MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2010, AT 7:30 P.M. IN
ROOM 210, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present
James Sima, Chairman; David Schrumm; Absent: Justin Adinolfi
Michael A. Milone, Town Manager; Robert Ceccolini, Parks and Rec Director;
Suzanne Simone, Environmental Planner. Anne Giddings, Councilor.

1. ROLL CALL
The clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

3. DOG PARK
Mr. Milone explained that a few months ago the concept of a dog park on the old
land fill came before the Planning Committee, and it was noted that this would
require DEP approval before any further action could be taken. PW Director
Michaelangelo sent a letter to DEP on the components of the dog park such as
size, fencing, etc. A letter from DEP has been received which grants the
approval as long as it conforms to the specifications set forth in Mr.
Michaelangelo’s letter. The dog park group has returned to discuss the next
steps in the process for the park.

Mr. Sima noted that the DEP letter referred to no disturbance of the cap on the
land fill and this has been discussed regarding fencing to be done on the site.

Parks and Rec Director Ceccolini has spoken with Mr. Michaelangelo about the
fencing, which will be run between the two grades on the site. Mr. Ceccolini
pointed out this area on the map of the site. The chain link fence can be on the
perimeter and will not disturb the caps; there are woods between Arts Place and
fence can be run between the caps. It is expected the fence would be a
minimum of 4 feet high, and possibly as high as 6 feet.

There are concerns about parking spaces and Mr. Sima said there could be a
conflict with the Arts Place parking.

According to Mr. Ceccolini this dog park will be popular particularly in the
morning and early afternoons. The parking area at Arts Place is never filled
except during the daytime hours for lessons. There may be a gravel area added
at the edge of the dog park parking site. Arts Place believes the dog park traffic
will bring more people into the area and into art lessons. For the dog park there
will be a double gate within the transition area for the dogs to enter the park.
There are ideas for signage and the Parks and Rec crews will maintain and now
the grass. Mr. Ceccolini said the supporters of the dog park are committed to
policing the area and keeping it clean, and they want permission to use the Town land, and will continue with their fund raising efforts.

Barbara McWhirter, 223 Woodpond Road, stated that the group is applying for a 501-3C application and when it comes through will enable donations to be received for the dog park.

It was noted by Mr. Schrumm that there are monitoring wells on the land fill site, and he said DEP is very strict about capping limits. He wants to see exactly where the capping is located. Mr. Schrumm commented on the dog park becoming very popular with 50 cars, parking becoming an issue, and no place for the cars to go. He said that the green space beyond Arts Place may also be capped. The constraints of the capping must be known because we do not want parking problems, and people cannot park on the road. Mr. Schrumm said that DEP has specifications on the capping of the land fill and wants to know where everything is.

With regard to this being a lease agreement with the dog park group, Mr. Milone said that has not been determined at this point in time.

Martha Roddy, 21 Currier Place, informed the committee that it will be about $8,000 to $35,000 for the cost of the fencing due to the high cost of steel. The group has raised $4,500 to date with many fund raising events being held, and has received great support from the community, with 250 people on their e-mail.

Mr. Sima said that the DEP letter seems to indicate that if enough gravel was brought in over the existing cap, more parking is possible.

Mr. Ceccolini said most towns are looking at installation of dog parks, some with fencing and some without fencing.

Regarding the time frame, Mr. Sima said it takes about 6 months to get tax exempt status, so he asked if it would be one year from now for design and construction.

In reply, Ms. Roddy said the group wants to do this with an earlier time frame, 3-6 months to put everything together.

Ray Burelle, 105 Quarry Village, commented on the parking saying he does not believe there will be a problem with too many parked cars, and expects 10 to 15 maximum. Additional parking will not be needed.

Town Manager Milone recommended that the parking issue be checked out with Arts Place and determine the maximum number of participants there at various times during the day. He advised that the dog park issue may have to go to Planning and Zoning Commission for approval.
After information comes in on the landfill capping, parking issues, and from Arts Place, the Planning Committee will place this matter on its agenda for June.

4. HORSE COUNCIL PATROL
Mr. Milone stated that the Horse Council has been around for a long time and has been riding on the DeDominicus property, and the group wants to form a relationship with the Town to be a patrol for this property. They have met with the Police Chief and Town Planner and both support the idea. The State DEP gives a designation to the Horse Council which meets certain criteria, and the group wants the Town to consider a formal relationship and support efforts to keep the trails safe and nice. There are letters in the packets from the Connecticut and Cheshire Horse Councils.

Mr. Sima asked if the Council wants to make it official to ride on parts of the DeDominicus property.

Diane Ciano, 660 Graystone Road, Plymouth CT, explained the Connecticut Horse Council is a state wide organization and the Cheshire Horse Council is part of the organization. They have met with DEP and told them about cleaning trails, etc. and they are participating with DEP, come into State parks and forests. The people are trained in CPR, First Aid, and are ambassadors on the trail and promote etiquette on the trail. The horse patrol is a promotional and educational tool, and they meet and assist people on the trail and are the eyes and ears of the DEP. The Cheshire Horse Council was formed in 2003 and has been patrolling the trails, without any enforcement powers, and is an educational group that wants to share the trails which are not limited to horses.

Daisy Gmitter, Beacon Falls, CT, stated that the group has been riding trails, cleaning up trails, trimming brush, and places calls to DEP if there are drainage problems. With their work they are saving the State about $60,000 annually by monitoring the trails. The Councils speak to the Park Rangers about ATV illegal use, carry first aid equipment, are trained in CPR, and assist people on the trails. Ms. Gmitter said the Council would like to report to the police department if there are problems found on the trail. The Council wants to be recognized that they are out there, can assist in search and rescue, and help with the trails.

There was a discussion about property on Cook Hill Road connecting to the old Moon property which the Town recently acquired. The Horse Council has a parking area near the DeDominicus trails. Mr. Milone said that in the summer time the Town will be able to build up the parking area at the DeDominicus property.

With regard to the land management plan for the DeDominicus property, horseback riding is a permitted use.
Deborah Somers, 42 Miller Road, Middlefield CT, informed the committee that she patrols the Rockland Trail in Madison CT, and the town wants the Council to patrol the property. Any problems or concerns are reported to the Police or Planning Departments.

Regarding the Moon property, Mr. Sima said there has been discussion about the trail on this property with parking of 8 to 12 spaces.

Mr. Milone asked the Horse Council members if there are any guidelines in place from the Clinton/Madison patrols. This is town owned land, not DEP land, and it must be know what is expected, what is not expected, who is notified in an emergency, etc.

Ms. Ciano said there are no guidelines in place.

In that regard, Mr. Milone said he would recommend there be guidelines established for Cheshire.

Bob LaRosa, Waterbury CT, said the trails are usually cleaned twice a year, picking up brush, some trimming, and he has come across walkers who need assistance in directing them off the trails. Mr. LaRosa has found lost for owners.

The issue of insurance was raised by Mr. Sima who asked if the Horse Council has any insurance.

According to Ms. Ciano the Councils have no insurance but volunteers sign a release. They have DEP support and can provide contacts at DEP, and everyone has individual insurance.

Mr. Sima has concerns about entering into an agreement with the Horse Council for cleaning of the trails, without insurance in place.

This group wants to be recognized by the Town as users of the property owned by Cheshire, and Mr. Sima has a hard time with the patrolling aspects of this issue.

Mr. Sima commented on the Horse Council wanting just to be recognized as users of the DeDominicus Property.

Ms. Ciano said this was right.

Mr. Schrumm asked that anything the Horse Council has from DEP be forwarded to the Town Manager. The patrol groups are out there now, and the question is what do they want and what do they do.
Ms. Gmitter said the group wants to be recognized by the Town of Cheshire, go to functions, be available for search and rescue missions, patrol the trails, clean the trails, etc.

Mr. Schrumm wants more specificity on the old Cook Hill Road area, cutting the trail back into this property, where the trail goes in, cleaning of the area, etc.

Ms. Simone agreed to meet with the Cheshire Horse Council members, walk this area and report back to the committee on the findings.

According to the Horse Council members their horses are well received by people in the areas they patrol, DEP calls them in for events, and they patrol Chatfield Hollow. The horses are trained, checked out, are not frightened and are friendly to people, particularly children.

Whatever can be received to give to the Council will be helpful and Mr. Milone said documentation explaining the group’s expertise would be beneficial. For the Council to recognize the Horse Council would require documentation outlining the expectations.

Committee Chairman Sima said the committee would wait for information and expectations from the Horse Council. The information will be reviewed with the Town Attorney to know whether insurance is required.

5. BOULDER KNOLL
Mr. Sima informed the committee that he received a letter dated January 21, 2010 from Kim Stoner, Friends of Boulder Knoll.

a. Public School Educational and Agricultural Production Farm
In 2007 the Town had an ad on the State DOA web site inviting people to submit information. Ms. Simone explained that an inquiry was received from Tim Cipriano, New Haven Public Schools Food Service, about using 35 acres of the farm for education programs and use of the food in the school system. This information was forwarded to the Town Manager. A letter was sent to Mr. Cipriano on November 5th indicating that more proposals were not being entertained at this time, and there are two lessees on the property. From the web site ad, Ms. Simone said that the Town received 6 or 6 inquiries, with the majority for live stock use on the property which is not permitted.

Mr. Schrumm would be interested in listening to Mr. Cipriano’s proposals, but questioned whether this is being done under the auspices of the New Haven School System or if it is an ad hoc program.

Ms. Giddings said the idea from Mr. Cipriano is to use the land to integrate the raising of food for the public school system and as an education program for kids working on the project.
Ms. Simone pointed out the area on a map of the Boulder Knoll Farm.

Ms. Giddings questioned what part of the land could be used for farming, and without potable water, how could the land be farmed. She pointed out areas on the map of the property which could be farmed, noting that access could be an issue.

The committee could listen to the proposal and Mr. Schrumm said a question is whether the area will be mowed. The proposal seems to fit the State sanctions for the property. A decision must be made on this property; will it just be mowed and leave the fields open; do nothing with the fields; or let someone find a way to farm it.

Mr. Milone sent the letter from Mr. Cipriano to Dr. Florio. Mr. Milone said if anything is done for a school system, we must make hear from our Superintendent and the Food Service Director about any possible participation they would like to have in farming. This area is in a dangerous spot; there is a hill, blind areas; and bringing a lot of people out there is a public safety concern.

If the land can be used by a school system, Ms. Giddings said it should be used by the Cheshire School System for the food program.

The committee will wait for a response from Dr. Florio on the Cheshire School System’s possible use of this property.

b. Invasive Species Removal

Mr. Milone noted that there is $20,000 in the last capital budget for removal of invasive species on Boulder Knoll Farm.

The information in the packet was put together for volunteers and staff to be involved in the winter to keep things rolling. In summer 2008 the Town started removing some of the invasive species on a 3 acre area, with two species removed (autumn olive and multiflora rose) and they are not coming back up. Ms. Simone said there are many invasive species on the property near the kiosk, running under power lines, and they would need herbicide sprays, particularly the Phragmites. Removal of the species will be beneficial to the property and adjacent properties. CL&P has a right of way and there have been discussions with them about removal of the invasive species during regular maintenance in the area. It is not certain whether CL&P will take on the area even if the Town paid for some of the costs.

Mr. Schrumm said that this removal must be done each year or at least every other year. He also commented on finding someone local to hay these fields, and keep the hay as payment for services to the Town. With this being done we may not have to worry about invasive species again.
In that regard, Ms. Simone would recommend a study be done to know what animals, migratory or permanent, are using the area. With the land now growing into grassland, we could be supporting some rare or endangered species of concern, and with the conservation easement language, that takes precedent. Protection of these species is key, and this could be evaluated prior to putting in hay. There are more areas with invasive species all over the property, so it is not a solution to have hay for all of the land. With some areas having hay there are still areas with issues. By active management of this property we would be addressing these issues.

Ms. Giddings said that the Friends of Boulder Knoll have done a good job with the area they lease. The parcel closest to the barn had a lot of multiflora rose growth. The Friends cut it down at the bottom, and spread leaves over it.

According to Mr. Sima the project has gotten a lot bigger in two years.

Mr. Schrumm commented on the Town having the highway mowers and they could be used to whack down some of the invasive species. Also, the Town should add the possibility of hay fields for this property to the web site.

Mr. Sima said that the area where the power lines are located must stay open.

For the inventory of the invasive species, Ms. Simone said the cost estimate is $20,000. There was communication with the Friends group about this work, but there has been nothing done in a year. Ms. Simone said the flora/fauna survey will take about a year, and there is a methodology to be followed for all seasons.

At this time, Mr. Schrumm does not see spending $20,000 to find out what is there because this has changed. What was there when the Town purchased the property were corn fields, hay, corn stubble, etc.

It was suggested by Ms. Simone that there be another posting on the web site to know what is out there to actively plan for a comprehensive view of what is there, how to expand the trail system, and enhance what is naturally on the land. It is her understanding that the property was not purchased to be a revenue generator.

Ms. Giddings asked what endangered animals might be on the property which we should be looking for.

In response, Ms. Simone said that the DEP made comments that this is a blind hole, and that there is no information on the State level on what is there. Without proposals for this property there is no information on what is there.

With constraints on the Town’s budget, Mr. Schrumm does not see spending $20,000 to see what is on the Boulder Knoll property.
Mr. Sima said that with a volunteer group there is minimal expense to the Town, and the issue of opening up this land for farming should be discussed further.

Ms. Giddings commented on it being nice to know what is on the property, but she does not see spending $20,000 to do this.

The committee was informed by Mr. Schrumm that the Yale School of Forestry did an excellent job, at no charge, for the report on the Ives Farm property. He recommended that the school be contacted about the Boulder Knoll Farm.

Ms. Sima stated that the volunteer group could do some of the work taking down some of the invasive species, working with Town staff, following the proposed guidelines. Then, the inventory of flora/fauna can be done. And, staff can contact CL&P and the Yale School of Forestry on how they can assist in this project.

6. CASERTANO LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

Mr. Sima made some changes to this management plan, and the Environment Commission responded to these changes. They were reviewed by the committee.

Sima: Page 2, Section II, line #2...delete “at least”. Mr. Sima did not want to open up the goals to too many uses, and with “at least” this is opening it up to many uses. Mr. Schrumm said “at least” indicates many things which can be done but they are not stated.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – decision to remove “at least”.

Sima: Goal #1, line #3...delete “public”. Mr. Sima said there are private water supplies on the property also, and he does not want to be tied into what DEP has to say regarding how water is withdrawn. Mr. Schrumm noted that by taking out “public” it would mean both private and public water supply.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – decision to remove “public”.

Sima: Goal #2, line #3, delete “passive”. Mr. Sima said the word is repeated in the first sentence of this paragraph. Mr. Schrumm said he has no problem is using the word “passive” in this sentence.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – decision to leave in the word “passive”.

Sima: Goal #3, line #2, delete “indispensable”. Mr. Sima said this is not a major flood plain. Mr. Schrumm said this word should be left in if it goes along with State guidelines. Ms. Simone stated there is a flood plain going through a portion of the property and Cuff Brook goes through the property.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – decision to retain the word “indispensable”.

Sima: Goal #4, Line #5, delete “limited”. Mr. Sima’s concern is maintaining a good healthy forest needs to have some thinning, and with the word “limited” there would not be property thinning of the forest.

Environment Commission – edited the language to read: “Therefore, efforts shall be made to manage and maintain the property’s forests in a manner that balances ecosystem protection and biodiversity.”

Planning Committee – after discussion, the committee decided to use the word “proper” timber resource utilization, and the proposed sentence from the Environment Commission was not accepted as a necessary change to the plan.

Page 3, Section III, Permitted Uses, #5 – delete “in its current condition”. Mr. Sima commented on the current condition of the property as the plan is written today, and has concerns on what the condition will be when the plan is read in 10 years. He said plants and trees grow, everything changes, and in 10 years someone else is looking at this with new eyes seeing something different.

Ms. Simone said this is specific to the forest and wetland buffer; that this will not be cut down; it will remain the same, be maintained, so there is protection to the wetland area.

Stating he understands, Mr. Sima commented on the recent dry period and said things could be different in the future, and this is his concern because the condition could be different in the future.

Ms. Simone clarified that this is meant for the size of the buffer not the condition.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – decision to delete the words “in its current condition.”

Page 3, #6, line #3…forest structure, invasive species removal, and sustainable forestry practices “while maintaining agricultural use.” Ms. Simone said this plan is for the upper area not the farm area of the property, and in the forest area there is no agricultural use. The Commission did not want to include the agricultural portion of the property in the Management Plan. The Commission
may want to review and change the language to specific management goals which are solely for the upper area.

Mr. Sima said the plan already encompasses the brook area, and he wants to leave in “while maintaining agricultural use”.

Environment Commission – voted to retain the original proposed language.

Planning Committee – there was agreement for Ms. Simone to work on the language in the Management Plan, clarify it, and bring it back for further discussion with the committee.

7. NAMING OF SENIOR CENTER ROOM
Mr. Milone advised that the Senior Center has requested naming of a room at the Center “The AT&T Computer Room”. The Senior Center followed the Naming Policy with three letters of individual support and a letter from its Board of Directors in support of this request. The request can be sent to the full Town Council and/or to other boards, committees, or commissions which have some standing or relevance to the request.

Mr. Schrumm said that the Center could have a plaque thanking AT&T for its generosity and support of the Senior Center.

Mr. Sima recommended that a plaque be put in the room stating “Donated with generous support of AT&T”.

MOTION by Mr. Schrumm; seconded by Mr. Sima.

MOVED that the Planning Committee approve a plaque at the Senior Center giving recognition to AT&T for its donation of equipment to the Senior Center Equipment Room.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

8. ROUTE 10 TRAFFIC STUDY
Mr. Sima recused himself from comments on the Milone and MacBroom proposal due to possible conflict of interest.

Mr. Milone stated that the traffic study focused on the area of the high school, and the DOT response did not help with the issues on Route 10. DOT offered some suggestions and potential for some grants if this area is widened. There was talk about the possibility of using the tennis courts area for high school parking and reduce students crossing Route 10 for parking. Milone and MacBroom offered to put together a study and recommendations, at no charge to the Town, on the Route 10 issues.
At one time there was a suggestion about coming in from Oak Avenue, and with the GIS there is a map showing the property that exists, wetlands, location of the high school, etc. Ms. Simone pointed out the high school complex on the map, wetlands on the west side of the trail, two water courses, Linear Trail and Willow Brook. She said it would be difficult to get through Oak Avenue to the high school for bus traffic.

Given the wetlands and the number of homes on Oak Avenue, Mr. Schrumm said it would not be possible to go through this area.

In looking at the GIS map, Mr. Sima said the first thoughts were to move the tennis courts to Bartlem Park, and use the tennis court area for student parking. This would eliminate the delay of the light cycles along Route 10. But, there is an issue of whether or not there is room at Bartlem Park for the tennis courts.

Regarding the light cycle, Mr. Schrumm said the issue is traffic, and he questioned if anyone has looked at whether DOT would like longer cycles. He also said that students should not be parking at Bartlem Park.

Mr. Milone said that there has been a question about whether or not there was permission from the State Traffic Commission Authority for student parking across the street at the park. He also noted that the Bartlem Park lot is not full all the time, and some sections of the parking lot could be set aside for student parking only.

Mr. Schrumm said that with tennis court area parking for students there would not be many cars able to park, and students would still park at Bartlem.

Mr. Milone said that with tennis court parking, there would be no student parking at Bartlem Park. The State Traffic Commission may have money to widen the high school section of Route 10, with a right turn lane coming south, and widening of the exit area of the high school so right turns can be more easily made. With the Milone and MacBroom report, there would be more data on how to proceed with the parking lot reconfiguration. The students pay $250 a year to park, and there are 120 cars with parking permits.

The committee was informed by Mr. Milone that the State will not do anything along Route 10 for the Town, but there may be potential grants for the area to be widened.

Mr. Sima asked Mr. Milone to talk further with the State Traffic Commission and DOT on the Route 10 traffic issue, and the water mains which were put in the north end of town. Mr. Sima said when this work was done, the State dug through all the lighting triggers, and now the signals do not operate properly.
9. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Schrumm; seconded by Mr. Sima

MOVED to adjourn at 9:55 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk

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