I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Robert DeVylder at 7:26 p.m.

II. Roll Call

David DeFusco called the roll.

Members in attendance were Robert DeVylder, David DeFusco, David Cadden, and Randy Yale.

Members not in attendance were Bonnie Mayer and Matthew Levine.

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

III. Determination of Quorum

Vice-Chairman DeVylder determined there were enough members present for a quorum.

IV. Pledge of Allegiance

All present recited the pledge of allegiance.

V. Acceptance of Minutes from the December 9, 2009 – Regular Meeting

Vice-Chairman DeVylder called for a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion: To approve the minutes from the December 9, 2009 regular meeting with one correction; page 8, under 2.a change “School of Forestry and American Studies” to “School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.”

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

VI. Election of Officers

Ms. Simone informed the Commission there were three officer positions, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary that were up for nomination.
Vice-Chairman DeVylder opened the meeting up for the election of officers.

Mr. Yale nominated David DeFusco as Chairman. Mr. Cadden seconded the nomination.

There were no other nominations made for Chairman.
Nomination approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

Mr. DeVylder nominated himself as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Cadden then nominated Robert DeVylder as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Yale seconded the nomination.

There were no other nominations made for Vice-Chairman.
Nomination approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

Mr. DeFusco nominated Randy Yale as Secretary. Mr. Cadden seconded the nomination.

There were no other nominations made for Secretary.
Nomination approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

Nominations were closed.

Newly nominated Chairman DeFusco chaired the meeting from this point forward.

Anne Giddings, new Town Council liaison to the Commission introduced herself to Commission members.

Commission members welcomed Ms. Giddings to the Commission.

VII. Communications

1. Staff memo regarding Motion of December 9, 2009 meeting

Ms. Simone addressed the memorandum dated January 12, 2010 sent to Town Manager Michael Milone regarding the motion made at the last meeting regarding access to Mixville Hills.

Ms. Simone explained that she forwarded the motion to the Town Manager and they had discussion. The Town Manager suggested that this motion
come back to the Commission for more details and more specifics in the motion.

Ms. Simone said the motion covered three parts having to do with finding access on to the property using Darcy School as the public parking area; number two suggesting that the Town Attorney review adjacent properties to obtain an easement of an access; and number three the long term solution for the Town to investigate purchase of adjacent properties and installing a parking area.

Ms. Simone said there was discussion that it would be beneficial when this gets forwarded it goes to the Planning Committee of the Town Council and that they would have a fleshed out plan of exactly what it is that the Commission would be suggesting for accessway.

Ms. Simone said so if the Commission would look at the property and identify particular areas that might be best suited for access for all three of these categorizes – first having to the short term of just finding a way to get on to the property then second looking for properties that maybe they could gain easement through and then third potential properties to purchase.

Ms. Simone said she brought a laptop computer to the meeting so the Commission could look at the Town’s GIS system and look at some pictures of the subject site and adjacent properties.

Ms. Simone asked if the Commission wanted to address this matter under new business item one.

The Commission agreed. This item was addressed under new business.

VIII. Business

1. Town Property Reviews/Recommendations

Ms. Simone accessed the Town of Cheshire website – cheshirect.org and displayed the website on the projection screen for Commission members to view.

Ms. Simone briefly reviewed the Commission’s site and the quick links section and the GIS system. She explained that the Regional Planning Agency that Cheshire belongs funded the basics for the GIS system. The system provides a link to the regional agency where they can look at more details for properties.
Ms. Simone zoomed in on the properties adjacent to the Mixville Hills property. She explained that the system provides detail of who owns the property and a few other details.

The Commission viewed the Darcy School property, the two houses directly across the street from Darcy School which are actually on two separate parcels of property.

The Commission viewed the aerial photographs of the subject properties; they viewed the driveway going to Darcy School, the two houses with the common driveway and the location of the town property.

Ms. Simone gave a visual overview of properties owned by the Town and an overview of different access paths.

Ms. Simone showed the Commission which adjacent properties that were privately held.

There was discussion about a private property owner who owned several parcels of property in the area.

Ms. Simone explained that at one point in time, the property owner approached the Town to potentially sell a parcel to the Town but from what she understood the issue fell apart when it came to negotiation of price.

Ms. Simone showed the Commission frontage access on Notch Road. She said if the Town was able to access or acquire all of the adjacent properties then there would be a substantial increase to the amount of property of Mixville Hills but then also area for direct access.

Ms. Simone said when she drove by the Waterbury Road she took pictures to see what the street looked like.

The Commission reviewed the pictures of Waterbury Road and map of the Waterbury Road properties abutting the subject property.

Ms. Simone reviewed with the Commission parcels of privately owned land abutting the Mixville Hill property. She said there was some frontage to the subject property along Marion Avenue as well as along Waterbury Road.

Ms. Simone reviewed the landscape of the property near the town property; she said a lot of the property as previously discussed is
inaccessible. She explained the property would be pretty much wet throughout the year.

Ms. Simone reviewed the location of the privately owned two houses off of Waterbury Road; she said that she identified this area just by natural topography would make sense for someone to walk from Waterbury Road down in to the property – it goes through an area that is gently sloping so it doesn’t have the sharp drop-off features that you have along the rest of the guardrail and you can walk up between the two large outcroppings or you could possibly go around it but upon further review that is entirely on the neighboring property so that would require an agreement or some sort of access to allow the public to walk across someone’s property.

Ms. Simone said she did not know how amenable the property owners would be if approached about an access agreement. She said it appeals as though a neighboring property is for sale; she said there was discussion a few years ago of potentially the Town buying it but again it was the price that sort of stopped that deal.

There was discussion about obtaining access from the property where there is the mostly reasonable access, the exact property for sale and who owned the driveway that accessed the two homes. Staff said there must be some kind of driveway agreement but she did not know what their agreement was.

Ms. Simone said in looking at the information that is available at Town Hall, she did not come across any other Town owned properties that have a simple agreement with a land owner to allow access; she said she was not saying that was a hurdle but that there is no sample to work from and that she did not know what would be required legally.

There was discussion that currently there is no formal access agreement to access the Mixville Hills property. There was also a question regarding the zoning acreage and the acreage of the property assumed to be for sale.

Ms. Simone said the lack of a formal access agreement is part of the issue of getting people out to this property because of the location of the guardrail along the frontage along Waterbury Road; the property entirely has the guardrail on it.

Ms. Simone said she did not know what the zoning was for the area, whether it was R40 or R80.

Ms. Simone said the property for sale is a 5 acre parcel.
Ms. Simone stated that the property options reviewed where the portion of parking at Darcy School. She said it really would require an agreement from private property owners to allow access through their property; she said it’s a real hindrance.

Mr. DeVylder asked if it was possible the Town to get a right-a-way from one of the privately held properties.

Ms. Simone said that was something she did not know; that is something that if this Commission saw fit could then get forwarded to the Town Council for consideration.

Mr. DeVylder said he thought that would be one of the simplest things. He talked about the accessway used when the Commission accessed the property during a field walk of the site – he said that was not a bad walk at all.

Ms. Simone informed the Commission that there were other areas that touch on the property but does not have the same parking that Darcy School would have but you have properties that touch along the subject parcel adjacent to residential neighborhood.

The Commission reviewed a map of other possible accesses located north of Waterbury Road near Vanessa Court.

Ms. Simone showed the location of other possible accesses to the property but noted these accesses would then require on-street parking if these areas were going to be a solution (located on Vanessa Court).

Ms. Simone talked about a parcel of property where there were no homes but where there was some drainage development in the location of Summer Hill Court – a new development. She said much of the site is not developed currently.

Ms. Simone said access from properties off of Summer Hill Court would again require the agreement of properties owners to allow people to walk across their property.

There was discussion that the Town considers purchasing a lot off of Summer Hill Court to access the subject property and then the Waterbury Road property as a second possibility.

The Commission reviewed the location of the properties on Summer Hill Court and possible access to the Mixville Hills property.
Ms. Simone said she was not familiar with the topography of this area but thought there were wetland considerations; she also noted that there might be drainage infrastructure contained on this property.

Mr. DeVylder asked if the gas line ran though the middle of the property under review.

Ms. Simone stated yes. She said if the subject parcel was to be accessed from Notch Road then it would require the purchase of a few parcels of property.

Ms. Simone said she believed the parcel around Notch Road tend to be pretty wet.

Ms. Simone pulled up the online wetland mapping of the properties on and around Notch Road. She said accessing the subject parcel from Notch Road may not be feasible; there are boggy soils in this area and that would impede anyone of accessing the property year round.

Mr. Cadden asked if the Town purchased a parcel of property with a house on it what would they do with the house.

Ms. Simone said if the house was going to be used for a house there maybe then be some further investigation in to that accessway to get there assuming there is already an agreement on record.

Mr. DeVylder asked if there was a common right of way to access the homes from the shared driveway.

Ms. Simone said it may have just been a gentleman’s agreement from the 1950’s; she said most of these homes were built in the 1950’s and there may not be documentation but to have access to that property that would be very important to have.

Mr. DeVylder said in his opinion talked about looking to get a right-a-way on the same right-of-way and possibly if you have to buy something buy that odd piece of property (as seen on the map) on Waterbury Road.

There was discussion about the possibility of the Town purchasing two parcels of land on Waterbury Road to gain access to the property or getting an easement to the Mixville Hills property.

Ms. Simone asked which properties the Commission would recommend for possible purchase.
Ms. Simone was not able to confirm exactly which two properties were for sale. She accessed the online Town Assessors information to get an idea of price of the two properties thought to be for sale; one appraised at $206,000 (2 acre parcel) and the second for $247,000 (5 acres).

Mr. DeFusco suggested the Town purchasing one of the two properties for sale on Waterbury Road; he 1681 Waterbury Road just might provide parking – he said he didn’t know if that was possible but since there seemed 5 acres he would assume that there was not going to be a flood of people at any one time looking to hike that property and it just may provide enough parking spaces.

Mr. DeVylder commented about the condition of the two houses presumed for sale – he said neither one of the houses looks like they were ready for someone to buy and move right in.

Ms. Simone said with all of that being said and the fact that the Commission is aware of budgetary constraints that are on the Town so purchasing property may not be high on the agenda right now but this may be a long term solution.

It was asked if there were funds available to purchase property.

Ms. Simone said she did not know how much money there was and if there’s an allowance to spend it. She said she was putting the budgetary constraints issue out there not as a way to saying “I know they (the Town) are not going to buy it” just as a way of saying “this may not come to pass for several years.”

Mr. Yale asked about the possibility of getting an easement or right-of-way off of Summer Hill Court that adjoins the adjacent property.

Ms. Simone said that property is undeveloped as of right now.

Ms. Simone asked if the Commission wanted to make a motion for these properties for potential purchase and then maybe they could talk about temporary access and getting an easement and identify which properties which might be the same properties.

Mr. DeFusco suggested the Commission look at whatever the most feasible route was and leave it in the capable hands of Town officials to determine what was needed and the best way of going about it. He said he did not have a preference – just whatever they could get.
Motion: That the Town Attorney investigates first exploring the feasibility of an easement off of 40 Summer Hill Court for the purpose of gaining access to Mixville properties and secondly to explore the possibility of purchasing other properties on 1681 Waterbury Road and 1673 Waterbury Road, there again to look at the outright purchase of those properties and or a portion of those properties and also investigate creating some sort of access by other means to access the Mixville Hill property.

Ms. Simone said just to clarify that for 1673 and 1681 Waterbury Road and 40 Summer Hill Court to explore the possibility of first gaining an access or secondly purchasing the property outright to gain access to Mixville Hills.

Mr. DeVylder asked that the motion be amended to read, “and or a portion of those properties.”

Mr. DeFusco said Mr. DeVylder’s suggested sounded good.

Moved by Mr. DeFusco. Seconded by Mr. Yale. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

2. Earth Day 2010

Ms. Simone informed the Commission that Earth Day 2010 was fast approaching (April 2010). She said the there are several events scheduled and there was discussion at the last meeting about the dates April 13 and April 14 that are reserved for any plans that the Commission may have; she said she did not know if there would be a determination tonight of which of any of the dates would be used. She said she asked this question because the Library asked her because they are getting calls from people who want to schedule those dates.

Ms. Simone said April 14 is the regular Environment Commission meeting date so she did not know if there was any preference or interest in doing an event that night at the Library.

Mr. DeFusco said he thought at the last meeting there was a positive reaction to securing both dates – April 13 and April 14; one of the dates was for a presentation from a guest speaker.

Mr. DeFusco said he is looking in to getting a guest speaker for one of the nights.

Ms. Simone asked if the Commission wanted her to keep these dates on the schedule.
Mr. DeFusco stated yes.

Mr. Cadden said he wanted to set-up a meeting to work on a CD showing all the open space areas in town. He said he wanted to have the CD run on a computer kiosk.

Ms. Simone said there was also a previous discussion about the Commission hosting an informal open space event and the possibility of having it right before the events that are scheduled on April 20, 21, and 22, about a half-hour before those events start at 7:00 p.m. She said she did not know if this was still an interest and that she was asking because the Parks Department has agreed to put all of this information in their Parks Bulletin and the deadline is tomorrow to get the information in.

Ms. Simone explained to the Commission that she has found in the past that when they have used the Parks Bulletin they get a lot more people coming to events. She said she did not know if there was any opinion on what the Commission wanted to do for an open space open house.

Ms. Simone said they do have display materials; these are the ones that were brought to the Fall Festival.

Ms. Simone said the open space map the Commission currently has is outdated and needed to be updated to add all the open space areas in Town.

Mr. DeFusco said one of the important things this Commission should tackle is marketing the open spaces in Town because very few people know that they exist and this might be a good opportunity to package all of these open space areas and give a presentation as to what is available.

Ms. Simone said they also have the website and they are adding more material to the site so they could set a deadline to get information on the website for the update to the trails book so that it's digitally available.

Ms. Simone showed the link on the Commission’s homepage and noted the site did have it's limitations as far as being able to put up a lot of pictures or video; she said she was told they are going to be updating the website where they will have the ability to have more content. She said they will be able add to, change, to showcase the properties because some of the properties especially the DeDominicis is quite a nice property and the current website does not do it justice.
Ms. Simone said if that was something the Commission wanted to work on then they could set a deadline and focus on that and then that could be an unveiling of the Commission’s online features as well as any handouts they have.

Mr. DeFusco asked if there would be an opportunity to show a video.

Ms. Simone said yes. She noted there were some funds in the budget for programming; she said there’s maybe $250 and the Commission was certainly welcome to use that and is encouraged to use those funds to help get the word out.

Mr. DeFusco commented about updating the trails book.

Ms. Simone said she they have less and less people interested in purchasing the book – they like to go online and just print it out. She said this also helps encourage people to go to the website in case there is a trail closure or a problem and they can see the latest information. She said trails books has a lot of historical information but when it comes to trails themselves there are not that many listed in the book.

Ms. Simone said to update the online trails information would just require staff time. She said if they just got a direction of how they wanted it to look and what information they wanted to provide; she said that she would need to check to see if the website could support more information and pictures layout in a more interesting manner; the maps would still be on the site but they could have pictures of the properties and sort of showcase and highlight the interesting features.

Ms. Simone said the current trails book does not have all of the open space properties owned by the Town; she said the book is outdated.

Ms. Simone said that she did not know how many people would attend the Earth Day events but in the past they have gotten a good response; it’s ranged from 30-40 people and depends on the timing of the events. She said Saturday afternoon events are not well attended that is why the events are held during the week at night.

Mr. DeFusco talked about the most cost effective way of getting the open space information to the public; he said at the Fall Festival the handouts were very popular; he said they could probably duplicate the same effort but consolate the information to one sheet of paper and also have the information posted on their website.
Ms. Simone said that for the three events that she did last year all put together there were 150 people that attended. She said right there, there would be an opportunity to handout 150 pamphlets to people and that does not include the Library, having the information handed out at the lectures and possible having a night that was open space – come and learn about open space where they could show pictures of open space and how to navigate through the website, they can have materials for the public to look at and for the public to take.

Mr. DeFusco said he did not know if there should be a discussion by the Commission as to what exactly do they want to put into that brochure – he said what was there strategic objective going to be and what sort of information should be included. He said he was not sure who to consult.

Ms. Simone said that they could certainly talk about that and she could put together some information.

Ms. Simone said the Earth Day events include April 7 – Black Bears in Connecticut put on by the CT DEP, April 20 – Maintaining Healthily Perennials, April 21- Vernal Pool Walk and Organic Land Care Presentation, April 22 – DeDominicis Hike and Historic of Connecticut Forests and April 23 – the Quinnipiac River Clean-up.

Ms. Simone said they are looking to advertise all of the Earth Day events widely including in The Cheshire Herald, The Hartford Currant and online sources.

Mr. Cadden and Mr. DeVylder talked about how the Commission could present the open space information to the public. It was suggested that a tri-fold brochure be created.

Mr. DeFusco said that was a great idea and he suggested that the each Commission member think of one or two things that they think should be promoted.

Mr. Cadden agreed to work on a sample tri-fold brochure for the next meeting.

There was discussion about the attendance at three events Ms. Simone attended.

Mr. DeFusco asked Ms. Simone if April 13 and 14 was going to be basically display tables.
Ms. Simone said it can be whatever the Commission wants it to be; the days at the Library for reserved so the Commission can do what they choose (programs from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.).

Mr. DeFusco said he is working on getting a guest speaker for one of those nights either April 13 or April 14.

Ms. Simone asked if the Commission was aware that April 14 was the regular meeting night; she said the Commission could use their regular meeting night to present at the Library either for the open space presentation of the lecture.

There was discussion about the meeting date and the two dates reserved; it was noted that one of the two nights could be considered a meeting or the regular meeting could be moved to another date.

Ms. Simone said whatever happens on those two dates would have to be advertised separately because this information is going to go in to the Parks Bulletin and will get in for their spring listing.

The week of April 18 is a school vacation week.

Ms. Simone if the Commission wanted they would have an opportunity to present information on April 20, 21, and 22. She said if the Commission wanted to make a decision on that tonight that the information could be listed in the Parks Bulletin or they could just pick one day.

Ms. Simone noted that April 22 was the official Earth Day and the 40th anniversary of Earth Day.

It was agreed that the Commission should advertise events for April 13, April 14, and April 22.

Ms. Simone said the information could also be directed to school since schools will be out that week.

Ms. Simone said she is leading the family-friendly DeDominicis hike on April 22.

Mr. DeFusco said he would like everyone to think about what they could do for the April 13 and April 14 and come up with an idea or two for the next meeting to talk about how they could really exploit the time that they have on those dates; he said is was trying to secure a guest speaker on one of those dates and use the other night to present information to the public.
Ms. Simone asked the Commission to clarify what dates should be advertised for their events.

The Commission agreed that they should advertise events for April 13, April 14, and April 22.

Ms. Simone said she would provide information at the next meeting regarding what information would be presented at the Library events and what would be distributed to Town buildings as well as what would be brought to Stop & Shop and Everybody’s Market.

a. Commission Program/Hike

Ms. Simone stated the DeDominicis hike would be held on Thursday, April 22.

b. Display/distribution materials - covered under Earth Day discussion.

3. Tip of the Month

Mr. DeFusco said he would come up with a topic and present it at the next meeting.

Ms. Simone noted that the new policy at The Cheshire Herald is they won’t allow a third party to send the information – the information must be sent from the author.

VI. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 8:34 p.m. Moved by Mr. Yale. Seconded by Mr. Cadden. Motion approved unanimously of those Commission members present.

Respectfully submitted:

Carla Mills
Recording Secretary pro-tem
Cheshire Environment Commission