**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2026, 6:30 P.M., COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 84 SOUTH MAIN ST., CHESHIRE, CT 06410**

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Present:
Peter Talbot
Jim Jinks
Fiona Pearson
Greg Wolff
Lou Todisco
David Veleber
Don Walsh
Deb Manke

Staff/Guests: Sean Kimball, Town Manager; Andrew Martelli, Assistant Town Manager; Jim Jaskot, Finance Director; Gina DeFilio, Deputy Finance Director; John Gawlak, Director of Parks and Recreation; Sheila Adams, Aquatics Director; Joan Pilarczyk, Artsplace Director; Michelle Piccerillo, Director of Human Services; Sandy Hernandez, Library Director; Elizabeth Mayne, Program Supervisor

Absent: Tricia Cramer

**1. Roll Call.**

Peter Talbot called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. Noelle Shepard called the roll, and a quorum was present.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance.**

**3. Appointments.**

Peter Talbot motioned to appoint the following to the Youth & Human Services Committee as high school representatives:

- Norah DeCicco, renomination, 3/23/2026-1/31/2028
- Kathryn Suarez, new appointment, 3/23/2026-1/31/2028
- Imani Johari, new appointment, 3/23/2026-1/31/2028

Deb Manke seconded the motion. The motion passed 7-0, David Veleber not present for the vote.

**4. Public comment.**

Ellen Bartley, 60 Brigadoon Drive, expressed her support of the Cheshire Public Library budget including the position being restored.

Chris Marini, 182 Patton Drive, President of Cheshire Youth Baseball and Softball, expressed concern over the challenge to find field space in town. He explained that the Town of Cheshire does not have any fields in compliance with little league rules regarding fencing. He further mentioned that there are no break-away bases.

Fiona Pearson read letters received by the councilors. Peter Talbot read a letter submitted for the record from Connecticut Charge regarding opposition of the per player fees.

**5. Proposed FY 2026-2027 Operating and Capital Budgets.**

**a. Human Services**

Michelle Piccerillo, Director of Human Services, acknowledged her staff in the department. She reviewed the mission of the department as well as the wide variety of programs and services offered in the Youth Services, Senior Services, Crisis Intervention, and Counseling divisions. She discussed the increase in community need: last year the department provided $4,812 in fuel assistance, while this year at $6,319 already. They have seen an increase in approximately 19 food voucher clients and 39 energy assistance clients from last year. Last year, the department provided $5,551 in funding for housing insecurity, while this year they are already at $17,382. This funding covers emergency accommodation at hotels and assisting with preventing evictions. In FY 2026, they already had 850 crisis referrals. She explained that they are requesting the funding for the nutrition program be restored to $10,000. There is a proposed $3,000 increase in Youth Services for the costs of program materials and supplies. There is a $5,000 proposed increase in Crisis Intervention due to increased need, especially in housing insecurity.

Peter Talbot commended the Human Services Department for the work that they do in town. He further recognized the work of Hope for Our Neighbors Inc. Peter Talbot requested to see year over year data on crisis referrals.

Michelle Piccerillo updated that they are in the process of setting up a meeting with Cheshire Food Drive to see how to position themselves to meet the increased need. Fiona Pearson inquired about the line-item increase in 5409. Michelle Piccerillo explained that part of this funding would cover her becoming an approved supervisor, which allows the department to meet the requirements of universities and retain student interns. She clarified that there are no new positions requested this year.

**b. Library**

Greg Wolff recused himself from the presentation and left the meeting.

Sandy Hernandez reviewed the history of the library, first founded in 1892. She reviewed programs and services offered including homebound delivers – currently on track to surpass 800 deliveries this year. She explained that they are seeking the restoration of a fulltime position – Senior Library Associate. Visits to library were up by 9% this year over last year.

Circulation, library card holder, computer usage and study room usage are all on track to increase this year. She attributed the increase in summer reading participation to outreach in schools and with adult participation. She explained that the Library's programming is fully funded by the Friends of the Cheshire Public Library and is about $40,000. She reviewed accomplishments over the last year. She explained the proposed increase of $5,500 in line item 5401 for consultants – the CT Library Consortium provides support and resources for libraries in the state and offers a cohort for libraries looking to do strategic planning. She provided background on the proposed elimination of the funding in line item 5409 for the Abilities Without Boundaries program partnership. Sean Kimball explained that this was a difficult decision.

c. **Artsplace**

Joan Pilarcyzk explained that Artsplace has seen 1,421 registrations divided between weekly classes and art classes. The weekly classes average 240 students. Nonresidents are 1/3 of participants and pay a higher fee. They expect to meet the required $180,000 revenue this year. Instructors moved from contractors to employees, so they were moved accordingly in the budget. Discussion was had on evening course offerings, and Joan explained that there is difficulty finding instructors to teach in the evenings.

d. **Parks and Recreation**

John Gawlak updated that since the ribbon cutting last fall for the new Honey Pot Disc Golf Course, it has risen to the 9th most played out of 63 courses in CT. 9 out of 18 tee pads will be built and installed via an Eagle Scout project. He updated that the department will be offering skateboard lessons and a skateboard summer camp. This year they are offering four Bartlem Beats concerts along with fifth one at fall festival. He explained that the sponsorship campaign is at $4,000 this year so far. Youth basketball has seen a large growth over the last four years and was up to 646 participants. Mixville Adventure Camp had 624 registrants in summer 2025, and they are looking to offer 11 weeks of camp this year because of schools getting out earlier and going back later.

Greg Wolff inquired about the RFP to manage the sound and production at the Bartlem Bandshell. John Gawlak updated that the contract was awarded to PowerStation, which was the lowest cost. Jim Jinks asked about basketball supplies funding being $16,000. Elizabeth Mayne explained that most of this funding covers consumables, score books, whistles. John Gawlak attributed the increased cost in the celebrations funding by 30% to the proposed addition of a portable skating rink to Winter Wonderland. Elizabeth Mayne explained that the pavilion rentals are down this year following the increase in rental fees. Discussion was had on field usage issues. John Gawlak discussed the decrease in number of baseball diamonds. Sean Kimball explained that the School Building Committee is leaving the decision as to what types of fields are at the new schools to the Town Council. John Gawlak mentioned he will get estimate cost on break away bases. Discussion was had on maintenance of fields at schools.

e. **Pool**

Sheila Adams, Aquatics Director, reviewed the various programs and classes offered at the Community Pool. She updated that they have 100 kids enrolled in private swim lessons and 250 in group swim lessons. Sean Kimball explained that there was one major change in the budget as it relates to the maintenance of the pool. He explained that he inherited bifurcation of pool maintenance from public works/public property and feels it is more efficient to have the Department of Public Works take over maintenance. As a result, he is recommending the funding for the primary maintenance person be moved out of the pool budget to public property. In addition, there will be an increase in the pool budget to cover cleaning services. Sheila Adams mentioned that they can also look at lowering the overtime funding because it had been intended for maintenance. Sheila Adams discussed revenue. They are trending higher than last year and are currently at $652,000 with hopes of meeting or surpassing the plan. All fees except day passes for residents. Discussion was had on electric bill and taking a look at whether the budgeted amount can be decreased now that the cogen unit is functioning.

Don Walsh suggested that the Town Council look at pool liner in the five-year capital budget. Jim Jinks asked for a spreadsheet as it relates to fees/increase in activities for the pool and Parks and Recreation for the Town Council to view.

**6. Authorization to apply for a Municipal Brownfield Grant (Round 23) on behalf of Waterbury Button Company through the State of Connecticut Office of Brownfield Remediation and Development (OBRD) for property located at 1855 Peck Lane, Cheshire CT.**

Greg Wolff motioned:

*BE IT RESOLVED, That the Town Council approves Resolution #032326-01*

*BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council hereby authorizes application for a Municipal Brownfield Grant (Round 23) on behalf of Waterbury Button Company through the State of Connecticut Office of Brownfield Remediation and Development (OBRD) in the amount of $2,932,150 for the property located at 1855 Peck Lane, Cheshire, CT, and*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town Council authorizes Town Manager Sean M. Kimball to execute any and all agreements and documents necessary for said grant.*

The motion was seconded by Fiona Pearson. Andrew Martelli explained that he has been working on this application with Waterbury Button Company, which operates from a leased space at Peck Lane that requires remediation. He explained the process and how the Town would act as a fiduciary. The Town will be the applicant, and Waterbury Button Company will be the co-applicant. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously by those present, 8-0.

**7. Adjournment.**

Jim Jinks motioned to adjourn, and Fiona Pearson seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously by those present. The meeting adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Attest:

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Noelle Shepard, Management Specialist

March 24, 2025

**Cheshire Town Council**
Town of Cheshire Parks & Recreation Commission
84 South Main Street
Cheshire, Connecticut 06410

**Re: Statement for the Record — FY 2025–2026 Parks & Recreation Budget Hearing | Opposition to Per-Player Participation Fee**

To the Members of the Cheshire Town Council and Parks & Recreation Commission:

We submit this letter for the record on behalf of our youth sports organization and the many Cheshire families we serve. We address the Town Council directly today because six months of written correspondence to the Parks & Recreation Department regarding the newly imposed $10 and $25 per-player participation fee has yielded no substantive answers only a form acknowledgment that restates the fee's existence without justifying its application to our organization or addressing the specific and material concerns our families deserve to have answered.

We want to be constructive partners with the Town of Cheshire. We believe in youth athletics, in community investment, and in working cooperatively with municipal government. It is precisely that commitment that compels us to stand here today and ask publicly what we have asked privately, repeatedly, and without adequate response: What, specifically, does this fee provide our organization and our families and why are taxpaying residents being charged again for facilities their taxes already fund?

## I. The Fee Was Implemented Without Meaningful Input from Affected Organizations

We are aware that the per-player fee was one element of a broader budget package considered during ten publicly noticed Town Council meetings. We do not dispute that those meetings occurred or were televised. However, public notice is not the same as meaningful engagement. The youth sports organizations, travel leagues, and recreational programs directly impacted by this fee were not invited to participate in those deliberations. We were not consulted. We were not warned. We were simply informed after the fact that we were required to collect $10 per player from families, many of whom are already paying Cheshire property taxes specifically to support these facilities.

Standard municipal fiscal governance requires not only that fees be approved in open meetings, but that those bearing the financial burden have a genuine opportunity to be heard before implementation. That process did not occur here, and the resulting fee structure has left participating organizations unable to explain to families what they are paying for or why.

## II. The Town's Response Has Not Addressed the Specific Services — or Lack Thereof — Provided to Our Organization

The Parks & Recreation Department's written response acknowledged rising operational costs including a 67% increase in the Grounds Maintenance budget since 2019 and cited capital investments such as the Bartlem Park turf field and the forthcoming adaptive turf facility at Cheshire Park. We do not question the value of those investments. What we question is the premise that our organization is an appropriate vehicle for funding them.

Our organization independently manages its own scheduling, registration, communications, and administrative operations. We receive no dedicated administrative support from the Parks & Recreation Department. We do not use the Bartlem Park turf field. We do not use the swimming pool. We do not use the pavilions consistently or if need be, do so through rental agreements. The fee adjustments cited in the Town's response pool passes, pavilion rentals, swim meet rentals are entirely unrelated to our program. Yet we are being assessed the same per-player fee as organizations that may directly benefit from those amenities.

Most critically: several of our teams regularly use fields at Cheshire High School and other locations that receive no maintenance whatsoever from the Parks & Recreation Department. Those fields are prepared, lined, and maintained by our organization's own volunteers at our own expense the overwhelming majority of the time. We purchase lime, drag infields, and prepare playing surfaces that are then used by other town organizations and programs throughout the season as well particularly in summer months. We are, in effect, subsidizing the Town's maintenance obligations. To then be asked to pay a participation fee on top of that contribution, with no explanation of what service it covers, is not equitable it is unreasonable.

## III. Field Conditions and Limited Availability Reflect a Service Gap, Not a Service Rendered

We want to address directly the condition and availability of town athletic fields. The reality our coaches, parents, and players experience is one of limited access windows, fields that are frequently unavailable or in substandard condition during critical parts of our season, and scheduling constraints that force our organization to be resourceful simply to give our athletes a place to practice and compete safely.

The participation fee is framed, in part, as helping to maintain "safe, high-quality facilities." Our members' direct experience does not reflect that characterization. When a fee is imposed with the stated purpose of improving or sustaining facilities, those paying the fee should be able to point to a tangible benefit better condition, greater availability, more responsive maintenance. We cannot. The fields we most rely upon are the fields we maintain ourselves or with the assistance of the school maintenance/grounds staff from CHS. The facilities most visible in the Town's response are those our program does not use.

We are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for basic fairness: either the fee should be tied to demonstrable services received, or organizations like ours which shoulder maintenance responsibilities that properly belong to the municipality should be recognized for that contribution rather than assessed an additional charge.

## IV. The Burden on Cheshire Families Is Cumulative and Has Not Been Adequately Considered

Many Cheshire families have children participating in multiple sports organizations simultaneously our program, Cheshire Youth Soccer, Cheshire Youth Baseball and Softball, and others. Under the current fee structure, a family with two children in two sports each could face $40 or more in participation fees per season, on top of activity fees, equipment costs, and the property taxes they already pay. These are not abstract numbers. These are real financial pressures on real families.

We raised this concern in our August 2024 correspondence. It was not addressed in the Town's response. We raise it again today: Has the cumulative fee burden on multi-sport families been evaluated? Has any analysis been conducted of the impact on participation rates, particularly among lower-income households? If youth athletic participation is a community value and the Town's investment in capital projects suggests it is then fee structures that quietly discourage that participation undermine the very goals those investments are meant to serve.

## V. Departmental Budget Shortfalls Should Be Resolved Through Municipal Appropriations, Not Ad Hoc Assessments on Families

We recognize that the Town has faced genuine fiscal pressures reduced state aid, rising costs, and new debt service obligations. We do not minimize those challenges. But it is the Town Council's responsibility, through the established budget process, to resolve departmental funding gaps through municipal appropriations not to transfer that burden onto community organizations and youth athletes through per-player assessments.

The participation fee functions, in practice, as an additional tax on residents who use public recreational facilities, facilities those same residents already fund through their property taxes. That is an appropriate concern for a public budget hearing, and we raise it as such. We respectfully urge the Town Council, in its deliberations over the upcoming fiscal year budget, to reconsider this fee structure, and at minimum to exempt organizations that independently maintain the very fields they use and receive no dedicated departmental services in return.

## Conclusion

We appear before you today not in opposition to the Town or to responsible fiscal management, but in support of the families and young athletes who make up our community. We ask for transparency, for fairness, and for a fee structure that reflects the actual relationship between our organization and the services the Town provides.

We respectfully request that the Town Council direct the Parks & Recreation Department to: (1) provide a written accounting of the specific services covered by the per-player fee for organizations that self-maintain their fields; (2) consider a credit or waiver mechanism for organizations that independently shoulder municipal maintenance obligations; and (3) engage youth sports organizations in the budget process before implementing any new or revised fee schedules. As we recognize this currently is taking shape now

We thank the Council for the opportunity to be heard and remain committed to working cooperatively with the Town of Cheshire in the best interests of our athletes and our community.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Connecticut Charge**
Jay Miramant and Kristine Drust
Cheshire, Connecticut
Submitted for the Record — Parks & Recreation Budget Hearing

March 16, 2026

**Dear Members of the Town Council,**

Thank you for the time and effort you devote each year to reviewing the town's budget and balancing the many priorities our community cares about.

During the budget process we often hear two concerns expressed by residents: people want Cheshire to maintain strong schools, and people are understandably concerned about the impact of rising taxes. Both of these concerns are real, and both deserve thoughtful consideration.

However, these priorities do not always move in the same direction, and the choices made during the budget process ultimately determine the values that guide our community.

As residents, we often say that education is one of Cheshire's highest priorities. We take pride in our schools and recognize that they are a central part of what makes this town such a desirable place to live. Yet during budget discussions, the conversation can quickly shift toward how much the education budget can be reduced rather than how we sustain the system that has made Cheshire successful.

Strong school systems are not built in a single year, and they are rarely weakened by one dramatic decision. Instead, they are shaped by the accumulation of choices made over time. Small reductions, repeated year after year, gradually erode the capacity of a school system to maintain the quality that residents expect.

Cheshire Public Schools continue to serve a growing student population while operating efficiently compared with many similar districts in Connecticut. The proposed budget is designed to maintain the level of education that our community has come to expect while responding to increasing enrollment and rising operational costs.

Supporting this budget is not simply about approving one year of spending. It reflects a long-term commitment to the strength of our schools and the future of our town. I recognize that taxes are a real concern for many residents. At the same time, every budget ultimately reflects a set of priorities, and the choices we make today determine the kind of community Cheshire will continue to be in the years ahead.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Town Council to approve the Board of Education budget in full and continue the steady investment that has helped make Cheshire the community we are proud to call home.

Thank you for your time and for your continued service to our town.

Sincerely,<br>
Irene Margary<br>
Cheshire Resident & Educator