

Town of Litchfield Conservation Commission

Regular Meeting Minutes — DRAFT

Tuesday, April 28, 2026 | Litchfield Town Hall

Attendance & Call to Order

Chairman: Barbara Putnam **Members present:** Marsha Fowler, Diane Stoner Cleve, Fuessenich, Chester Reed. Quorum confirmed.

1. Open Space Plan

Legal Opinion (Town Attorney Michael Rybak)

The four-page opinion addresses whether CGS § 7-148 allows municipal Conveyance Tax funds to be used for open space acquisition. Key conclusions: the Open Space Acquisition Fund may not cover costs (e.g., surveys, appraisals) for property acquired by a private entity such as the Litchfield Land Trust; however, the Town may purchase property in its name and arrange for third-party management. The opinion does not directly address Conveyance Tax use; further inquiry is needed.

Conveyance Tax

The combined state/local conveyance tax is ~1% of sale price; the Town receives roughly one-quarter, believed to flow to the general fund. Given difficulty expending existing Fund money (~\$20,000–\$25,000), members agreed the Conveyance Tax may be a more promising implementation source pending confirmation of how it is collected, held, and restricted. Cleve will contact Town Treasurer Eric Marriott to clarify.

Ordinance & Grant Programs

The existing ordinance makes Fund withdrawals difficult. The Commission will evaluate possible amendments to improve practicability. Relevant grants: OSWA (CT DEEP, reimburses up to 90%, 18–24 month timeline); Highlands Grant (federal, less predictable); CLCC TAG and LEAP Grants (transaction costs, more accessible). The Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC, Exec. Dir. Catherine Rawson) was referenced as a regional partner.

POCAD Incorporation & Water Company Land

The Open Space Plan (map of protected lands + parcel evaluation criteria) should be incorporated into the 2027 POCAD renewal. Progress is limited by Land Use Office staffing constraints. The Commission will continue coordinating with Carol Bramley. Members also noted that state law requires water company land no longer needed for water supply to be offered first to preferred purchasers (state agencies, municipalities, qualified land trusts); recent Aquarion parcels near Maple St./Dudley Rd. represent a local opportunity.

Proposed Town Meeting on the Open Space Plan

The Commission will hold a public Town meeting to present the Plan (map, criteria, priorities), explain its role in guiding land use decisions, and build public support ahead of the 2027 POCAD update. Date, venue, and presentation to be developed; timing will be coordinated to avoid conflict with the September riparian event.

2. Public Education Event — Riparian Zones (September)

A public event on riparian zones is planned for September (after Labor Day) in collaboration with the Litchfield Land Trust, Sustainable Litchfield, Planning & Zoning, Inland Wetlands Commission, and Rivers Alliance (Exec. Dir. Alicia). Target audience: general public and property owners along the Bantam, West Branch Bantam, Shepaug, and other local rivers. The Chair will coordinate date and venue with the Community Center and partners.

3. Greenway Scavenger Hunt — Withdrawal

The Commission will withdraw its CFPA statewide trails day registration for the June 6 family scavenger hunt, given limited capacity and a desire to focus resources on the September riparian event and the proposed Town meeting. Diane will notify CFPA and the Town's Parks staff.

4. Staffing — Land Use Office

Selected planner Dennis Tobin withdrew after acceptance. The position remains unfilled; a part-time planner works limited hours/month. A current applicant is available only 30 hrs/week; the Town may need to combine a part-time hire with volunteer support. Staffing gaps are limiting POCAD progress.

5–6. Aquarion Awards & Membership

Aquarion Environmental Champion Awards (16th annual): the Commission will not submit a nomination this cycle due to the May 8 deadline and limited time to coordinate with the high school. The original letter will be scanned and forwarded to the Chair. Membership: two current vacancies; no new prospective members presented.

New Business

A. Meeting Date Change: The Commission approved returning to the fourth Tuesday of each month. A special meeting is required before the new cadence resumes. Motion by Chester, seconded by Marsha; all in favor.

B. CLCC Municipal Affiliate Program: The Commission voted to join the Connecticut Land Conservation Council as a Municipal Commission Affiliate at \$100 annual dues (within budget). Benefits include educational resources, conference discounts, and state-level open space advocacy. All in favor.

Action Items

- **Cleve:** Contact Town Treasurer Eric Marriott re: Conveyance Tax collection, deposit, and permissible uses.
- **Diane:** Withdraw CFPA scavenger hunt registration; notify Parks staff.
- **Chair/Staff:** Submit \$100 CLCC Municipal Affiliate dues for processing.
- **Members:** Plan September riparian zones event — confirm date/venue, coordinate with partners, develop outreach list.
- **Members:** Plan Town meeting to introduce the Open Space Plan — select date/venue, prepare presentation, coordinate publicity.
- **Commission:** Monitor water company land dispositions; coordinate with Land Trust and Town to act under preferred-purchaser process.
- **Barbara:** Scan and forward Aquarion and CLCC letters to Chair for the record.
- **Commission (ongoing):** Evaluate Open Space Acquisition ordinance amendments to facilitate Fund expenditures.
- **Commission (ongoing):** Coordinate with Land Use Office (Carol Bramley) on Open Space Plan incorporation into 2027 POCAD.

Next Meeting & Adjournment

A special meeting will be scheduled pending resumption of the fourth-Tuesday regular cadence. Date, time, and location to be posted per FOIA requirements. Chairman Barbara declared the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted: Diane Stoner

Acting Recording Secretary, Litchfield Conservation Commission