

EAST LYME COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
JULY 10, 2024

Present: Penny Heller  
Mark Christensen  
Harvey Beeman  
Marjorie Meekhoff, Alternate  
Steve Dinsmore, Alternate

Absent: Don Danila  
Laura Ashburn

Also Present: Rose Ann Hardy, Ex officio

RECEIVED FOR RECORD  
EAST LYME, CT  
2024 JUL 15 P 3:17  
TOWN CLERK

**I. CALL TO ORDER.** Ms. Heller, Chair, called the July 10, 2024 East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

**II. SEATING ALTERNATES (IF NECESSARY)**

**MOTION (1):** Mr. Christensen moved to seat Ms. Meekhoff for Mr. Danila and Mr. Dinsmore for Laura Ashburn. (3-0-2) Motion carried.

**III. CALL FOR ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA.**

**MOTION (2):** Mr. Christensen moved to add a. Zoning Issue under VI. New Business of this evening's Agenda. (5-0) Unanimous.

**IV. CALL FOR PUBLIC DELEGATIONS.** There were no guests.

**V. REVIEW OF MINUTES OF June 12, 2024.** Ms. Heller asked for additions, deletions or corrections to the June 12, 2024 Minutes.

**MOTION (3):** Ms. Meekhoff moved to approve the June 12, 2024 Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources Regular Meeting Minutes, as presented. Seconded by Mr. Christensen. Mr. Dinsmore abstained from voting. (4-0-1) Motion carried.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS**

**a. Zoning Issue.** Mr. Christensen reported he is considering submitting a request to rezone the north end of town from two acres to five and one acre to three. Justification for these changes are the issues discussed in detail in this Commission's Drinking Water Report, as well as the recent finding of PFAS compounds in the town's drinking water. PFAS compounds are an issue because the state is changing its standards to a lower

amount. Additionally, he stated that the sodium levels, documented by this Commission's review of town drinking water quality data, are increasing every year from road salt and are expected to continue if more impermeable road surfaces are created. Ms. Hardy suggested that he pursue the establishment of a subcommittee of the Zoning Commission to review this zoning change.

## VII. OLD BUSINESS

- a. **Affordable Housing Development – 91 Boston Post Road.** Mr. Danila informed Ms. Heller that at the Zoning Commission's June 20 Meeting by a 4-2 vote it again denied the approval for a 25-unit age-restricted single and multi-family affordable residential housing project at 91 Boston Post Road after modifications were presented by the applicant. The public hearing notes and the Zoning Commission comments may be found in the June 20 Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes posted on the Town website. The applicant's attorney noted that this proposed development would still need to gain approval from the East Lyme Inland Wetlands Agency, septic from Ledge Light Health District, the Zoning Commission for a Final Site Plan, the Town's Building Department, State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, and any other required applications. Note that the denial of this Conceptual Site Plan is not a denial of a Final Site Plan and that the requirements for an 8-30g affordable residential housing development lend the developers more advantages than they would have for a more regular commercial housing development. Mr. Danila will remain engaged in any further applications made for this project to the Zoning Commission, Inland Wetland Agency, or other agencies allowing for comments.
- b. **Update on the Hole-in-the-Wall Stormwater Demonstration Project.** Ms. Meekhoff reported the Committee met on site and decided to hire an invasive plant expert to spearhead a workshop for Parks and Recreation and to also design a maintenance plan for the Parks and Recreation crew. She added we have an intern for the summer.

## VIII. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- a. **Communications.** Mr. Danila informed Ms. Heller that at the June 13 Fisheries Advisory Council Meeting, he learned that the 2024 Bride Brook alewife run was estimated to be about 170,000 fish, a 32% increase over last year. However, this total remains far below the peak estimate of 400,000 alewife for this anadromous fish population, which is one of the largest in Southern New England.
- b. **Agribusiness Subcommittee.** Mr. Christensen reported contact has been made with Ledyard Agricultural School on developing an after-school agricultural program for East Lyme Middle School students. Terri Yuhas is the Agribusiness Subcommittee contact person.

The winter educational series will be on edible vicariant buffer, a sheep and goat expert and a UCONN extension speaker.

The Agribusiness Subcommittee will not meet in July.

- c. **SustainableCT Subcommittee.** (See attached Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings.)

Ms. Heller and the Program's intern met to work on Climate Certification. The intern is helping to write up the installation of cameras on the recycling garbage trucks to improve the quality and quantity of recycling in town.

With the assistance of this Program's personnel, Mr. Beeman is working on an analysis of energy usage in all town-owned buildings. He will also speak with Joe Bragaw about the replacement of town vehicles with more efficient vehicles as another aspect of this certification process.

- d. **Pollinator Pathways East Lyme (PPEL).** Ms. Meekhoff reported on the following:
- the Samuel Smith Farmstead front meadow is coming along. The back meadow is solarizing.
  - At the Betty Murphy Memorial Garden, we will be installing white wood asters in autumn. Public Works is solarizing the garden beds.
  - We are doing weekly weeding at the Community Center.
  - We are meeting with Bruce Dasinger on maintenance for the pollinator meadows at Darrow Pond.
  - The roundabout in Industrial Parkway is thriving.
  - 4 Church Lane maintenance is going well.
  - She has not heard back from Joe Bragaw about invasive trees at the Community Center.
  - She is preparing to speak under Public Delegations in the future at a Zoning Commission Meeting.
  - She is continuing to work on the Pazzaglia Development Landscape Design Plan.
  - She is working with Annah Perch on invasive plant removal behind the Community Center. The summer book discussion group "Bringing Nature Home" is continuing.
- e. **Chairman's Report.** Ms. Heller reported she gave a presentation to the Board of Selectmen on Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings. (See attached.)
- f. **Ex-Officio Report.** Ms. Hardy informed the Commission she spoke to First Selectman Dan Cunningham about budget cuts.

The Board of Selectmen Short-Term Rental Committee gave a preliminary report.

She was unable to attend the June Board of Selectmen's Meeting.

## IX. ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION (4): Mr. Dinsmore moved to adjourn the July 10, 2024 East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources at 8:25 p.m. Seconded by Mr. Christensen. (5-0) Unanimous.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Frances Gheri, Recording Secretary**



## Town of East Lyme, Connecticut

### Community Resilience Building Workshop

### Summary of Findings

#### Overview

The need for municipalities to increase resilience to extreme weather events and a changing climate is strikingly evident in light of recent events across the state of Connecticut. Super Storm Sandy, severe winter storms (2013 & 2015), COVID-19 pandemic, and Tropical Storm Isaias have reinforced this urgency and compelled leading communities like the Town of East Lyme to proactively collaborate on planning and mitigating risks. Ultimately, this planning process should reduce the vulnerability of infrastructure, ecosystems, and people at risk, as well as serve as a model for other communities in Connecticut, New England, and the nation.

The Town of East Lyme achieved certification with Sustainable CT in 2019 and renewed in 2023. As part of the ongoing process to achieve Climate Leadership certification, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Sustainable CT provided the Town with a community-driven process to assess current hazard and climate change impacts and to generate potential and prioritized solutions to improve resilience and sustainability for this community. In February 2024, East Lyme's Core Team helped organize a Community Resilience Building process and workshop facilitated by TNC in partnership with Sustainable CT. The core directive of this effort was the engagement with and between community members to define strengths and vulnerabilities and the development of agreeable priority resilience actions for the Town of East Lyme.

The East Lyme Community Resilience Building Workshop's central objectives were to:

- Define top local, natural, and climate-related hazards of concern.
- Identify existing and future strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Identify and prioritize actions for the Town.
- Identify opportunities to collaboratively advance actions to increase resilience alongside residents and organizations from across the Town, and beyond.

The Town of East Lyme employed an “anywhere at any scale”, community-driven process called Community Resilience Building (CRB) ([www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org](http://www.CommunityResilienceBuilding.org)). The CRB's tools, reports, other relevant planning documents, and local maps were integrated into the workshop process to provide decision-support for shared issues and existing priorities. The East Lyme Plan of Conservation and Development (2020) and the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Government Hazard Mitigation Plan Update – East Lyme Annex (2023) were particularly instructive as references. Using the CRB process, the participants produced the findings presented in this summary report.

## Summary of Findings

Prior to the CRB Workshop, the East Lyme CRB Core Team identified several top hazards present in the Town. The hazards of greatest concern included winter storms; hurricanes and large tropical storms; extreme precipitation events causing flooding. Additional hazards that were highlighted by participants during the CRB Workshop included flooding from rivers and sea level rise; and heat waves resulting in drought. These hazards have direct and increasing impacts on the infrastructure, environment, and residents of and visitors to East Lyme. These effects are seen in residential areas, natural areas (beaches, wetlands, rivers, forests, parks and preserves), businesses, transportation infrastructure (roads, bridges, culvert), municipal facilities, farms, social support services, and other critical assets within East Lyme.

The recent series of extreme weather events highlights the diversity of impacts from climate change. Workshop participants were generally in agreement that East Lyme is experiencing more intense and frequent storm events, flooding duration and extent, and heat waves. In East Lyme, this includes coastal and riverine flooding of critical infrastructure, bridges, roads, and low-lying areas; localized flooding from stormwater runoff during intense storms and heavy precipitation events; road closures due to flooding and downed trees; property damage from trees, wind, snow, and ice. Longer periods of elevated heat, particularly in July and August, have raised concerns about vulnerable segments of the population including elderly, disabled, and isolated residents. The combination of these issues presents a challenge to preparedness and mitigation priorities and requires comprehensive, yet tailored actions for various locations and/or areas across the Town of East Lyme. Additionally, there was a general concern about the increasing challenges of being prepared for the worst-case scenarios particularly in the late summer and in the fall/winter months when more intense storms coincide with colder weather. The impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic was raised by workshop participants as well.

## Specific Categories of Concerns and Challenges

As in any community, East Lyme is not uniformly vulnerable to hazards and climate change. Certain locations, assets, and populations have been and will be affected to a greater degree than others. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key areas of concern and challenges across several broad categories.

### Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Concerns with ongoing and future development that risk generating additional impacts on roadways and associated stormwater management systems as well as impacts on large tracts of highly productive agricultural lands in northern portions of East Lyme.
- Growing concerns regarding the potential for overdevelopment competing with needed affordable housing for young professionals looking to move to East Lyme.
- Mass transit is needed to reduce fossil fuel emissions but is almost non-existent in East Lyme and difficult to access for most residents. Train lines run through town but there are no train stops, which would allow for greater accessibility and use of this critical transportation corridor.



- Large events held in the downtown area of East Lyme cause extreme parking issues and travel challenges. Alternates to car traffic, including bicycle and pedestrian access, is disconnected throughout town resulting in concerns for safety due to traffic volume and excessive speeds.
- East Lyme does not have centralized grant writing capacity, which reduces the potential of securing grants to advance identified needs for improvement in facilities, infrastructure, and programs that could increase resiliency within the community.

#### Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- Current lack of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to help support emergency-related capacity needs in East Lyme.
- Current lack of back-up communications tower associated with the new Emergency Operation Center and the reliance on a fiberoptic system that can become compromised during emergencies. This potential loss of the ability to communicate during times of crises could compromise the emergency response and support services for residents.
- Drought conditions that stress the groundwater supply the entire town relies upon, especially if contamination limits any of the existing drainages. The current “Aquifer Protection Areas” have been reduced in recent years to accommodate development and are currently only “well head protection areas” within close proximity to the six public drinking water wells.
- Sewer pump stations that are below sea level are at high risk of flooding, particularly the Niantic sewer pump station.

#### Watersheds, Wetlands, Rivers/Streams, Open Space, & Trees:

- The level of connectivity between current protected open space parcels is less than adequate to ensure the ecosystems in town can persist given the growing impacts of changes in the climate. A large number of small parcels owned by many private owners creates challenges for open space acquisition that will connect or expand protection between protected parcels.
- The impact of invasive plants, pests, and pathogens in and around open space and protected areas in town is increasing.
- There is an urgency to protect and better manage salt marsh resources in East Lyme to ensure this critical habitat type continues to function in reducing storm surge impacts to people and property. The salt marsh and estuary resources at the Rock Neck State Park are particularly important. In addition to the Park’s importance as a recreational beach, its acreage provides essential habitat for the largest alewife spawning population in the state.
- Warming climate has subjected more trees to newly invasive pests and pathogens resulting in dead stands. Dead trees located along roadway that present an immediate concern during windstorms despite recent clearing by Eversource. Invasive species such as the spotted lanternfly have the potential to severely impact Connecticut’s agricultural crops as well as native trees.

## Current Strengths and Assets

Just as certain locations, facilities, and populations in East Lyme stand out as particularly vulnerable to the effects of hazards and climate change, other features are notable assets for East Lyme's resilience building. Workshop participants identified the following items as their community's key strengths and expressed interest in centering them as the core of future resilience building actions.

### Municipal Functions, Operations, & Growth:

- Ongoing collaboration between municipal staff, commission and board volunteers, the business community, faith-based and non-governmental organizations, adjoining municipalities, Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, and various state-wide organizations (i.e., Sustainable CT, The Nature Conservancy), on priorities identified here help advance comprehensive, cost-effective, community resilience-building actions. Volunteers have achieved a great deal in Town with limited resources.
- East Lyme as a wide diversity of geographies ranging from coastlines along Long Island Sound, active farmlands to the north of town, and active vibrant Main Street and downtown commercial districts.
- Multi-generational connection to East Lyme among long-standing families have prioritized caring for the land in East Lyme. These families are hopeful that newer residents will continue this tradition of commitment to protecting the town's natural resources.
- A respected school system that allows students several opportunities to learn the value of natural resources in protecting quality human and wildlife habitats.
- Hole-in-the-Wall Beach Parking lot was designed as an open classroom demonstrating design elements for stormwater management and flood control.
- The boardwalk connecting Cini Beach, Hole-in-the-Wall Beach and McCook Point Park helps increase community use and connectivity of coastal amenities in the downtown Niantic area.
- Strong agricultural communities in Flanders and Niantic generate products that are sought after by residents and people from adjoining communities.
- Recent efforts by the town staff and Natural Resources Commission volunteers have resulted in the acquisition of permanently preserved open space on the Hathaway Property, located in the middle of the north end of town, Ravenswood in coastal Giants Neck, and a final parcel within Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve in Niantic. Friends of Oswegatchie Hills volunteers and other trail volunteers have maintained access to quality trail systems in all of the town's preserves.

### Emergency Management & Preparedness:

- East Lyme is rated as a Class 8 Community in the Federal Emergency Management Agencies Community Rating System.
- East Lyme's Emergency Operation Center is brand new with consistent updates in technology to stay up-to-date and better serve the community in times of need. An emergency-response related software program



and Development recommendation to establish a train station in downtown East Lyme. Potential siting options include near the Hole in the Wall parking area or old Police Station property.

- Explore potential for an energy campaign to increase the deployment of solar panels on residential homes through a “group-buy” approach to help lower individual costs.
- Perform an energy audit for every municipal-owned building in hopes of prioritizing and accelerating the installation of renewable energy options. *Harvey Beeman, member of NRC, is working on this with the guidance of a former UConn Professor (Amy Thompson) - another service provided by Sustainable CT*
- Continue to identify and protect open space parcels in East Lyme with an emphasis on parcels that connect exiting open space as well as locations that have a high likelihood of reducing risk from flooding and storm surge (i.e., areas in or adjacent to floodplains and salt marsh advancement zones). *\*remember Montpelier VT shut down & damaged*
- Work to increase access to affordable housing by adopting or creating new regulations that lead to truly affordable housing located near transportation, shopping, and employment opportunities in East Lyme.

## Additional Actions

- Secure funds and execute existing plans to reinforce sewer pump station with particular focus on the Niantic sewer pump station which is at very high risk of flooding.
- Work towards contributing to the establishment of a regional CERT program through the state’s Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (Region 4).
- Review and advance approved plan to connect via access road Stoney Wood and Romagna Road in the Bush Hill Road neighborhood to improve access and egress during major flood events.
- Explore potential uses for the old Police Station, coupled with an investigation of existing contamination. The Police Station represents a prime downtown location that could be used to provide many different public benefits to residents and visitors. Consider an opportunity to connect with neighboring St. Johns property.
- Look to identify and acquire/protect low-lying areas adjoining river, streams, and wetlands with the intention of increasing natural flood storage within East Lyme away from people and property.
- Continue to partner with organizations like the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District that can support residential and commercial green stormwater infrastructure programs, such as provisioning of rain barrels and rain garden installations.

allows residents to sign up online to privately list any medical needs in the event of a communitywide crisis. The software can generate maps with those details that can be used by emergency responders in a response and recovery phase of a disaster.

- Public Works Department has resources to respond quickly and effectively to keep roads safe after major weather events.
- Multi-jurisdictional sheltering capacity is available at the East Lyme Middle School.
- All town facilities have emergency back-up power that are maintained regularly.
- Paid, full-time Fire Department and Ambulance/EMT staff, who also provide ambulatory care services. The Niantic and East Lyme Fire Departments have recently merged to form the East Lyme Fire Services with the goal of streamlining services and improving response time. Partnership with Mohegan Sun Casino provides paramedics during times of crisis.

## Recommendations to Improve Resilience

A common theme among workshop participants was the need to continue community-based planning efforts focused on developing adaptive measures to reinforce East Lyme's strengths and reduce vulnerability to extreme weather, climate change and other common concerns raised. The Community Resilience Building Workshop participants developed the following actions and identified but **not ranked** them as priority or as additional actions. Mitigation actions from the East Lyme Hazard Mitigation Plan Annex (2023) are provided as an appendix to the full report for cross reference with actions listed in this summary. Maps are also provided as an appendix in the full report, gathered from the East Lyme Hazard Mitigation Plan Annex and Plan of Conservation & Development (2020), and The Nature Conservancy's Southeastern Connecticut Regional Framework for Coastal Resilience (2019).

## Priority Actions

- Secure funding and complete installation of a communications tower to improve emergency response and coordination via a direct connection through microwave links to Roxbury Road (approximate cost = \$400K).
- Reinvigorate the Aquifer Protection subcommittee of the Zoning Board to revisit the aquifer protection needs of East Lyme due to drought and increased development expansion. Consider annual joint meetings with the Water and Sewer Department and Zoning Commission to focus on expansion of recharge and aquifer protection regulations within state statute.

- Assess ways to incorporate alternant transportation systems to alleviate car traffic issues. Seek funding for connecting sidewalks and bikeways (i.e., "complete street designs"). Revisit the 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development. *The Planning Commission adopted a Complete Streets Policy last week. The goal of these projects should be to connect Flanders and Niantic and alleviate some of the traffic tie-ups when events are held in either area Niantic or elsewhere in town.*

- Provide educational materials to homeowners on how to better manage stormwater runoff at their homes including step-by-step guidance on planning and installing rain gardens to trap and retain precipitation from roof leaders and downspouts.
- Continue to support the work of the Historic Resources Commission that is focused on preserving and maintaining historic buildings in East Lyme.
- Consider establishing and enforcing more stringent water conservation restrictions, including watering of residential and commercial lawns to minimize water shortages during summer months.
- Assess the level of water use by commercial businesses and state institutions in East Lyme in comparison to the needs of residents at the household level.
- Look for ways to encourage and potentially incentive the installation of green roofs on commercial building in East Lyme.
- Explore interest in creating an “ambassador program” to help welcome new families to East Lyme to include information about the actions listed here.
- Assess whether all forms of municipal outreach to residents is provided in multiple languages to accommodate the changing make up of East Lyme.
- Look to maintain and potentially increase funding for road and subsurface road maintenance with the goal of decreasing impervious surfaces while increasing the overall resilience of transportation infrastructure and related stormwater management infrastructure.
- Move forward on elevating identified roadways and improving drainage in key segments along the coast in East Lyme (see Appendix A – 2023 East Lyme Hazard Mitigation Plan Actions).
- Enact actions listed in the Lower Niantic Watershed Resilience Vision to ensure this ecosystem and the adjoining community become more resilient to climate effects.

<https://tnc.box.com/s/ryskw7q1tas2cw3qrv5do3w76f0ddo7f>

## CRB Workshop Participants:

Town of East Lyme – Board of Selectmen, Rose Ann Hardy

Town of East Lyme – Public Works Department, Alex Klose

Town of East Lyme – Police Department, Emergency Management, Julie Wilson

Town of East Lyme – Natural Resources Commission, Penny Howell-Heller, Harvey Beeman

Town of East Lyme – Zoning Commission, Nancy Kalal

Town of East Lyme – Planning Commission, Richard Gordon

Town of East Lyme – Inland Wetland Agency, Phyllis Burger

Niantic Main Street – Teri Smith

East Lyme High School – Laura Ashburn

East Lyme Pollinator Pathways – Marjorie Meekhoff

### East Lyme CRB Core Project Team

Rose Ann Hardy – Board of Selectman, East Lyme

Penny Howell-Heller – Chair, Natural Resource Commission, East Lyme

Harvey Beeman – Member, Natural Resource Commission, East Lyme

Laura Ashburn – Member, Natural Resource Commission, East Lyme; ELHS Teacher

Nancy Kalal – Vice Chair, Zoning Commission; Farmer

### Online CRB Workshop Facilitation Team

The Nature Conservancy – Adam Whelchel, Ph.D. (Lead Facilitator)

Sustainable CT – Jessica LeClair (Small Group Facilitator)

Sustainable CT – Torin Radicioni (Scribe)

Sustainable CT – Inez Ortiz (Scribe)

Sustainable CT – Dorothy Piszczek (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Timothy Clark (Scribe)

The Nature Conservancy – Jessica Cañizares (Scribe)