

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF CHESHIRE ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12TH, 2026, 7:00 P.M., @ HARMON LEONARD YOUTH CENTER
559 SOUTH MAIN ST., CHESHIRE, CT 06410**

Present:

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

Staff/Guests: John Gawlak, Director of Parks and Recreation; Holly Kocet, Newtown Conservation Commission; and Ron Walters and Joy, Bartlem Park Native Plant Enhancement Project.

Absent:

Tim Sullivan was not in attendance.
Karen Schnitzer called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

Karen Schnitzer called the roll, and a quorum was present, with six members present and one member absent.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: All in attendance participated.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

i. Approval of minutes from June 1, 2026, Meeting

Peter Prohaska moved to approve the June 1, 2026 meeting minutes. Randal Raynes seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by those present, 6-0, with one member absent.

VI. GUEST

- A. Holly Kocet from the Newtown Conservation Commission discussed Newtown's native plant policy and the effort to address rodenticides. She explained that rodenticides are sometimes disguised as rocks, can kill rodents over several days, and may harm owls, hawks, children, and pets. She noted that the EPA has known about these concerns for more than a decade and that, during the upcoming January legislative session, towns may present local policies to the state in support of restricting these pesticides, similar to actions taken in California and Rhode Island. She also described how Newtown placed the issue on the agenda by first developing a policy and then presenting it to the Board of Selectmen.
- B. Ron Walters and Joy discussed the Bartlem Park Native Plant Enhancement Project, which would improve the park with more pollinator-friendly landscaping. The project would remove mug wort, create soft landing areas under oak, willow, or cherry trees, install short fencing, and plant native low-growing species so leaves can remain in place for caterpillars and pollinators. They expect to hire contractors for basin removal and are

currently exploring funding sources. A proposal needs to be submitted to John by the morning of the 28th. David suggested developing a maintenance plan so the improved areas will continue to be cared for after installation.

C.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

i. Fall Festival Table – The Fall Festival is scheduled for September 18 and 19, with September 20 as the rain date. Karen stated that the Commission does not yet have a table and would like to begin discussing who is available to cover two-hour shifts for Parks and Recreation.

ii. Apparel – Ordered uniforms are in, and Karen handed them out.

iii. Trail Stewards Group Updates – On behalf of Laura, it was reported that work was completed on the rail trails. At Fenn Road, the parking lot area needs to be mowed, and Japanese knotweed is expected to return if not addressed. An email will be sent to DPW requesting removal of the remaining knotweed.

iv. QRWA and MRWA Updates – Sean reported that QRWA is addressing a water chestnut problem, which is consuming a significant amount of time, and that he plans to attend an upcoming board meeting. He also visited the Quinnipiac River and noted that it needs trash and storm-debris removal and is currently impassable. Laura reported that there were no updates for the Mill River Watershed Association.

iv. Open Space Management Updates –

a. Roaring Brook – No updates per Karen.

b. Yankee Highlands – Karen reported that the Environmental Review Team will conduct another review and will include an environmental wildlife biologist and the State Archaeologist. Karen will notify members when the review is scheduled. John also provided an update from Francisco, noting that the project was recently completed in July and looks good.

c. Boulder Knoll – Sean reported that an Eagle Scout project was recently completed, including the construction and installation of trail markers and a small footbridge wide enough for a lawn mower. Another Scout is interested in proposing a project for Boulder Knoll. While Sean was away, another volunteer cleared the trail, and Karen said the area looked nice and neat. John added that another Eagle Scout is looking for a project and asked members to let him know if anyone is interested in taking on another larger project.

d. Fenn Road – Karen provided an update.

e. DeDominicis – Tim will lead a Cheshire Creation Care hike on August 30 at 1:00 p.m., and Karen will update everyone.

f. Cheshire Park – John provided an update on the T-signs and noted that they have been well received.

g. Bartlem Park – No additional update was provided.

h. Papandrea Property Purchase Progress – The project has received \$725,000, and the application is due at the end of the month. The Land Trust is working on purchasing the 18-acre property. Additional updates will follow.

i. Environment Commission Projects and Priorities Spreadsheet – Karen asked Sean how the Commission should proceed with the task sheet. Sean noted that everyone has access to the spreadsheet and that he has been updating it as meetings are held. He will continue to keep task sheet tracking until hearing otherwise.

j. HOA Update – Karen asked Dave whether the Commission should continue pursuing the HOA initiative or discontinue it.

k. Other Old Business – The Commission approved Mark Kasinski's project. He offered help with other projects, prioritization, forest reports, and related items.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

- i. Budget Update/Proposed Purchases – Karen will speak with Marg about purchasing equipment to be stored and locked at Boulder Knoll.
 - i. [60V 22' Cordless Battery Wheeled String Trimmer W/8.0Ah Batter & Changer - Greenworks Tools](#)
- ii. Education on Invasive Plants – Karen reported that she completed her DEEP conservation course and must complete her volunteer hours within the next year and a half. She also stated that she will receive a certificate.
- iii. Speaker Series – No discussion.
- iv. Staff Report/Council Liaison Report – John reported that the Town of Cheshire has several maintenance projects in progress or under consideration. The Town Manager is forwarding projects related to the Little League fields, including field re-engineering, fencing, increased parking, and lighting for the skateboard park. John also noted the need to modify the baseball field across from the Youth Center to a 50/70 field.
- v. Map Vernal Pools – This item was not discussed.
- vi. Other New Business – No additional topics were discussed.

IX. NEXT MEETING DATE

- i. Next meeting: September 9, 2026.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Karen asked for a motion to adjourn. Peter moved to adjourn, and Randal seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Attest:  8/17/2026

Krystle Testa, Minutes Clerk