	6	3.00	0.98	0.49	1.47	2.94

Incident Type	Incident Count	Number Attended	Average Attended	Total Length (hrs)	Average Length (hrs)	Average Man Hours	Total Man Hours
Fire / Smoke Alarm	8	21	2.63	3.59	0.45	1.13	9.07
Gas Alarm	1	3	3.00	0.34	0.34	1.02	1.02
Other Alarm	1	2	2.00	0.17	0.17	0.34	0.34
Citizen Assist / Service Call	22	49	2.23	8.11	0.37	0.80	17.55
Lift Assist	3	8	2.67	0.69	0.23	0.61	1.83
Weather Response	1	2	2.00	0.21	0.21	0.42	0.42
Move-up	19	48	2.53	21.05	1.11	2.60	49.32
Standby	5	10	2.00	12.03	2.41	4.92	24.60
Motor Vehicle Collision Extrication / Entrapment	1	1	1.00	2.70	2.70	2.70	2.70
Person in Water (Standing Water/Lake)	1	4	4.00	0.56	0.56	2.24	2.24
Blank. No Incident Type(s) Entered	0	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total and Averages for all Incident Types	295	759	2.57	155.41	0.53	1.33	392.91

CHESTER FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINE

SOP # ADM-002	Effective Date: 07/01/2026
Approved By: Chief Gladu	
Subject: 24 Hour Shift Coverage Policy	

Policy Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to provide all Chester Fire department employees with specific information as it pertains to scheduling dates, and authorized work schedules for twenty four hour shift coverage. This policy is also intended to set expectations for all personnel while covering shifts and working for the Town of Chester.

References:

N/A

Scope:

This policy applies to all current employees of the Chester Fire department, including full-time, "per diem", and "call" members. All members will be responsible for carrying out the assigned duties such as responding to various emergencies, providing emergency medical services, maintaining equipment and vehicles, participating in training and drills, and general station housekeeping.

Definitions:

N/A

Policy:

A. All "per diem" and "call" members will be allowed to sign up for shifts, using the electronic scheduling software. The following are specified time frames when members can access the schedule to bid for shifts:

   1) All certified employees will be offered access to the schedule from the 1st through 10th of the month for scheduling in the following month (i.e., the schedule will open July 1st through 10th for August scheduling). The assigned schedule will be posted within three business days from the date scheduling closes. ***There will only be two people posted to each shift not including an officer unless there is a need for additional staff (i.e., hose testing)***.

2) All certified employees that can only work a partial shift (i.e., 7:00 am – 3:00 pm or 8:00 am – 6:00 pm, etc.) can only request the shift no earlier than 48 hours prior to the desired shift.

3) When the month starts, the schedule will remain open for employees that want to pick up a shift at the last minute during the current month. During this specific time frame, employees will not be allowed to "bump" anyone off the schedule based on certifications or scheduled time.

B. During the first 10 days of the month, when scheduling is open, preference for shift coverage will be given to individuals that are dual certified firefighter and EMT. Shift coverage will be filled with priority given by certification level and your seniority based on years of service. See *Appendix A* for certification priority matrix.

C. During the open enrollment period (1st through 10th of the month) each per diem employee will be required to sign up for a minimum of two day shifts (8:00 am to 8:00 pm) and two night shifts (8:00 pm to 8:00 am), monthly. In addition, each per diem employee will be required to sign up for (1) twelve hour "weekend" shift per month which can be a Friday 8:00 pm to 8:00 am or any shift on Saturday or Sunday.

D. In accordance with *29 United State Code (U.S.C.) Section 207(k) and 29 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Section 553.230;* employees may work up to 53 hours per week, 106 hours per pay period, or 212 hours in a twenty-eight-day cycle before overtime is required. The town of Chester's standard work week is from Friday through Thursday of the following week. The pay period is two consecutive work weeks.

All personnel will be responsible for tracking their own hours worked.

E. If you are scheduled for a shift (same day) and are unable to work, you are required to notify the Fire Chief and an officer by call or text prior to the start of your shift.

F. If you are scheduled for any day, Friday - Thursday, and need to make changes to your upcoming schedule, you are required to make that change no later than Friday before the week of the schedule change. If you are scheduled for a Saturday or Sunday and need to make changes to your upcoming schedule, you are required to make that change no later than the Wednesday before the weekend of the schedule change.

G. The fire department's normal business hours will remain 7:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The front door will remain unlocked from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm, Monday through Sunday when the fire station is staffed to assist any residents that may stop in for assistance.

H. There will be special work tasks posted on the whiteboard each day with anything that needs to be completed that is not already covered on the chore list.

I. Truck checks and daily station chores will remain as posted in the kitchen next to the whiteboard.

J. Shift coverage personnel are free to work on any fire, EMS, or college courses that they are enrolled in provided all work requirements assigned are completed.

K. All TEMSIS reports must be completed by the primary EMS technician prior to the end of their assigned shift.

L. A member that is assigned as a mentor may coordinate with their mentee and schedule a time to work on the probationary member's book. The mentor must email the Fire Chief with the date and time that is scheduled. The mentor does not count towards the shift coverage for that day.

OPERATIONS

The shift coverage personnel will immediately respond to each call with the appropriate apparatus in accordance with the apparatus response guideline, provided one of the two personnel are a certified driver/operator and signed off to operate that apparatus. In the event that neither of the shift coverage personnel are certified driver/operators, the duty Officer will respond to the station and fill the role as driver/operator.

A. Derry will remain our primary transporting agency. In the event that a situation dictates that we need to transport, that decision must be made by an Officer.

B. If a non EMS related call is received and "call" members are responding to the station on iamresponding, the Officer or senior member on the apparatus will make

the determination to wait for the "call" members or to immediately respond.

C. "Call" personnel may also respond in the 2nd or 3rd due apparatus based on the apparatus response guideline located in the communications room.

TRAINING

Training with the on shift crew can take place at any time during the day or evening shifts. The regularly scheduled training held on Tuesdays is also available for any per diem personnel as long as the member's 106 hour pay period is not exceeded. When training occurs during a shift, a completed training sheet must be filled out by the senior person and submitted to the Fire Chief to be filed and receive credit

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Any member that cannot fulfill their obligations to shift coverage in accordance with this policy without prior written notification of their absence, will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with *Standard Operating Guideline 101 "Disciplinary Action"*.

APPENDIX A

Shift coverage rankings by certification level:

1. Driver All Vehicles, FF/Paramedic
2. Driver All Vehicles, FF/AEMT
3. Driver All Vehicles, FF/EMT
4. Small Apparatus Driver, FF/Paramedic
5. Small Apparatus Driver, FF/AEMT
6. Small Apparatus Driver, FF/EMT
7. FF/Paramedic
8. FF/AEMT
9. FF/EMT
10. FF or EMT (EMT will be given priority over FF)

Small Apparatus includes – Rescue 1 and Utility 1