

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026, 7:00 P.M., COUNCIL ROOM 207, 84 SOUTH MAIN ST.,
CHESHIRE, CT 06410**

Present:

Karen Schnitzer
David Schrumm
Randal Raynes
Laura Monte
Peter Prohaska
Sean Henri
Tim Sullivan

Staff/Guests: Andrew Martelli, Assistant Town Manager; John Gawlak, Director of Parks and Recreation; Jocelyn Lahey, CT Environmental Review Team

Absent: N/A

Karen Schnitzer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Karen Schnitzer called the roll, and a quorum was determined.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

i. Approval of Minutes - January 14, 2026

Peter Prohaska motioned to approve the January 14, 2026 Environment Commission meeting minutes, and Laura Monte seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

VI. WELCOME NEW COMMISSIONER

Karen Schnitzer welcomed the new Environment Commission member, Tim Sullivan.

Sean Henri arrived to the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

VII. VOTE FOR NEW SECRETARY

Randy Raines motioned to nominate Sean Henri for appointment as the new Secretary of the Environment Commission, and Peter Prohaska seconded the motion. All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

VIII. APPROVE 2026 MEETING DATES

i. Approve 2026 Meeting Dates

Karen Schnitzer explained that the November meeting date lands on Veterans Day, so they will be adjusting that to the following week. Peter Prohaska motioned to approve the 2026 meeting dates, and Laura Monte seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously.

IX. GUEST SPEAKER FROM CT ENVIRONMENT REVIEW TEAM VIA ZOOM

Jocelyn Lahey from CT Environmental Review Team, introduced herself. She referenced that that she reviewed all the materials Andrew Martelli sent her regarding Yankee Expressway Highlands property. Karen Schnitzer explained that the Commission's goal is to find out what flora and fauna are present in the area and when to be cautious of them because CT NEMBA is planning on installing mountain bike trails. Jocelyn Lahey explained that she will need to get permission from the Town to be on site. Volunteers will go back out on their own and coordinate directly with the Town. Everyone will prepare individual reports and submit them to the CT ERT. These reports are not regulatory, just recommendations for best practices for land use. She expressed that they hope to complete this overall report in a year.

Tim Sullivan expressed that he would love to know where areas of concern are and have it overlapped with the proposed trail map. Karen Schnitzer explained that she would be available often to go out with ERT volunteers. Jocelyn Lahey clarified that Cheshire would mostly be working with a colleague of hers, Christian, on this project. She explained that the Town is in a waiting pattern at this point because they will need to work on finding the volunteers and then will be able to coordinate a day visit.

X. OLD BUSINESS

i. POCD – Public Session was on February 9, 2026 – review/discuss

Link to Conservation section of POCD:

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

Karen Schnitzer explained that several members of the Environment Commission attended the last Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) public hearing. She provided an update that the PZC held the hearing open.

ii. Trails Stewards Group – report

Laura Monte updated that the group has not been able to do much due to the snow. They have tackled woody herbaceous invasives – burning bush mostly. Discussion was had on what to do with the plants once removed as even a cut stem growing into the ground will turn into a new plant. Laura Monte mentioned that they could apply for a burn permit. She explained that right now she contacts Public Works, and they send a truck to pick it up. Andrew Martelli asked about placing a roll off container.

iii. Open Space Management Updates

John Gawlak mentioned that David Irwin sent an email requesting dates that would work to review the Boulder Knoll property. Karen Schnitzer explained that she would check on the Commissioners' availabilities.

iv. Yankee Highlands/NEMBA update re: MOU, LUA, NRI, Town Council vote

Karen Schnitzer updated that there were meetings held on the MOU and land use agreement. The ERT is in progress. Andrew Martelli explained that they need a scaled map from CT NEMBA on where the bikes will be.

John Gawlak will call CT NEMBA tomorrow. The compromise that was agreed upon was starting with just the approved 7 miles instead of the full 20 miles of trails. John Gawlak mentioned that he would gather the information and documents to get to the Town Council.

v. EC Projects and Priorities Spreadsheet List/updates

Sean Henri mentioned that he would make the spreadsheet public and viewable. Discussion was had on posting the forestry reports on the Town website. David Schrumm requested a list of HOAs in charge of open space.

vi. HOA update

vii. Other Old Business

XI. NEW BUSINESS

i. Quinnipiac River and Mill River Watershed Association updates

Karen Schnitzer explained that she had been researching this because the Town Council Chair Peter Talbot had asked about whether the Town of Cheshire was a part of either of these. More research will be done to determine whether a member needs to be appointed by Town Council.

ii. Educational Opportunities & Events

CAWS, March 4

CT Land Conservation Conference, March 21

iii. EC Budget – Updates and discussion/review with Mr. Gawlak

Commissioners expressed interest in attending relevant courses, and discussion was had on budgeting for this.

John Gawlak explained that he took the Commissioner's requests and made adjustments accordingly including the consultant item for open space management plans.

iv. New Grant Opportunities (Next steps for a property)

v. Staff Report/Council Liaison Report

John Gawlak explained that the RFP for the new pavilion at Mixville Park is opening February 19th. He updated that Public Works had All Habitat survey water quality. Discussion was had on the trail system on the north side of Boulder Knoll.

vi. Other New Business

Karen Schnitzer updated that she attended the Town Council meeting last night, and Joy VanderLek spoke about the beekeeping lease at Boulder Knoll and reported on situation of native bees. She mentioned that a Town Councilor suggested that the Environment Commission research the impacts of beekeeping on native bees.

XII. NEXT MEETING DATE

i. Next meeting date - March 11, 2026

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

David Schrumm motioned to adjourn, and Randy Raines seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Attest:

Noelle Shepard, Management Specialist