

REGULAR MEETING
ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2014
TOWN HALL ROOM 115 at 7:00 P.M.

Members: Chairman Bill Sherman, Matt Abdifar, Carrie Collins White, Bob DeVlyder and Jodee Heritage.

Members Absent: Daniel Grasso and Dave Mercugliano.

Guests: Sylvia Nichols, town council liaison and reported Jeff Gabso of the *Meriden Record Journal*.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Sherman called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

II. Roll Call

Ms. Heritage called the roll.

**III. Determination of Quorum
Commissioner Attendance Summary**

Chairman Sherman determined there were enough members present for a quorum.

Members in attendance were Chairman Bill Sherman, Matt Abdifar, Carrie Collins White, Bob DeVlyder and Jodee Heritage.

Members absent from tonight's meeting were Daniel Grasso and Dave Mercugliano.

IV. Pledge of Allegiance

All present recited the pledge of allegiance.

V. Acceptance of Minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 11, 2013

Chairman Sherman called for a motion to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2013 meeting.

Motion: To approve the minutes of the December 11, 2013 Environment Commission regular meeting with corrections.

Pg. 6 "advocate" to "adequate"; pg. 7 8th paragraph "in" to "it"; pg. 11 "thoroughly" to "thorough"; pg. 15 "straying" to "spraying."

Moved by Ms. Heritage. Seconded by Mr. Abdifar. Motion approved unanimously by Commission members present.

VI. Election of Officers

Chairman Sherman opened the floor for the election of officers - secretary, vice-chairman, and chairman for the Commission for 2014.

Chairman Sherman opened the nominations for secretary for 2014.

Mr. Abdifar nominated Jodee Heritage as secretary. Ms. Collins White seconded.

The nomination was approved unanimously by Commission members present.

Chairman Sherman opened the nominations for vice-chairman for 2014.

Chairman Sherman nominated Bob DeVlyder as vice-chairman. Mr. Abdifar seconded.

The nomination was approved unanimously by Commission members present.

Chairman Sherman opened the nominations for chairman for 2014.

Mr. DeVlyder nominated Bill Sherman as chairman. Ms. Heritage seconded.

The nomination was approved unanimously by Commission members present.

Chairman Sherman informed Commission members that technically his term ends like someone else's term is ending (Ms. Heritage's) on January 31, 2014 but his intention is to continue on the Commission.

Ms. Nichols stated that Chairman Sherman and Ms. Heritage were re-nominated last night's meeting.

Chairman closed the nominations and stated they now have their slate of officers for 2014.

VII. Communications

Chairman Sherman stated that Ms. Simone had something she wanted to share – a recent conversation with the town manager.

Ms. Simone stated that the town has completed the conversation for audio/visual in the council chambers and it's the goal she believed of the town council as well as the administration is to have all commission meetings televised at least a few times.

Ms. Simone said so its very likely that this commission will be asked to take a look at their agenda in the next couple of months and identify a meeting that they think will be suitable to be televised and the purpose is to really get the word out the community of the different boards and commissions and what they do and get a sample of the agenda.

Ms. Simone said they are going to start looking at the room scheduling and if there's a conflict with the Wednesday night meetings with council chambers the town manager's office may ask that this commission change one of the meeting night's so that it can be held in council chambers so it can be televised.

Ms. Simone stated she believed this would begin in February and said we are hoping that at least one of the commission meetings will televised by May.

Ms. Nichols said there is a great intention on the part of the council and the administration to make people more aware of all the work that you volunteers do on all of the commissions and to understand the breath and depth of the work that's done in the commissions to support what goes on in town – that we increasingly find that the general public is not always aware of the amount of work that you are all doing.

Ms. Nichols said so the purpose of televising the meetings is to be able use this new technology – like Ms. Simone said – to bring awareness to the commission's work - it's a good time for you to promote what activities are available in town so choose your agenda so that it gets the most information out to the public and that's the general purpose of televising meetings – and hopefully we can get all the commissions over the course of the year – or at least have one meeting televised.

Ms. Nichols said we have trouble fining volunteers and we really appreciate the volunteers that we already have.

Chairman Sherman said he thinks they have some interesting things coming up in the spring which we'll probably get to as we march through the agenda so maybe one of those will be on our radar that we can schedule in that time frame (to be televised).

VIII. Calendar – Events

**Earth Day, April 22, 2014
Arbor Day, April 25, 2014**

Chairman Sherman said we have two items listed under the calendar of events – Earth Day and Arbor Day that come one of the heels of the other.

Chairman Sherman said they did talk about the Trails Day at the last meeting - we'll come back to that under new business.

Chairman Sherman said with respect to the items that are listed under the calendar of events – he asked if Ms. Simone wanted to update us with what we might have in mind this year.

Ms. Simone said so far for the Earth Day events I'm working with the library and we have about three events booked so far and we're looking to book a fourth.

Ms. Simone said we've found in the past that when we have a lot of events that it's difficult to really focus on what needs to be focused and it seems that maybe some of the attendance was falling off a little a bit for some of the programs so we're focusing on just getting about four programs and that we really want to advertise them widely and consistently so we expect that we'll get a good turnout again this year.

Earth Day is on a Tuesday. Ms. Simone said we do have an event already booked for that day as well as the 21st (April).

Chairman Sherman said so there are events that are kind of around that period of time generally.

Chairman Sherman asked if Arbor Day was of additional significance or is it all kind of parcel of what's going on.

Ms. Simone stated it's all together – it's really just an Earth Day – Arbor Day environmental spring event.

Chairman Sherman asked if any commission members needed to lend a hand with anything.

Ms. Simone said there may be some assistance needed for some things that she's thinking about and she can bring to this commission at the next meeting.

Ms. Heritage asked if Ms. Simone could tell us the names of the three that have been booked.

Ms. Simone said she can tell them in general – she stated she'd be speaking on the 21st (on invasive plants – ones that you would most likely find on your own property and how to deal with them), the 22nd a presenter that reports pretty extensively on open spaces in Connecticut.

Ms. Nichols said that the public is not always aware of what are invasive species – she said in her business people ask why they don't sell Bitter Sweet and Barberry anymore (they are invasive species).

Ms. Simone said the office sometimes gets calls in the fall asking where's a good place that somebody can go and pick Bitter Sweet and make wreaths- this is a good opportunity for us to explain to them why you don't want to do that and why it's not good transport the seeds.

IX. Unfinished Business

Social Media

Chairman Sherman asked if Ms. Collins White or Ms. Simone had anything to update us on.

Ms. Collins White said since the last meeting she knew that Ms. Talbot was having a social media committee meeting and she (Ms. Collins White) was not able to attend – she said she offered some help but she's not heard back.

Ms. Simone explained that we are on the verge of having a Facebook page put together so different departments can post information online and she believed that there was also a frame work that is near completion for how other commissions and boards can post information as well so it is moving in that direction and hopefully by the next meeting we'll have a live Facebook page that we can take a look at.

Ms. Collins White said that will be great because it will coincide with video stuff that we were talking about earlier because not everyone may watch the TV they may go on the internet.

Property Updates

Chairman Sherman said if there was anything new happening or old business with respect to any properties.

Chairman Sherman said one that comes to mind is the replacement of the kiosk at the DeDominicis property.

Ms. Simone said yes – the subcontractor Trees Incorporated and CL&P representatives were here at town hall to talk about their expanding project for clearing along power lines and they were notified at that meeting what had happened and were shown pictures and they said that that was the first they had heard about.

Ms. Simone said the town manager did just around the same time period send a letter to CL&P so they have indicated that they are willing to pay whatever the cost to have it (the kiosk) replaced – that they would either construct it themselves or they would provide the money for town staff to do it so we've received estimates on the materials and we are working on getting us the replacement costs.

Chairman Sherman asked about the other one (kiosk) that was damaged was Boulder Knoll.

Ms. Simone stated the Parks Department has put it back up and they still need to do some work on it – the design of it right now is not complete or consistent with other kiosks but they are working on that.

Ms. Simone said she did reply the information from this commission the request to have town staff work on the Ten Mile Lowlands kiosk and that is on the winter list for work for the Park and Recreation Department so that in addition to some other work that she had suggested that can be done in the wintertime such as removing a small pocket of Phragmites invasive grass at Boulder Knoll – that can be removed pretty quickly in about an hour or so and that would help eliminate the potential for that to dominate the south side of the road like it has on the north side of the road.

Ms. Simone said in addition to doing some clean up to go the DeDominicis property and take a look at those culverts that we had cleaned at National Parks Lands Day and make sure that that area is clear as well as cleaned up a bit – walking trails of all the properties to cut down trees that are crossing trails that are easily accessible so she believed all of that has made it on to the list and she can find out as these projects are completed.

Chairman Sherman said the other property that comes to mind is the Casertano property – has the Boy Scout Patrick Hedden been making some progress on that through the winter.

Ms. Simone reported that she did contact him regarding Trails Day – the Environment Commission had talked about putting something together for Trails Day – she said she asked if he (Patrick Hedden) would be willing to participate and possible lead a hike through his portion of the loop trail and he's excited about it – and he said he'd be very happy to do that.

Ms. Simone said she believed that also gives him a date to look forward too to get that loop trail worked on – not that he’s short of ambition because he’s done a lot of work so far.

Chairman Sherman said so you can kind of see we’ve got some things that would be nice to disseminate potentially through a wider audience.

Ms. Simone said she wanted to add one other thing – it might just be interesting to note that since the new property maps were created in September – we have distributed about 6,500 (copies of maps) so far – so they’ve been very popular – there’s the display in the lobby and I have to constantly restock that because those materials really fly out the door.

Ms. Simone said we have them at the library – there very popular at the library as well – we have an end cap design so as people are waiting in line they can easily see that and grab the materials so its getting out there and I’m very surprised by the numbers.

Ms. Nichols asked about the funding for the maps.

Ms. Simone stated that the Commission has their own budget – but the maps come out of our office – we do it all in-house – we print them in-house and fold them in-house.

Ms. Nichols asked what budget does this Commission have to do any cleaning of trails or repairing of kiosks or any of that – how does that work.

Ms. Simone said previously that came out of Public Works or Park and Rec budget as they work on that – she said she understands that \$50,000 was recently set aside to use for maintenance of open space so that’s going to be something new for departments to tap into and as far as I understand now that money hasn’t been tapped into as of yet.

Ms. Simone stated this Commission does have money for programming – there’s about \$300 every year that’s allotted to purchase materials – the Commission has bought decals in the past and handed those out – we’ve had stickers.

Ms. Nichols said so there’s no comprehensive plan for maintenance for open spaces.

Ms. Simone said that’s something that we’re working now and we’re near completion of that and what she understood the town manager will bring that to the council and then will know who to do – departments – and who has what responsibility.

Ms. Nichols said and would still be funded by those departments.

Ms. Simone said as well as tapping into that \$50,000 – the staff time will come of whatever department budget already exists; if other materials need to be purchased for kiosks or things like that there's a special fund.

X. New Business

1. Earth Day Event

Chairman Sherman said they covered the Earth Day event under the calendar section of the agenda.

2. Trails Day Event

Chairman Sherman said the date for the Trails Day event is Saturday, June 7th with the rain date of Sunday, June 8th.

Chairman Sherman said to gear up for that – the idea talked about last month was that they wanted to get registered with the state group.

Ms. Simone stated yes – and that's complete.

Chairman Sherman asked what other things you think we'd want to do in advance of that (Trails Day).

Ms. Simone said one thing that she will do is work with the person who's presenting on April 22nd – the reporter to give him all the information about the Casertano property and ask if he do an article – maybe go out to the property with him – show him the new trail and maybe we can get some publicity that way as well as posting it on Facebook.

Ms. Simone said so we're going to really try to advertise this much more than previous Trails Day event because this has bigger implications.

Ms. Simone said we can talk to Patrick (Hedden) to see if he can get the word out to the boy scouts.

Mr. Abdifar said Dave Mercugliano would be good contact for the boy scouts.

Chairman Sherman said yes (he would) – he's a scout leader.

Chairman Sherman said he hoped Commission members could also plan to attend as well if the day is open on your calendar.

3. Commission Goals for 2014

Chairman Sherman said he just wanted to have an open conversation about what Commission members might like to see we spend some time and attention to over the next calendar year.

Chairman Sherman said since you haven't had this agenda but for a couple of days – one thing that comes to my mind is continuing our visibility and we've done a fair amount this past year and beyond in terms of coming up with these sign posts – with the sign posts – with the emblem and getting that out there – and now we have the Facebook coming on and so forth so that has been generally speaking that's kind of a goal (Facebook) that makes sense to him.

Chairman Sherman said he was eager to hear others ideas.

Mr. Abdifar said events like the Trail Day – getting more people using the open space as the town does a good job budgeting money to buy open space and we are fortunate that we have it but many don't use it because they don't know it exists – he suggested planning ways to get people involved and using open space and not on just specific national days which are good days to do things and we should continue doing that but finding ways to plan our own type of events.

Chairman Sherman said so kind of along those lines kind maybe to put that into action – and make a big splash for the Casertano property is probably a nice way to start of the spring time – the walking season – the warm weather season.

Ms. Collins White said she had similar thoughts along those lines that maybe doing some kind coordinated walks or hikes just to get the town involved and now that we've got the communication channels we can promote them and its low cost to us but again its just to kind of help promote some of the open spaces not that we've got the maps – there was a lot of interest at the fall festival – a lot of people we picking up flyers and asking a lot of questions – she said if there things that we can do – community events.

Ms. Nichols suggested that there might be a way to have a video of one of the hike's walking somewhere that can be shown on the public access channel – the video could describe a clearing of a trail or whatever – she said kids and young people love interactive videos – isn't there some way at little cost where somebody can do a video showing a family walking through the Casertano property.

Ms. Collins White said you can do that with an iPad or iPhone – she said it's going to be a very rustic video.

Ms. Nichols talked about the fact the video could show others what they'd be in for and might encourage them to go do it themselves.

Ms. Collins White said you could get clips of the walk – an entire video takes up too much on the computer.

Ms. Nichols said video is not her area of expertise but said there must be some way to take pictures or video at the Trails Day for the people who don't go.

Mr. Abdifar said especially once the Facebook stuff kicks in – it's easy to post a video or photos of an event.

Ms. Nichols said maybe a little something can be posted on the town website – similar to what she sees when she goes online.

Ms. Simone said the town does have a video camera – and one thing that she thought would be a cool video is to speed the video up – if you are taking a video of going up Roaring Brook you can fast forward that video it's like your zipping up a hill and there it is to Roaring Brook.

Ms. Simone said somebody did a similar video for the Quinnipiac River and they sped it up so that its at the very beginning of the river and you just go through all these marshes and it's a kayak that has the camera mounted on the front and you are seeing it go through all these tributaries and everything else and its engaging.

Ms. Nichols talked about a trail walk that she did years ago with the Garden Club and school age children and they identified different kinds of things – plants – trees- rocks – river – is there any way you can develop a video like that – like showing an invasive species and it's a 30 second thing.

Ms. Simone stated yes.

Ms. Nichols said because that's informative and once you give them the information they may want to go out and see it for themselves.

Chairman Sherman said back when his boys were in high school he believed there was a class – video productions – there might be something like that.

Ms. Heritage said there still is a class at the high school.

Chairman Sherman said that (the high school video class) might be a resource there.

Ms. Heritage said to dovetail on that we talked a little bit with Deb Burns who's in charge of curriculum instruction at Cheshire High School – and she was very excited to know that we were actually thinking about communicating and making more our properties to our teachers who also don't really know we exist and what we are; she said to make it a little easier if we could somehow put together an easy informational packet – showing the open spaces and the town Facebook link and whatever but include the brochures that we have that are beautifully done and invite our science classes and their teachers to do field trips to the property that Cheshire's proud of – and it would probably link to the curriculum at certain grade levels better but just let the teachers know that they have an open invitation – they can contact us with any questions – she said she thought it would be a nice out reach for our Cheshire public schools – our children and our teachers and we could also think about if we wanted to do as we are looking to market Trails day, Arbor Day and Earth Day is coming up with simply little competitions for kids – draw a picture – send in a photo – and win a \$25 gift certificate – we could do some of that that would get parents and families involved.

Ms. Simone said right and if we could get a reaction back from the information that we post on Facebook that's even more meaningful because it then is a meaningful dialog it's not just the town putting information out there but that we're getting responses back and then if other people see that people are following up and going to the properties that then it may have a life of its own.

Ms. Heritage said having an information packet would be helpful.

Mr. DeVyllder said he thought the Ten Mile Lowlands and DeDominicis can be emphasized because of how flat they are and how easy they are to walk – they are beautiful pieces of land and easy to walk – there flat – its easy – if people could see how nice these pieces are – event the Ten Mile Lowlands – it's a nice east path to walk.

Ms. Simone said she thought to follow up on that point some people aren't necessarily comfortable in the woods and comfortable looking at a map and seeing that there's five loop trails and how do they connect – and Ten Mile Lowlands is one way in turn around and go back out so the opportunity to get lost is sort of null and for some people that's a comfort level.

Mr. DeVyllder said it's a bulldozed trail and it's a nice easy trail to walk.

Ms. Heritage said she thought there are teachers that are just not aware of open spaces available (suitable for their curriculum).

Ms. Simone talked about the Sleeping Giant program that if you are to walk all of the trails for each of the seasons that you get a patch and long term maybe the Commission can do something like that as well – that you can document that you went to each of these properties for each of these seasons and you get a patch and prove you did the whole thing.

Ms. Simone said the CT Forest and Park Association does that also with the blue trails.

Chairman Sherman said it seems like we are getting a lot of traction and some nice ideas.

Ms. Collins White said maybe just a goal – maybe other areas that the Commission could cover are some conservation areas or local food supplies – maybe other areas that effect the environment that we might to bring up that may impact Cheshire residents – maybe we could try to open up those doors as well – maybe we'll get some of that feedback from the social channels – like what does the public want to hear us cover and what's important – so maybe just have a goal that we maybe tackle one or two other areas.

Chairman Sherman said he thought he heard that Ms. Heritage is willing to help with the interaction with the schools. He asked if someone else could volunteer to get a hold of the high school teacher Dan Warburton (audio-visual teacher) as a video source – he asked if Ms. Collins White would agree to contact him.

Ms. Collins White stated sure (she'd contact Mr. Warburton).

Mr. DeVyllder suggested adding items for next month's agenda.

Chairman Sherman said if anyone has anything to add let him know now or call or email him so their item could be placed on the agenda.

XI. Adjournment

Chairman Sherman called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:41 p.m. Ms. Heritage moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. DeVyllder seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by Commission members present.

Respectfully submitted by:

**Carla Mills
Recording Secretary
Cheshire Environment Commission**