

EAST LYME COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 11, 2026

Present: Penny Heller
Don Danila
Laura Ashburn
Harvey Beeman
Mark Christensen
Steve Dinsmore, Alternate
Marjorie Meekhoff, Alternate

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
EAST LYME, CT
2026 FEB 17 AM 10:55
Laura Ashburn
TOWN CLERK

I. CALL TO ORDER. Ms. Heller, Chair, called the East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources of February 11, 2026 to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. SEATING ALTERNATES (IF NECESSARY) A quorum was established.

III. CALL FOR ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA.

MOTION (1): Mr. Christensen moved to add under New Business, b. Owners of unknown Properties. Seconded by Mr. Danila. (5-0) Unanimous.

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

V. REVIEW OF MINUTES OF JANUARY 14, 2026 REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. Ms. Heller asked for additions, deletions or corrections to the January 14, 2026 Minutes.

The following correction was noted by Mr. Danila: In Motion 2, the vote was 5-0 rather than 6-0.

MOTION (2): Mr. Danila moved to approve the January 14, 2026 Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources Regular Meeting Minutes, as amended. Seconded by Ms. Ashburn. (5-0) Unanimous.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

a. Nominations and Elections for the Chair and Secretary Positions. The Commission was asked for nominations for Chair of the Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027.

MOTION (3): Ms. Ashburn moved to nominate Ms. Heller as Chair of the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027. Seconded by Mr. Beeman.

A vote was taken and Ms. Heller was unanimously elected Chair of the Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027.

The Commission was asked for nomination for Secretary of the Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027.

MOTION (4): Ms. Ashburn moved to nominate Mr. Danila as Secretary of the Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027.

A vote was taken and Mr. Danila was unanimously elected Secretary of the Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources for 2027.

- b. **Owners of Unknown Properties.** Mr. Christensen visited the Tax Collector and Assessor's offices to discuss properties (Assessor's records 008386 and 009631) just north of the Niantic River Headwaters Preserve near the Waterford boundary. The town doesn't know who owns them. They suggested that he contact the town's attorney. The Commission reviewed Map 41 showing the properties. One of the properties was in the estate of Mrs. Crocker. Mr. Christensen stated at least one of the properties is currently undeveloped, and he felt the town should acquire it.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

- a. **2027 Budget.** Ms. Heller reported Mr. Goeschel asked that this Commission request funds in its upcoming budget for trail development in Darrow Pond Preserve. The Board of Selectmen has discussed the budget but further steps are required before this addition to the Commission's budget is finalized.
- b. **Plan for Conservation.** Ms. Heller passed out a draft list of concepts to expand upon in this Plan. (See attached Natural Resource Conservation Plan for East Lyme.) She encouraged the members to review and edit the list with their ideas. Mr. Danila suggested determining how neighboring towns are handling it. A Wildlife Plan was approved by CT DEEP. Some town websites show state statutes governing conservation commissions. Several towns have performed a natural resources inventory.
- c. **Town Open Space Issues.** Mr. Christensen referred to the Community Investment Act and suggested the Commission look into using that fund for the purchase of undeveloped land.

VIII. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- a. **Communications.** There was no correspondence received.
- b. **Agribusiness Subcommittee.** Mr. Christensen reported many positive comments were received after the presentations given at the Preservationists Potluck Dinner in January. The bear lecture in January had 40 in attendance. The lecture by speaker Gary Robbins scheduled for February 7 was cancelled due to inclement weather and will be rescheduled. On March 7 Judy Preston will give a lecture on water issues. Mr. Kalal will give a talk on water purification in East Lyme at a later date in the spring.

The town will need to respond to a lawsuit in court regarding its five-acre zone change in the northern portion of the town.

- c. **Sustainable CT Subcommittee.** Mr. Beeman reported he is continuing to work with Eversource on electric usage issues in town buildings.
- d. **Pollinator Pathway East Lyme (PPEL).** Ms. Meekhoff reported Pollinator Pathways East Lyme, Inc. submitted a grant proposal to the Eastern Connecticut Community Foundation on January

16 for \$30,000 to install native plant species on one-fourth of an acre hillside behind the Community Center on municipal property. The East Lyme Library provided a grant writer to help her edit the proposal. Alex Kloss of the East Lyme Public Works Department is partnering with PPEL to reconstruct the stairway from the Community Center property to Brookside Farm Museum property. Grant proposal includes planting 12 understory trees, 80 shrubs and hundreds of native forbs and grasses as green mulch over three years.

PPEL is designing a new landscape for the front left garden as you approach the Community Center.

On February 22 at 2 p.m. Landscape Designer DL Drake will lecture on native plant design in the East Lyme Room in the library. Registration is with the library. The snow date is March 1 at 2 p.m.

After speaking with the First Selectman Dan Cunningham, who encouraged her work with invasive plant species on town property, she has been in email correspondence with the Ridgefield Pollinator Pathways who have created an Invasive Plant Management Task Force. She will research their information on key points: 1) town line-item budget? 2) town department that performs the labor? 3) task force members.

The Darrow Pond Subcommittee is ready for Zoning approval for the trail's expansion.

She will not be attending the Connecticut Land Conservation Conference at Wesleyan University this March.

- e. **Chairman's Report.** Ms. Heller participated in a webinar sponsored by Save the Sound and New York Chapter of The Nature Conservancy titled: "Where Roads Meet Rivers: Introducing the Long Island Sound Crossing Prioritization Tool". These organizations have mapped river and stream road crossings in Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties into a GIS database and adopted a risk assessment process to fund restoration of culvert and bridge crossings most apt to affect the surrounding habitat. They would like to extend this dataset to the Connecticut coastline.
- f. **Ex-Officio Report.** Ms. Hardy was unable to be present and there was no report.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION (5): Ms. Ashburn moved to adjourn the February 11, 2026 East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources at 8:10 p.m. Seconded by Mr. Danila. (5-0) Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Frances Gheri, Recording Secretary