

Conservation Commission of the Town of Litchfield

Land Use Office, 80 Doyle Road

PO Box 12, Bantam, CT

Regular Meeting Minutes, September 22, 2026

7:00 PM, Bantam Town Hall Annex, Bantam, CT

Members present: Barbara Putnam, Chairman, Cleve Fuessenich, Vice-Chairman, Marcia Fowler, Chester Reed, Jordan Richards

Members absent: Diane Stoner, Clerk

1. Approval of Prior Minutes

The April minutes were not yet available. The Commission reviewed the August minutes. Cleve Fuessenich moved to adopt the August minutes, and Marcia Fowler seconded. [Confirm the vote result.]

2. Open Space Plan Review

The Commission reviewed the revised draft open space plan and discussed additional changes. Material describing steps for commissions that directly purchase land and identify individual acquisition parcels had been removed. The existing Open Space Acquisition Policy was retained under Land Evaluation Criteria.

Land ownership and protection categories

Members agreed to add White Memorial and Livingston Ripley to the discussion of nonprofit and land trust holdings. The wording should recognize significant holdings maintained for public benefit while distinguishing these lands from permanently protected open space. Members discussed describing these organizations as private foundations whose land may not be permanently protected.

City of Waterbury holdings should be identified as municipally owned land within the publicly owned land discussion. Members distinguished ownership for water-supply purposes from permanent legal protection. Water rights and public access were discussed as related issues.

Community open space objectives

The Commission reviewed objectives intended to inform the Plan of Conservation and Development(POCAD) and zoning and subdivision regulations. The discussion supported the following revisions and clarifications:

- Separate preservation of natural drainageways from preservation of farmland and productive forests.
- Add scenic roads to the cultural and scenic resources objective, alongside archaeological sites, historic landmarks, scenic vistas, and community gathering places. Members referred to an existing scenic-road inventory and map.
- Remove tidal marshes from the list of local natural features.
- Replace the general reference to prime soils with prime and important agricultural soils.
- Clarify that growth should be directed toward areas with public water and sewer.
- Explain land suitability for development using factors such as steep slopes, groundwater availability, and soils capable of supporting septic systems.

The objectives also addressed critical and threatened habitats, drinking-water supplies and aquifers, active and passive recreation, wetlands, floodplains, ridgelines, community character, streetscapes, greenways, town greens, and gateway landscapes. Members discussed available floodplain, soil, habitat, and aquifer mapping, including layers in the Housatonic Valley Association Greenprint map.

3. Mapping and Plan Implementation

Protected acreage and a potential preservation map

Figures attributed to Stacy at the Housatonic Valley Association indicated that 7,520 of Litchfield's 36,436 acres, or 20.64 percent, were permanently protected. Members reviewed the distinction between protected acreage and uncommitted open space, including Waterbury water-supply property. The latter was described as excluded from the protected-acreage total.

A proposed open space preservation map would identify areas with conservation value using existing information about water resources, wetlands, forests, slopes, agricultural soils, and protected parcels. Members discussed possible mapping assistance and a future budget request. Concerns were raised about identifying acquisition priorities publicly; members also noted that much of the proposed information is already public. No map or expenditure was approved.

The reference to acquisition criteria in Section Four will be replaced with a reference to the Land Evaluation Criteria heading. The map remains a proposed future project, with potential incorporation into the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Planning and Zoning recommendations

Members emphasized the Commission's advisory role. Proposals about minimizing natural resource consumption, respecting site features, and directing higher-density development toward appropriate locations should be presented as recommendations for Planning and Zoning to consider in its regulations. Lower-density uses were discussed for sensitive sites. References to transit were questioned because of limited local service.

The discussion distinguished general policy goals from enforceable regulations. Members recognized that Planning and Zoning would need to determine the appropriate regulatory language and that broader review during the Plan of Conservation and Development process could refine these recommendations.

Open space fund and public outreach

The Commission discussed preparing a short, plain-language explanation of the Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund ordinance, including its purpose, funding sources, and the four-step process described for spending the money.

Proposed outreach activities included public education on open space protection, visual presentations, media coverage and feature articles, displays of maps and reports in public locations, and community surveys. A punctuation correction was requested in the media-coverage item.

Funding and the fiscal case for open land

Potential funding approaches included dedicated support from the Board of Finance, state and federal grants through relationships with DEEP and regional planning agencies, a possible change directing part of the property conveyance tax to the open space fund, and land trust partnerships or matching grants. These remained strategies for exploration; no current acquisition financing proposal was presented.

Members revisited the age of a citation supporting the fiscal case for open land. A prior search had not identified a newer source. The existing reference will remain for now.

The draft will be updated to reflect this meeting's discussion and forwarded to Carol Bramley for possible use in the Plan of Conservation and Development process. Consultant selection for that process was reported to be underway. The open space plan remains a draft; no final adoption was recorded.

4. Riparian Zones Presentation

Arrangements were reviewed for the Wednesday, September 30 presentation at the Litchfield Community Center. Marcia will bring water in reusable jugs with ice and fruit, and buy cookies.

The event was confirmed on the Community Center calendar but was not listed on the Town calendar. Barbara will request a Town calendar listing and prepare a press release.

5. Conservation Easement Mapping

A request had been made to the surveyor who coordinates mapping changes with Public Works and the Assessor for a proposal to research approximately 20 parcels and accurately depict conservation easements on the Town map. The purpose is to help land-use officials identify easement restrictions when reviewing permit applications.

The surveyor was identified as Dave Zygmunt. The cost proposal would support an application for a Seherr-Thoss grant. If that funding is unavailable, other grants or a request in the next Town budget will be considered. Members agreed that the work requires professional expertise.

Discussion included a property with substantial easement restrictions and the Town's responsibility for enforcing easements it holds. Members emphasized the need for reliable parcel and easement information.

6. Correspondence

A September 14 email to zoning administrator Steven Macary requested a legal opinion on whether, and under what circumstances, a conservation easement may be vacated. The specific question was whether a payment in lieu of open space could be accepted in exchange for releasing an easement. Denise Raap was copied. No response had been received at the time of the meeting.

7. Other Business and Next Meeting

Members briefly discussed a report that a development property on North Lake Street was being offered for sale. No action was taken.

Because of scheduling conflicts, members agreed to cancel the October 27 meeting and next meet on Tuesday, November 24, 2026.

8 Adjournment

With no further business or objection, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Submitted by: Diane Stoner, Clerk