

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION MEETING
HELD ON WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 15, 2025, 2025, AT 7:00 PM,
HARMON LEONARD YOUTH CENTER,
559 SOUTH MAIN ST., CHESHIRE, CT 06410**

Present:

Karen Schnitzer – Chair
Laura Monte - Secretary
Randal Raines
Laura Monte
Sean Henri
Peter Prohaska
Albert Buell, Jr. (joined via phone call)

Staff/Guests: John Gawlak, Director of Parks and Recreation.

Absent: David Schrumm

I. CALL TO ORDER

Karen Schnitzer called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

A quorum was determined to be present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING SEPTEMBER 10, 2025

Sean Henri would like an amendment to minutes on page two under POCD section a, it reads “He clarified that the purpose of the plan is to identify which parcels are suitable for development and which should be preserved as open space.” He would like the wording to be changed to “the purpose of the plan is to guide on land use, development, and resource management, land use is inclusive of open space.”

Karen Schnitzer motioned to approve the minutes with the revisions as presented. Sean Henri seconded the motion. All were in favor.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

1. Yankee Highlands

Karen Schnitzer states that the Planning and Zoning department is waiting for the 824 referral from CT New England Mountain Bikers Association (NEMBA) to move forward. John Gawlak states he currently has a Memorandum of Understanding that he

has forwarded to Francisco Perez of CT NEMBA for his review. The Forester hike will take place on Friday, October 17, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

2. POCD - Link to Conservation section of POCD:

<https://cheshirect.portal.civicclerk.com/event/956/files/attachment/831>

Karen Schnitzer stated that per Tyche the public comment session is expected to occur sometime next year, and she will consult with Mike Glidden, of Planning and Zoning to determine the specific timing. She noted that the POCD is still in the process of developing regulations and is scheduled to be completed sometime next year.

3. CT Trail Finder

No update.

4. Trail Stewards Group - Update

Laura Monte reported that the sixth session of the Trail Stewards Group took place over the weekend, during which participants worked on removing burning bush. Laura stated she will reach out to the Department of Public Works (DPW) again to request assistance. She inquired whether there is a designated area where removed invasive plants can be laid out to desiccate. John suggested emailing DPW to determine the proper procedure for handling invasive plants that have been removed.

Laura and Karen also met with Doug Levins and Thomas Manning, who had previously spoken with Karen Schnitzer regarding children seeking community project opportunities. It was noted that the children will have advisors or supervision while assisting. Laura welcomed any additional suggestions or ideas for suitable youth projects.

Sean Henri stated that when youth assist in community service activities it often leaves them with a sense of accomplishment and suggested creating a sign-up list. John Gawlak mentioned that a sign-up option could be added to Myrec website, and Albert Buell, Jr. offered to contact the Kiwanis Club leader at the high school to see if there are students interested in participating.

5. Open Space Management – Updates

a. Roaring Brook

No update.

b. Boulder Knoll -update from Sean Henri

Sean Henri reported that 80% of the trail work is complete, with over a mile walkable and only 150 feet left to clear to finish the loop. He raised concerns about maintaining the trail through routine mowing in spring and summer. John suggested creating a mowing contract and issuing an RFP, including identifying locations, developing a scope of work, and gathering pricing. He offered to assist with planning and noted available capital funds that must be spent within 1.5 years, which could support trail maintenance, conference attendance for members, or other materials such as booklets. Sean asked how to proceed, and John confirmed his willingness to help.

Sean states an Eagle Scout is currently working on installing posts for signage along the trail at Boulder Knoll, with approval from the commission. He is currently working on obtaining donations for materials, and the final step will be updating the trail map.

Sean states he received feedback at the Sustainability fair regarding a trail connection from the parking area, the original idea of a short path along the road received negative feedback. During the Sustainability Fair, several attendees suggested creating a trail from the beekeeper's area instead. John asked Sean to prepare a brief proposal or overview of this alternative, which he will share with Andrew Martelli and Dan Bombero for review.

John reported that he spoke with a DEEP officer who confirmed there are currently 5–6 active hunting stands on Cheshire property, with many more on adjacent private land. All current hunters are using archery, but firearm season begins on November 1st. DEEP has methods to identify active stands and may request permission to place cameras to apprehend violators rather than simply removing the stands. If apprehension is not possible, DPW may be asked to remove the stands. Follow-up signage is planned after any enforcement action is taken.

Sean Henri reported that the field is heavily overtaken by invasive phragmites, though the area in the back remains in relatively good condition. He asked whether the situation is hopeless or if the invasives can be managed. The suggestion was made to reach out to All Habitat Services to request a quote or schedule a site evaluation. John questioned All Habitat's full range of services, associated costs, response time, and availability. John also suggested the possibility of inviting a representative to a future meeting. Karen will introduce John to Dave from All Habitat, noting that they are already involved in invasive control at Mixville Park.

John also raised the idea of leasing portions of the land for farming. Sean responded that the primary benefit of maintaining the land in its current state is ecological, with an emphasis on preserving biodiversity. Laura Monte added that converting invasive-dominated fields back to native habitat is typically a multi-year process. Peter Prohaska suggested exploring controlled burning followed by native replanting. He referred to Peter Picone, a wildlife biologist known for restoring invasive fields to native ecosystems.

c. Fenn Road – Update regarding invasives – Laura Monte

Karen Schnitzer has observed that the south field is currently abundant with milkweed. The field will not require mowing this year, to preserve it. She will notify the DPW.

d. DeDominicis – Forester report is available

No update.

e. Cheshire Park – Disc Golf Course Update

John Gawlak reported that since its opening, the disc golf course has been utilized by over one hundred players per week. He noted that the tee pads and permanent signage have not yet been installed.

6. Environment Commission Projects & Priorities List/Updates

The Commission held an in-depth discussion on updating the Environment Commission Project Request/Task Tracker, reviewing priorities and outlining next steps. The review

concluded around item 48 on the list.

7. Sustainability Fair October 4, 2025, 10am -2:00pm – Boulder Knoll

Randal Raines noted the need for shirts for commission members to identify themselves when they are in public. Karen stated shirts will be added as a budget item, as well as the purchase of an Environment Commission tent. Sean Henri suggested that future events could guide participants to volunteer opportunities, such as trail stewardship, or through an email list, as suggested by Peter Prohaska. Karen stated that overall, the event was successful.

8. HOA Updates

No update.

9. Other Old Business

Not Discussed.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Staff Report/ Town Council Liaison Report

John Gawlak, Director of Parks & Recreation, reported that a request for proposal (RFP) is still pending for the Challengers Field at Bartlem Park. Current events include the Scarecrow Contest, with upcoming events such as the Turkey Hunt, Mixville Halloween Bash, and Winter Wonderland. He noted that Bartlem Park has been selected as the 2025 Park of Merit by the Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association, with an award ceremony scheduled for November. John also mentioned that the Town Council has discussed the potential conversion of Chapman School into a community center. Additionally, there have been multiple inquiries regarding the installation of lights at both the skate park and the sand volleyball courts. Laura Monte exited meeting around 8:15 p.m.

2. Letter for Papandrea Property Acquisition

A motion was made by Karen Schnitzer to accept the Papandrea Property acquisition letter in favor of the acquisition of the Papandrea Property by the Cheshire Land Trust. The motion was seconded by Laura Monte, and all were in favor.

3. Budget – Invasive Plant Management Tools

Not Discussed.

4. New Trails at Yankee Highlands

Karen Schitzer noted that new trails have recently appeared on the AllTrails app and appear to have been blazed within the past few years. John Gawlak stated that neither he nor the Town Hall has granted authorization for any new trails to be established.

5. Map Vernal Pools

Karen Schitzer reports that the Town Council approved 41.3 acres of open space near Blackberry Woods on Marion Rd. The land is reported to include vernal pools.

6. Other New Business

John Gawlak suggested that the Environmental Commission present the Forrester reports and their priority list to the Town Council and take the opportunity to introduce themselves. Sean Henri noted it would be great to receive feedback from the town manager, Sean Kimball, and the Council.

7. Grant Funding Opportunities for Town-Owned Open Space

Sean Henri shared information on potential grant funding. He is exploring grants for two projects: trail and habitat improvements at Boulder Knoll, and bridge installation on Fenn Road.

Sean noted that using crushed stone could reduce or eliminate the need for mowing. Proposed improvements also include ADA-compliant parking at the trailhead and replacing invasive plants with native species. He estimated the project cost at \$50K–\$80K, with the majority potentially covered by grant funding.

Sean stated the purpose of the proposed bridge at Fenn Road is to secure funding for the design, engineering, and permitting of a flood-resilient pedestrian bridge. The bridge would connect the parking area to the trail system across the Mill River at DeDominicis.

He added that many grants prioritize ADA accessibility. He mentioned available grant opportunities, including the CT Recreational Trails Grant, stating that the deadline was in November.

IX. ANNOUNCEMENT

Laura Monte has successfully completed the Master Naturalist Course offered through the Connecticut Forest and Park Association. Laura conducted a phenology study focused on observing and documenting ecological changes over time at Fresh Meadows and the Land Trust properties. Her project included weekly photographic documentation of these sites, to record seasonal variations and environmental progression.

X. NEXT MEETING DATE: November 12, 2025

XI. ADJOURNMENT.

Randal Raines motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Sean Henri seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed unanimously. 7-0

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM

Attest:


KRISTA MASSEY, MINUTES CLERK

October 15, 2025

Allyson Clarke, Property Agent
Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
Office of the Commissioner
79 Elm Street, 6th Floor
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

The Cheshire Environment Commission urges DEEP to support the Cheshire Land Trust's (CLT) application to CT DEEP's OSHA grant program to acquire and protect 18.5 acres of land along the Quinnipiac River known as "Frank's Field". CLT is a cornerstone of the community with a fifty-five-year history and over 630 acres of land permanently protected. The Commission believes that this acquisition will benefit all those who live, work, and play in the area by conserving vital riparian wildlife habitat and agricultural resources for generations to come.

All open space has intrinsic value based on its immediate surroundings. But this parcel offers benefits beyond its location along the Quinnipiac River in Cheshire. The river is the fourth largest river in Connecticut running 38 miles from the Plainville/Farmington border before emptying into Long Island Sound at New Haven harbor. The long-term effort to clean up the harbor and Sound starts with the cleanup of Connecticut's rivers. The Quinnipiac watershed contains portions of eighteen municipalities and is home to over 200,000 people which can result in significant pollution loads. It needs riverways with no development to restore its health and make a positive contribution to larger water bodies downstream. With adjoining Land Trust, National Audubon and RWA open space, Frank's Field will be a key link to over two miles of undisturbed river bank that will create a greenway that is rare in this part of the state.

Frank's Field is a perfect acquisition for the town and the region. It will preserve agricultural resources and wildlife habitat, provide recreational opportunities and help regenerate an important Connecticut waterway.

Thank you for your consideration.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at kschnitzer1@aol.com or 203-915-5315.

Sincerely,

Karen Schnitzer, Chair
Cheshire Environment Commission
Town of Cheshire Town Hall
84 South Main Street
Cheshire, CT 06410

cc:

Christine O'Neill, AICP
Senior Environmental Planner
49 Leavenworth Street, 3rd Floor
Waterbury CT, 06702

Michael Ceccorulli
Cheshire Land Trust
P.O. Box 781
Cheshire, CT 06410

DRAFT

Supplemental Information:

"Grant Funding Opportunities for Town-Owned Open Space". My goal is to see if the Commission would consider recommending that the Town pursue outside funding for two projects:

1. Boulder Knoll - Trail and Habitat Improvements

The goal would be to improve accessibility of the recently restored meadow trail by adding a compacted gravel or stone-dust trail surface to the ~loop (similar to the butterfly meadow loop at Wallingford's Fresh Meadows), adding ADA compliant parking at the trailhead, removing invasive plants and replacing with a native pollinator buffer along trail. We could also consider adding a small pad towards the back of the trail for use as a nature's classroom and stargazing area.

2. The Fenn Road - Mill River Bridge

The purpose would be to secure funds for the design, engineering and permitting of a flood-resilient pedestrian bridge connecting the parking area to the trail system across the Mill River at DeDominicis.

There are at least two grants that might be a good fit for these projects including the [CT Recreational Trails Grant](#) and the [DEEP Climate Resilience Fund](#). I believe there is still time to pursue these for the current funding round.