ENVIROMENT COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2010
TOWN HALL ROOM 207 at 7:00 P.M.

I. Call to Order

Mr. Yale called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Mr. Sherman called the roll.

Members in attendance were Robert DeVylder, David DeFusco, Dan Grasso, John Pepper, and Randy Yale.

Member not in attendance was Bonnie Mayer.

Staff liaison Suzanne Simone, Environmental Planner and Anne Giddings, Town Council liaison were also present.

III. Determination of Quorum

Mr. Yale determined there were enough members present for a quorum.

IV. Pledge of Allegiance

All present recited the pledge of allegiance.

V. Acceptance of Minutes – November 10, 2010 – Regular Meeting

Mr. Yale called for a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion: To approve the minutes from the November 10, 2010 regular meeting with corrections. Pg. 3 last paragraph “though” to “thought”; Pg. 4 “leave” to “leaf”; “won” to “one”; Pg. 5 “stripping” to “piling”; Pg. 7. “about there” to “where”; Pg. 15. Delete “see”.

Mr. Pepper moved to adopt the minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. DeVylder. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

VI. Approval of 2011 Meeting Dates

The Commission reviewed the meeting dates for 2011.

Motion: To approve the 2011 meeting dates.
Moved by Mr. Sherman. Seconded by Mr. Pepper. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

The Environment Commission meeting will be held on the second Wednesday of each month in room 115 of the Cheshire Town Hall unless otherwise noted.

VII. Communications

1. April and May Calendar

The Commission reviewed the events on the April and May 2011 calendar.

Ms. Simone said there is one change to the calendar for April. She said the library booked the state archeologist and he is going to come in and talk about Native America Archeology in Connecticut on Wednesday, April 27, 2011.

Ms. Simone said so as it stands, there are seven programs set up as well as the Commission’s Trail Day program for April 30, 2011 for the Casertano property, staff is doing a vernal pool walk and there may be some other things that take place as well.

Ms. Simone said there is still the date of May 11, 2011 reserved for the Commission if there is interest in booking it. She said the library did ask if it’s not booked the end of this month that it then be handed back to them for their programming.

The Commission talked about plans for the May 11, 2011 date.

Mr. DeFusco said he was still trying to nail down a professor guest speaker from Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies to talk open spaces. He said he will try to get a commitment from the professor and report back to the Commission by the end of this week.

Mr. Yale said that if the Yale guest speaker does not come through then he instructed staff to release the room reserved back to the library.

Ms. Simone said there was discussion about the Bat Chat program on May 4, 2011 – she reported that the funding has come from another source so this Commission still has $150 in their line item budget for programs.

VIII. Calendar – Events
1. Earth Day- Friday, April 22, 2011 (Park bulletin listing deadline: Jan 10, 2011)

Ms. Simone said that the April and May 2011 events will go in the Park’s bulletin. She said no actual programs themselves are planned for the actual Earth Day because it’s also Good Friday.

There was discussion about the schools being on break during the Earth Day week and attendance at a Friday event would be uncertain.

Ms. Simone said the Butterfly Gardening and the Coyotes in Connecticut programs are scheduled for April 19 and 20, 2011 sponsored by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station so those speakers are free and the cost is not coming out of anyone’s budget. The programs were coordinated through the library and staff’s office as well.

Ms. Simone said the same for the program on April 12, 2011 – it’s also sponsored from the Connecticut Agricultural Station and the Song Birds program was paid for by this Commission and the library is paying for the archeologist program, staff is conducting the Blue Bird program and the Wetlands Commission paid for the Bat Chat program.

The Commission was pleased with the number of events being held.

IX. Unfinished Business

1. Tip of the Month

Mr. Yale suggested the Commission reconsider what they are doing and how they are doing the tip of the month.

Mr. Yale said for about the last year and a half the focus has been on open spaces and the hiking so maybe they should focus on these topics the next few months.

Mr. Yale suggested that the next tip of the month could be about the benefits of winter hiking. He said that people could be made aware of the fact that the most of the open space properties are available to hike in the winter and that it’s sometimes easier to access the sites in the winter and there are some benefits of hiking in the winter.

Mr. Yale said maybe in the Spring they could highlight some of the properties and talk about them. He informed Commission members that a few weeks ago there was a very nice article in the Hartford Courant about the DeDominicis property.
Mr. Yale said the Commission could put together a few bullet points about the different properties for the Spring tip of the month.

Ms. Simone said the Commission is limited to 350 words for the tip of the month – there may be opportunity that within those words to identify a website they can go to and then the Commission could provide more information on the Town website where they could look at pictures and get directions and they could get more information that way.

The Commission was agreeable to try the strategy proposed for the tip of the month.

Mr. Yale said he would work on the January 2011 tip of the month regarding benefits of winter hiking.

2. Casertano Property

   a. Proposed Property Access and Trail Maintenance

Ms. Simone reported that she did go to the Planning Committee of the Town Council to discuss the trail maintenance project as well the proposed parking stalls for the property. She said there was general discussion about it – no determination was made – it was an informative session so that the Planning Committee would know that this was in the works.

Ms. Simone reported that Public Works will be bring the application forward to the Planning and Zoning Commission for the installation of the parking stalls and that is expected to go forward in January or February 2011. She said the goal is that there would be approval and the stalls could be installed by Spring – hopefully by the April 30, 2011 date so that if work was being done out there that volunteers would have a place to park.

Ms. Simone said in the short term the Public Works Department will start on removing that stock pile to clear the trail head and that is something they will do in the wintertime as conditions allow them to do it.

Mr. Yale asked if there were any concerns what so ever or anything this Committee should be addressing.

Ms. Simone reported that some Council members had some concern about the current lessee of the property and how they feel about this.

Ms. Simone said apparently the Town Manager’s office had conversation with Mr. Arisco and told him where they were thinking of putting the stalls in and that he had no objection. She said that although she had not seen it
she believed Mr. Arisco wrote a letter to that affect that he is not concerned with that and that is not going to impede with his farming.

3. Open Space Property Signage/Logo design

Mr. Yale said there were still some concerns about what they can and can’t do but it was pretty clear at this point other than put signs on the property themselves.

Ms. Simone stated that for the offsite directional there would need to be a revision to the regulations.

Ms. Simone said the Town does not have the ability to exempt itself from the those regulations and the regulations are pretty specific – there are some exceptions but they are pretty specific when it comes to public safety or medical such as “hospital this way” kind of things – she said there is no allowance specifically for those signs. She said she did not think that anyone would have conceived of signs such as that at the time the regulations were written so she though the language was not included in there to allow it.

Ms. Simone stated the only way the offsite directional signs would be allowed is if the regulations were amended. She said that to have the signs on the property itself – that is permitted.

The Commission discussed where on the open space properties the property logo signs could be located.

Mr. Pepper said that the sign was all set based on Commission members’ comments at a previous meeting.

Mr. Pepper showed the finished rendition of the logo design.

Motion: To accept the logo design.

Moved by Mr. DeVylder. Seconded by Mr. Sherman. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

There was discussion about how to fund the cost of the signs.

Ms. Simone noted there was $150 left in the program supplies. She said she would have to get the latest printout of all of the expenditures to date to confirm if funds were available to produce the signs.

Ms. Simone said she spoke to the sign vendor and the estimated cost to have the signs made was $15 per sign.
There was discussion about the number of signs and kiosks (viewed as a sign) could go on each property based on the language in the sign regulations.

Ms. Simone said she would look into the number of signs that could be placed at each property.

There was discussion of having 20 signs with the same design produced – they possibly would be cheaper than $15 per piece. The Commission also discussed the use of the directional arrows and names on the signs and the location of signs and whether or not they be placed on posts or on trees.

Ms. Simone said she would inquire about if a Town agency would be the one installing the signs and if there would be a cost associated with that or if that would be absorbed into the larger budget of the Town.

The Commission agreed to rethink having the names of the properties on the signs or just having generic signs.

Mr. Pepper suggested having the logo design added to the tip of the month.

Ms. Simone said once the signs were put up that there would be some kind of big public announcement made – maybe hold a public event or a weekend of hiking of several properties to really get the word out.

Ms. Giddings said she tries to mention the work the Commission is doing each and every month at the Council meetings.

4. Ten Mile Lowlands Kiosk

Ms. Simone said at the last meeting they discussed staff would get an estimate for materials.

Ms. Simone reviewed the specs for the kiosks and the list of materials needed. She said that there is a difference in the field and what the drawing shows.

Ms. Simone said it appears that there were some changes made from the plans to what is in the field.

Ms. Simone asked for Commission input and guidance as to what it is that she really needs to ask for and get and estimate for.
Mr. DeVylder agreed to work on confirming the specs for the construction of the kiosks. He will try to have the information available for the next meeting.

5. Mixville Hills Property Access-Preferred Easement

Ms. Giddings said she wasn’t able to meet with Andy Falvey and Tim Slocum at the time they had stated but she hoped to meet with them and the property owner to discuss the easement.

Ms. Giddings said the easement is pretty restrictive but she thought it was the kind of thing that gives a lot of information so that it could be discussed with the property owner.

Ms. Giddings said that the Water Company was going to receive an easement to the Moran property for $3000 per acre – she said the Council did vote for that last month. She said that does restrict some uses – the area is mostly wetlands – she said she just wanted to be sure the Environment Commission was aware of the fact the Council had done this because its possible that it would effect any plans that they made for properties.

Ms. Simone noted that the property being discussed is a large parcel that the Town thought they were going to be able to purchase the entire thing – the Mill River runs through that property – this is on the western boarder of the DeDominicis property. She explained that through negotiation the property owner declined to sell the bulk of the property and declined to sell the portion that abuts the DeDominicis property itself but did agree to sell the southern portion which has frontage on Old Lane Road. She said there are ten acres of wetlands – it’s entirely wetlands with mucky soils so there is really no access that is going to be available through there whether it is people or horses or a horse trail.

Ms. Simone said the Regional Water Authority because its in the watershed area of the Mill River, they agreed to pay the Town $3000 for an easement per acre.

Ms. Simone stated the Regional Water Authority helped the Town purchase the DeDominicis property originally because they see it as a water quality issue so the long term goal is too eventually to be able to buy the remaining acreage and then further enhance the DeDominicis property. That would also provide, in the future, if it were to come to pass, it would provide for an area for parking on Fenn Road.

Ms. Giddings said the roads out there are fairly decent so you could even have parking along the road as people do already for the DeDominicis
property. She said they really didn’t see this acreage would be used in any other way – it really has to stay as wetlands.

6. Earth Day April 2011 Events

Mr. Yale said Earth Day events were discussed under Calendar events.

7. Staff Updates

a. Ms. Simone said the only staff updates were the ones relative to the Casertano property and other items that they already discussed.

Mr. Sherman stated that he has not heard back from the editor at the Cheshire Herald.

Ms. Simone said she did not hear from him either. She said she is planning on sending out a letter to abutting property owners of the Casertano property to let them know the Town is going to be removing soil there and doing trail maintenance – and the long term goal is to install parking that way they have notice so when they see dump trucks show up they don’t think something else is happening.

Ms. Simone said she was also thinking about putting something in the paper so maybe they can coordinate with the Cheshire Herald editor at that time and then talk long term or bigger goal of the property.

Ms. Simone said January 2011 would be the time frame.

Mr. Sherman said he would correspond with the editor again and see if they can meet in January.

b. Mr. Sherman said that he corresponded with the Superintendent Greg Florio’s secretary Carol Jesnesky about the property naming opportunity project for school age children.

Mr. Sherman said Mr. Florio would like a letter from the Commission to bring to him so he could in turn bring up in a principals meeting at which he would float the idea to the principals.

Mr. Sherman said he could draft the letter and send pending the Commission’s approval. The Commission would provide the naming opportunities, the naming regulations, and the general idea.

It was noted that the Commission is only looking for ideas at this point but if they like something they could act on it. The Commission talked about the naming project and how the might proceed.
The Commission discussed a few ideas about the naming criteria and what properties would be named or renamed.

Mr. Sherman said he could craft the letter to Mr. Florio and then reviewed and signed and sent out by Mr. Yale as the chairman.

Ms. Simone said that if the Commission was going to be inviting kids to go out to the property it should be a property where it’s acceptable and where they could get to and have it be save. She said the Dime Savings property the trails aren’t marked – the DeDominicis property is the one that is most easily accessible and the trails are marked.

Ms. Simone said if it’s a property the Commission wants kids to take a look at they will have to look at what the access is for those locations.

There was discussion about the criteria to use to come up with names for the properties – the names should have some historical value in Cheshire or a name of an individual who has a tie to Cheshire.

Mr. Yale said he appreciates the work Mr. Sherman has done so far and anything to get the community involved will help the Commission promote the open space properties.

X. New Business

1. Open Space Management Plans

Mr. Yale said there were several spaces that have no plans at all.

Ms. Simone said yes and she put together information for one property so far – the Boulder Knoll property.

Ms. Simone passed out information regarding the open space management plans.

Mr. Yale said since staff has the most knowledge of these plans she could put together a draft plan – an outline of a plan and they could as a Commission address it or have a sub-committees and have them go out and spend some time going through the properties and giving staff more input about specific things that need to be addressed in the plan.

Mr. Yale said if it’s a piece of property that is straight forward and clear and they don’t think there are a lot of issues staff can present it and the Commission could look at it and approve it but like they have done with some of the other properties they may want to put together a subcommitte
and walk the property once or twice and provide more input depending on what the property is and what the issues are.

Mr. Yale said if staff is willing she could start to put together the initial outline of plans for all the properties present the plan to the Commission and then they would move forward based on what their concerns were.

Mr. Yale asked if anyone else had any input or ideas now would be a good time to give staff some direction on what the Commission is looking for.

Mr. Yale said there are some plans in place for some of the properties.

Ms. Simone said she did not know off hand how many properties did not have plans but the Boulder Knoll property itself there are two parcels that identifies six parcels and currently the management plan that is in existence only applies to four of those parcels so there are two adjoining parcels that need to be incorporated into that plan – the Williams property is a large wooded parcel so those two – the Benz property at the end of Cornwall Ave and ... 

Tape change.

Ms. Simone said there is certainly enough to keep busy and there’s really a lot to do. She said in speaking with the Town Attorney about the Blue Trail that is proposed to extend on to the town’s Benz property and looking at the Open Space ordinance the question came up of where is the management plan for this property – the ordinance specifies that all open space properties will have a management plan. She said she indicated that the yes but it is a lengthy process and they are moving through it so that is what is sparking this of they should really move forward with this that way they are getting all of these properties into compliance with the ordinance and at least all of the properties have been looked at and reviewed and there is something in place and then they can take management to the next step of whatever maintenance may be or further review.

Ms. Simone said if the Commission thinks that it’s fine then she would go ahead and start with the Williams property which is “F” on the map and just start with the draft, get all the information together from the land records and do the research.

Mr. DeVylder asked why you can’t use a metal detector on any of these properties.

Ms. Simone said she was not part of that conversation as to why that was but she knew that was adopted by the Town Council but discussion leading up to it she did not know about.
Mr. DeVylnder said according to the Open Space Land Management plan you can’t use metal detectors. He said it seems like the usefulness of that part of the ordinance has run out. He talked about the possible usefulness of using metal detectors to find historical facts about the properties.

Mr. Yale asked staff to go ahead and draft a management plan for the Williams property of the next meeting. Commission members were in agreement.

Ms. Simone said that she would. She said she would also follow up with the status of the Mixville Hills management plan because that draft was completed from this Commission.

The Commission discussed the location of mines in Cheshire.

XI. Adjournment

Mr. Yale called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:55 p.m.

The motion was moved by Mr. DeVylnder. Seconded by Mr. Sherman. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

Respectfully submitted:

Carla Mills
Recording Secretary
Cheshire Environment Commission