

MINUTES
Regular Meeting
TOWN OF CHESHIRE ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, January 14, 2026
Cheshire Town Hall – 7:00 PM

- I. Call to Order
Karen Schnitzer called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM
- II. Roll Call
Present were:
Karen Schnitzer
Dave Schrumm
Laura Monte
Peter Prohaska
Sean Henri
Randall Raines
- III. Determination of Quorum
We have a quorum
- IV. Pledge of Allegiance
- V. Acceptance of Minutes – November 12, 2025 (December was canceled)
The minutes were accepted as written with the exception of Sean Henri, who abstained.
- VI. OLD BUSINESS
 - a. POCD – Public Comment Session
The public comment session for the POCD has been moved to February 9.
Link to Conservation section of POCD:
<https://cheshirect.portal.civicclerk.com/event/956/files/attachment/831>
 - b. Trails Stewards Group
Laura Monte reports that the group has had new members join. We are now up to 14 members. We have taken a break for the snowy weather, but hope to resume work soon, perhaps next week. In the winter work will mainly concentrate on the woody invasives. Discussion on what to do with herbaceous invasives such as Japanese Knotweed: it easily resprouts and weighs a lot in the growing season. It would be advantageous if a place/procedure could be found to desiccate the plants before disposing of them in the waste stream. Laura has reached out to Public Works about this but has not heard back.
 - c. Open Space Management Updates
Boulder Knoll – Sean Henri wants to move ahead with creating a trail from the parking lot down the hill to a safer crossing point. He will work with John Gawlak on this.
General – We will have the State Forester, David Irvin, do walks through two properties this year; Boulder Knoll and Casertano Uplands/Blackberry Woods. When these are done, we will begin the process of analyzing our current

management plans and updating each individual plan, as well as creating an over-arching plan.

d. Yankee Highlands/NEMBA update

Laura Monte reported on the meeting earlier in the day with Council Chair Peter Talbot, Assistant Town Manager Andrew Martelli, Council Person Fiona Pearson, Council Person Jim Jinks, Parks and Rec Director John Gawlak, herself, and Environment Commission Chair Karen Schnitzer, and NEMBA Representative Francisco Perez. The meeting went well. All serious concerns were brought up and discussed. The MOU is fine, but not sufficient as is. Laura will send a draft Land Use Agreement to all as a starting point. The Environment Commissioners expressed a strong desire to have a LUA attached to the MOU to give clarity to what the Town can expect from NEMBA. The Town submitted an application to the Connecticut Environment Review Team during the meeting. The goal is to have a one- year review done beginning this spring. There was discussion on the number of miles of trails and the design of the trails. Twenty miles of trails is a lot for a 300-acre property, according to many environmental publications. Also, the current design results in a large corridor of influence in the forest. This will be addressed as the project progresses. In the meantime, permission was given to NEMBA to begin limited trail construction in one corner of the property only. A vote on the MOU and LUA will be on the Town Council agenda in February.

e. EC Projects and Priorities Spreadsheet List/updates

None at this time.

f. HOA update

Dave Schrumm has not received anything from Town Staff. He will ask one more time and then direct his request to the Assistant Town Manager and copy John Gawlak.

g. Other Old Business

Laura spoke about the presentation of our Annual Report to Town Council in December. The presentation went very well, and we were able to answer all question.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

a. Southwest Conservation District

Chris Sullivan of the Southwest Conservation District has sent a letter to the Town of Cheshire outlining their contributions to the town in the form of services and information, and asking for a donation. Most members of the Commission were mostly in favor, but also would like Mr. Sullivan to attend a meeting to make his case.

b. QRWA & MRWA

Ms. Schnitzer discusses the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association. They are a mostly educational group. Previously they used to organize river clean-up and a canoe race. Many of their members who helped with that have gotten older and are not able to do that any longer. Sean Henri is very interested in getting that

done and going again, and would be willing to represent Cheshire as a member of this organization. His membership fee will be covered by the EC.

Ms. Schnitzer discusses the Mill River Watershed Association. This is a member organization, but membership is free and meetings are via ZOOM. They have done large projects in member towns and cities. Laura Monte is very interested in representing Cheshire at the meetings.

c. Educational Opportunities & Events – CIPWG Certificate program, CAWS

d. EC Budget

The proposed budget was given to Mr. Gawlak, and he will review, update, discuss and forward to Town Council.

e. Staff Report/Council Liaison Report

Mr. Gawlak discussed briefly the Town of Fairfield and their Conservation Director, Tim Bishop, and the resources the town has for conservation. He suggests that we invite Mr. Bishop to one of our meetings.

Mr. Gawlak thinks that our town needs a natural resource planner at some point, but more urgently someone who can help direct and prioritize Cheshire's natural resources needs and tasks. The Commission agrees and Mr. Gawlak will work on this.

Mr. Gawlak talked about All Habitat Services working at Mixville Park. They can offer services that will result in Mixville Pond being closed less often.

f. Map Vernal Pools – nothing new

g. Other New Business

Ms. Schnitzer passed around a print-out of the prospective new logo for Environment Commission shirts and etc. It was debated whether to have the town seal or similar on the logo, but the majority were okay with the turtle, trillium, and tanager motif.

Mr. Henri has 20 bluebird nesting boxes made by the Scouts that he would like to put up on Town Open Space. This should be fine. Mention should be made that they need to be properly mounted on poles and facing east, have predator guards, and be cleaned out every year at the end of nesting season.

h. Election of Officers

Before the election of officers, it was noted that some terms will expire before the Commissioners are reappointed. Mr. Schrumm informed us that "You serve until you are replaced."

Karen Schnitzer was nominated for Chair by Randall Raines, and seconded by Peter Prohaska. Nominations were closed, and Karen was elected unanimously by all in attendance.

Laura Monte was nominated for Vice Chair by Karen Schnitzer, second by Dave Schrumm. Nominations were closed, and Laura was elected unanimously by all in attendance.

Election of Secretary is delayed until February.

i. Meeting dates for 2026

This will be done in February.

VIII. Next meeting date: February 11, 2026

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Schnitzer, Chair