TOWN OF CHESHIRE

80 CHURCH STREET | CHESHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS 01225
PHONE (413) 743-1690 | FAX (413) 743-0389

WWW.CHESHIRE-MA.GOV

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes –April 15, 2025

Pursuant to a notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, a meeting of the Board of Selectmen was held in person at 191 Church Street (Cheshire Community House) on Tuesday April 15, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Shawn McGrath, Chair
Jason Levesque, Vice Chair
Ray Killeen, Member
Michelle Francesconi, Member
Ron DeAngelis, Member

Finance Committee Members Present: Jeff Chaput, Chair
Michael Biagini, Member
Austin Alibozek, Member
Kathy Levesque, Member (remote)
Denise Gregoire
William Rech
Patrick Pettit

Others Present: Jennifer Morse, Town Administrator; Lynn Melchiori, William Craig, Northern Berkshire Vocational School Representative; James Brosnan, Northern Berkshire Vocational School Superintendent; Melanie Medon, Northern Berkshire Vocation School District Treasurer; Corey McGrath, DPW Director; Sabrina Damms, IBerkshires; Liseann Karandisecky; Sean Lydon; Whitney Flynn, Town Clerk; Art Kaufman; Sten Spinelli, Berkshire Eagle; Peter Traub; Bob Tetlow, HVRSD School Committee Rep; Erin Milne, HVRSD School Committee Rep; Andy Przystanski, HVRSD School Committee Rep; Erika Snyder HVRSD Business Manager; Aaron Dean, HVRSD Superintendent; Kellie Lahey; Katie Conlin, Woodlands Partnership.

S. McGrath opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. with one recording device (iBerkshires)

Summary of Votes:

- Vote to approve the Annual Town Election Warrant 5-0
- Vote to keep the current Open Space and Recreation Committee in place 5-0
- Vote to expand the executive assistant hours until the end of the fiscal year 4-0
- Vote to appoint Brian Tenczar to the Zoning Board of Appeals 5-0
- Vote to approve the Consent Agenda as submitted 5-0

Discussion/Decision Items

Annual Town Election Warrant- The Annual Town Election warrant was presented by Whitney Flynn, Town Clerk.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to approve the Annual Town Election Warrant as presented.

Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Jeff Chaput called the Finance Committee Meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Budget Hearings – Joint Meeting with Finance Committee

Northern Berkshire Technical School - Superintendent Brosnan and District Treasurer Melanie Medon joined to discuss the FY26 McCann budget. Superintendent Brosnan reviewed the budget documents highlighting that the increase in Chapter 70 aid, Transportation noting that funds at the end of the year are sent back to the towns if not expended and noting that the freshman class is smaller than previous years. He reviewed the budget line by line taking questions from the boards noting that the health insurance increase had a big impact on the budget, he also explained salary increases, decreases and changes in positions and programs. Superintendent Brosnan notified the board that he had applied for an accelerated building grant to address the roof and window issues in the building and they are approved for a schematic design and will be meeting with a project manager and architect to have a final number for the project. The Superintendent will keep the town informed of project progress.

Hoosac Valley Regional School District - Superintendent Dean and Business Manager Erika Snyder joined the meeting to discuss the HVRSD budget. Superintendent Dean started by sharing that there were some significant challenges with large increases to the special education outplacement costs and similar to McCann health insurance costs, understanding that the towns are struggling, they put together a reasonable budget. Superintendent Dean then outlined the thought process, operating budget reductions, teacher shortage impact, and the new district partnership for severe needs programming. To combat past narratives the Superintendent reviewed positions and the role that each play (see attached documents) including their work and accomplishments.

Business Manager Erika Snyder then reviewed the budget taking questions from board members. She was thanked for providing the document that outlined the changes. After the review B. Rech (Finance) asked about the return on investment for the taxpayers when scores are consistently below state averages, he further noted that there is a declining school population and inquired what the district is doing to make improvements. Superintendent Dean highlighted the pathways program and noted progress made in the data. There was discussion about the impact of COVID and that the district is seeing signs of improvement hoping to find ways to engage families and students in learning.

FY26 Budget

B. Rech asked if the Board of Selectmen has done a line-by-line discussion of the budget noting that it is $240,000 over the levy. There was discussion about the Library Assessment, Stipends and the School District budgets.

Finance Committee Adjournment

A motion was made by Denise Gregoire and seconded by Patrick Pettit to adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting At 8:08 p.m.

Vote: Unanimous

Discussion/Decision Items

Open Space and Recreation Committee - J. Levesque shared that he had received a response from BRPC and that all towns handle Open Space and Recreation Committees differently. A. Kaufman stated that he would like to keep the current committee in place with a member of the Board of Selectmen in place.

A motion was made by S McGrath and seconded by M. Francesconi to keep the current Open Space and Recreation Committee in place.

Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Executive Assistant Expanded Hours

***M. Francesconi recused herself and left the meeting at 8:12 p.m. due to her relationship with the executive assistant

S. McGrath shared that the request is to give additional hours to the executive assistant until the end of the fiscal year which will not trigger benefits.

A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by R. Killeen to give the executive assistant expanded hours.

Roll Call Vote: J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 4-0

***M. Francesconi returned to the meeting at 8:14 p.m.

Zoning Board of Appeals Appointment – Brian Tenczar

A volunteer interest form was received and it was noted that none of the current alternates were interested in the full appointment. The Zoning Board of Appeals is requesting the appointment of Mr. Tenczar.

A motion was made by R. DeAngelis and seconded by R. Killeen to appoint Brian Tenczar to serve as a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals

Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Senior Center Rental – June 14

The Town Administrator explained that a request has been made to close the pickleball court to the public on June 14th for a private party. After discussion it was decided that the pickle ball court would not be closed to the public for private parties only for town events such as the Senior Center concerts. The Town Administrator will notify the applicant.

Consent Agenda

- Minutes – April 1, 2025
- Accounts Payable and Payroll Warrants

A motion was made J. Levesque and seconded by S. McGrath to approve the consent agenda as submitted.

Discussion: M. Francesconi asked if any changes were made to the minutes since they were sent to members, the Town Administrator shared that no edits were made.

Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Town Administrator Updates

Dynegy Contract - The Municipal Aggregation Cooperative now has 23 Berkshire County towns. The contract with Dynegy Energy expires in November 2025. In the middle of May the group will go out for indicative pricing to get a sense of where the market is.

Joe Nowak, Adams Board of Selectmen contacted the Town to see if there is interest in displaying the Girls Varity Basketball State Championship trophy. After discussion the board will display the trophy during Annual Town Meeting, the Town Administrator will reach out to the Superintendent to make the arrangements.

Community Compact IT Grant - The Town Administrator shared that an award was granted in the amount of $78,027 for drive by water meter upgrades. There was discussion on technology and if the cell reader meters might be a better option. Quotes will be obtained for all options and presented to the Water Commissioners.

Police Detective Status- The Town Administrator shared that the Police Detective Status for Officer Jean-Calixte was omitted from the agenda, the requested document was read out loud by the Chair.
A motion was made by S. McGrath and seconded by J. Levesque to approve the letter with one edit.
Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

Announcements from Board Members
S. McGrath inquired about the former Country Charm building on Route 8 noting that a lot of work is being done. R. Killeen shared that a cease and desist has been issued by the Conservation Commission and the DEP is aware.

M. Francesconi shared that the Firemen's Balls is scheduled for Saturday May 3, 2025.

Public Comment
Lynn Melchiori thanked all those involved in the Paper Shredding event.

Katie Conlin from the Woodland Partnership spoke about the upcoming grant opportunity, state owned land and opportunities offered for non-timber forest products, leaving information.

Executive Session – MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a), Reason 3 – Union Negotiation To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares

Executive Session – MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a), Reason 3 – Pending Litigation To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.

S.McGrath declared that the Board would enter executive session according to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21(a) Reason 3 as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position.

A motion was made by M. Francesconi and seconded by J. Levesque to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:45 p.m. and to enter executive session according to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a), Reason 3 and not to return to the regular meeting.
Roll Call Vote: M. Francesconi – Yes; J. Levesque- Yes; R. Killeen- Yes; R. DeAngelis- Yes; S. McGrath- Yes
Motion Carries: 5-0

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Respectfully submitted

Jennifer Morse

April 29, 2025

Document List

1. Northern Berkshire Vocation School District Budget
2. Hoosac Valley Regional School District Budget and Superintendent Notes
3. History of Free Cash/Stabilization

Fiscal 2026 Budget Overview

- **Significant Challenges:**
  - $1M increase in out-of-district tuition
  - 16% rise in insurance costs

- **Thinking Strategically:**
  - Use of revolving funds (short-term solution)
    - Apply $500,000 from school choice towards tuition
    - Apply $275,000 from circuit breaker
    - Apply $215,000 from school choice towards severe needs programming
    - Utilizing $340,000 Rural Aid to maintain key support positions
  - Consolidations and strategic partnerships
    - New England Center for Children - Support our severe needs programming on secondary level
    - In addition, the state has contracted Walker Therapeutic and Educational Consultants and Behavioral Health Integrated Resources for Children Project to work with us on developing behavioral support structures for our students in need of a higher level of behavior intervention. The overarching goals are to enhance the capacity of our schools to efficiently integrate behavioral health supports and develop systemic structures to address mental health needs.
  - Continued use of grants to supplement and support our programming needs

Fiscal 2026 Operating Budget Reductions

- Initial plan for reductions that have both direct and indirect impacts on this budget
  - **1.0 Secondary BCBA - Operating Budget**
  - **1.0 HVE Teacher - Operating Budget**
  - **1.0 HVMS SPED Teacher - Operating Budget**
  - **1.0 HVMS Elective Teacher - Operating Budget**
  - **1.0 MS Rise Teacher - Operating Budget (filled with sub FY25)**
  - **1.0 HS ACE Teacher - Operating Budget (filled with sub FY25)**
  - **4.0 Grade 1 Paras - Title I**
  - **1.0 HVE Student Support - SOA**
  - **1.0 HS Rise / Reset - SOA**
  - **1.0 Secondary SAC - SPED Grant**
  - 0.5 BCBA .5 Op Budget .5 CPPI - Fully CPPI
  - 1.0 RBT Operating Budget - CPPI Grant
  - 1.0 HVE Dean of Students - Operating Budget - Rural Aid
  - 1.0 HVMS Dean of Students - Operating Budget - Rural Aid
  - 0.5 Math Intervention - 0.5 Op Budget/0.5 Title I - Fully Funded by Title I

Teacher Shortage Impact

- **Special Education Staffing Issues:**
  - High demand for severe needs educators, private institutions offer higher salaries
  - Adjusted staffing: Two coordinators replacing unfilled teaching positions
  - Coordinators to focus on IEP development, allowing teachers to prioritize service delivery

- **New Partnership for Severe Needs Programming:**
    - Collaboration with New England Center for Children
    - $215K investment in choice funds
    - Goal: Reduce outplacement by developing in-house programming at the middle school level

Combatting Past Narratives - Administrative Heavy District

- Superintendent, Business Manager, and Director of Student Services are Statutory

- Positions Receiving Teacher Level Pay for longer work year:
    - Director of Technology was shared position, post covid demands made that unsustainable (1:1 district, security mandates, and maintenance of software packages require dedicated person)

    - Dean of Students -With discipline law updates we need building based staff that have authority to assess discipline and manage/document steps leading to disciplinary steps

    - Assistant Principals of Teaching and Learning - Building Level Curriculum and Instruction - 4 years ago we had 5 coaching positions that transitions to these positions/roles
        - Guided planning
        - Data analysis and inquiry(Curriculum Implementation and Individual student level)
        - Leading the Instructional Leadership Teams
        - Observation and feedback - Evaluation cycles require minimally 100 formal observations yearly in each building
        - Assessment: MCAS & benchmarking
        - Professional development (job embedded)
        - Curriculum support
        - Modeling and co-planning with staff

- **District Level additions required to manage necessary shifts in the district**
    - Overview of Curriculum Director's Work and Accomplishments:
        - Development, mentorship, and oversight if APTL
        - Full implementation of ELA Curriculum (K-12)
        - Piloting & selection of Math Curriculum (PK-8)
        - Implementation of SEL Curriculum (K-8)
        - Expansion of PLTW (Grades 4-12)
        - Full implementation of High School Pathways
        - Development of Summer PD Series for staff
        - Updated Social Studies Curriculum in middle grades
        - Deepened understandings of Applied Learning
        - Teacher-Driven PD Days
        - Staff Induction Programs & Supports
        - Staff evaluation & coaching

- In addition to accomplishments outlined with our Curriculum and Teaching and Learning, the Curriculum Director has achieved more that $1.5 mil in grants to support initiatives the past 2 years:

Student Opportunity Act	$750,000
Innovation Pathway	$200,000
Ignite	$228,000
OSE	$12,000
Investigating History	$7,400
PLTW	$33,000
Applied Learning Leadership Institute	$28,400
Portrait of a Graduate	$105,000
My Career and Academic Planning	$6,500
Teacher Diversification grant	$50,000
Buzz Education (SPED Consult)	$50,000
Technical Assistance Grant 15000	$15,000
Walker Education (Behavior Structures)	$50,000
PLTW participation cohort	$6,000
SAAB grant	$10,000
PLTW engineering grant	$26,000
	$1,577,300

- Overview of Associate Director's Work and Accomplishments
    - Facilitation of special education curriculum planning and supports
    - Support of the student services department- new IEP reviews, staff supports and training around the new IEP, and improvements in procedures
    - CPPI Universal PreK- coordination of access, itinerant supports and curriculum, for our public schools and the addition of 2 community partners
    - Title I programming including data meetings, needs assessments and summer programming
    - GLEAM Literacy work in PreK and district literacy plan
    - Social emotional Learning - grants to support PD and outside services for students
    - Math Recovery adoption for special education services
    - Dyslexia Team - Action planning and implementation member
    - Transition to Kindergarten leader
    - Teacher Diversification work around the Education Pathway
    - Monitors and supports district staff providing private school services
    - Conducts continuous program improvement and monitoring tasks through DESE for SPED, ESSA, EL, and McKinney Vento

- Grants Written and Managed by Associate Director

2024-2025- IEP Grants	$25,000
2024-2025 Financial Education Grant	$6,400
2023-2024 Afterschool Grant	$90,000
2023-2025 CPPI Grants	$2,411,000
2022-2025 Title I Grants	$1,600,000
2022-2025 Title 4A Grants	$116,000
2022-2025 Title 2A Grant	$187,000
2023-2025 GLEAM grant	$325,000
2022-2024 SEL Mental Health Grant	$260,000
2023-2025 Safe and Secure Schools Grant	$20,000
2022-2023 PreK planning grant	$40,000
2022-2023 Accelerated Literacy Grant	$71,700
2022-2025 Teacher Diversification Grant	$24,000
2022-2023 Early Literacy Grant	$64,000
2022-23 COVID 19 Summer reimbursement grant	$80,000
2022-23 Civics Grant	$22,500
Rounded figures	$5,342,600

Curriculum & Instructional Priorities

- **Key Investments:**
  - Completion of updated Math Curriculum for SY25-26
  - Expansion of PLTW (Project Lead The Way) & Open Sci Ed with grant funding
  - Essential instructional leadership roles retained (Curriculum Director, APs of Teaching & Learning

Metrics that show progress:

2024 Progress toward improvement targets

Indicator		All students (Non-high school grades)			Lowest performing students (Non-high school grades)			All students (High school grades)		
		Points earned	Total possible points	Weight %	Points earned	Total possible points	Weight %	Points earned	Total possible points	Weight %
Achievement	English language arts achievement	0	4	-	2	4	-	0	4	-
	Mathematics achievement	2	4	-	4	4	-	2	4	-
	Science achievement	4	4	-	-	-	-	3	4	-
	Achievement total	**6**	**12**	**67.5**	**6**	**8**	**67.5**	**5**	**12**	**47.5**
Growth	English language arts growth	2	4	-	2	4	-	1	4	-
	Mathematics growth	2	4	-	2	4	-	2	4	-
	Growth total	**4**	**8**	**22.5**	**4**	**8**	**22.5**	**3**	**8**	**22.5**
High school completion	Four-year cohort graduation rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	-
	Extended engagement rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	-
	Annual dropout rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	-
	High school completion total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**12**	**12**	**20.0**

Other tangible successes:

- 17 students completed chainsaw certification program
- 9 students completed CNA training last month
- Environmental Pathway student selected for Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Youth Council
- 5 Environmental IP students were selected to present their capstones at the 2025 Northeast Natural History Conference
- Cast and Crew of about 30 students just successfully completed their spring musical
- Band traveled to Disney and participated in a livelve studio experience creating Disney soundtracks
- HV has added a podcast studio and has students actively creating content
- Individual student organizations are taking on community work in new ways raising funds for mental health awareness and donating time at food banks
- Portrait of a Graduate is driving our work to create civic minded students, building high school experiences around student interests, and giving them access to applied learning experiences, internships, and high level courses
- Student voice is being utilized in ways it hasn't in the past with our student and adult advisory board at the high school, engaging students and adults to collaborate on ways to build a culture and climate all in our community deserve.
- 2 of our staff have been recognized by their respective organizations for their work with students

Budget Review Let's Review the Numbers!