

Parks and Natural Resources Committee (PNRC)

Thursday, January 15, 2026, 7:00 PM

Hybrid Meeting

Minutes

1. Call to order and roll call

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM

Attending: Jim Morrow (Chair), Ken Feathers (secretary)

Attending by Zoom: Miranda Davis, Vicky Wetherell, Juliana Barrett

Town Staff attending: Michael Stankov

Absent: Charlotte Pyle, Tom Harrington, Sue Harrington

2. Approval of Minutes

2.1 11-13-2025 PNRC Minutes – Draft

Moved (Wetherell) and seconded (Barrett); Vote: none opposed.

3. Opportunity For Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

4. Old Business:

4.1 Management Plan Updates

General conclusions from discussion:

- Proximity and distance to the nearest bus stop should be included in the template
- Need to add task ownership to all tasks
- Need a more specific/subordinate/implementing detailed task list, perhaps not part of the adopted plan due to its short term nature, but derivative from it. Need to define a process for developing this “tasks to-do” list, identifying ownership, and tracking execution
- It might be useful to have a log, for each parcel, of actions taken since the last plan update
- Boundary markings should be both in- and out- facing
- Identifying stewards for each parcel would be useful, but this brings with it the issue of needing resources to manage volunteers. Feathers suggested considering whether Joshua’s trust could be contracted to do this management, since they already have a framework for their holdings
- Stankov will tweak the management plan template.

Plan-Specific discussion of Shelter Falls draft management plan

- Wetherell would like to include notes written up for the site visit but they have not been formally prepared. (Note that absence of a quorum negated the mandate for formal minutes.) Feathers indicated he had some notes and Stankov also took notes, and they will work to get a trip summary to include in the management plan.
- There was a question as to if we mark the trail that extends onto UConn land to the south, and Stankov will contact folk at UConn to coordinate.
- Signage for entering/exiting town land is needed, and wording of currently in-stock signs is not appropriate, as it references private land. Morrow will provide Stankov with a list of needed signs
- There is potential for a connecting trail from hunting lodge road but the concrete culvert that provides the wetlands crossing needs work.
- Beavers were discussed, and Stankov reported that their management will be low on the Town’s priority since Public Works sees no risk to Birch Road.

4.2 Permanent Preservation – Strategy and Parcels

The agenda at the meeting had an added document, prepared by Wetherell, listing town parcels by preserve name, and identifying those parts that have permanent preservation and the mechanism thereof. (Note this is not included in the posted town website agenda).

This list helps identify preserves where only some of the constituent parcels have permanent protection, and which parcels should be thus protected so the preserve's lands have a uniform status.

Comments were that not all parcel boundaries are captured in Schoolhouse Brook Park on the Assessor's map, possibly because they are all one owner (the Town). The point was made that these boundaries may not be needed for taxation, but are needed to accurately discriminate preservation status if the GIS system is to be used for managing such status.

There is also a need to update the assessor's records (Vision cards) as these may not accurately reflect preservation status (other than Coney Rock?). Stankov will ask the assessor to add to the notes section the information we have in the table. This is considered important because the Vision Cards are the first place people look when evaluating a property.

Extensive research will be necessary to identify volume and page for deeds documenting preservation, as sometimes they may be separated by years from the land transfer itself (especially state grant projects), and some may never have been actually filed on the land records. This will be an ongoing effort, and the Vision Cards notes can be updated as data become available.

5. New Business (no new business was noted on the agenda)

5.1 UConn golf driving range (included here rather than in item 7 reports from staff)

Stankov noted the UConn proposal to build a golf driving range on East Road. He noted that the town has no control over UConn actions but can make comments on the pending CEPA environmental evaluation by the State. He solicited input from PNRC members for any comments to make, especially since the site abuts 50 Foot Preserve. PNRC discussion included the following:

- He indicated that public input to the town will drive a comment on the fate of the evergreen tree collection on-site. Wetherell noted that these trees have been propagated across campus as part of the arboretum, and some were also in commercial trade, and these considerations may ameliorate much of the concern.
- PNRC concerns were for impact of runoff to 50 Foot, since the preserve is downhill. These concerns include silt, water drainage, and potential pesticide or fertilizer chemical runoff.
- PNRC suggested that the golf driving range project should identify a permanent buffer that protects town land.
- Feathers asked if due to the downrange slope there would be regrading, which could exacerbate short term and long term silt and drainage issues.

6. Communications

Several communications were noted in the agenda

Details will be forthcoming on Jay O'Keefe's retirement, the search for a successor in underway.

The PNRC discussed the Natchaug Watershed letter and agreed that it was probably time to make another outreach effort. Wetherell reminded that we historically reached out to owners of parcels abutting rivers in town, and also owners of parcels within large forest tracts. She noted we sometimes got immediate responses, but also occasionally received a response several years later, so the outreach

effort serves to plant seeds for future preservation actions. Wetherell suggested that it would be conceptually easy to screen parcels for a given preservation goal, and target mailings to all such owners based on a chosen minimum acreage.

7. Reports from Members [and staff]

Stankov reported that he expects the POCD to be adopted in late February. Feathers asked if there would be a preceding public comment and Stankov was unsure of the adoption schedule details. There was some discussion as to whether both the PZC and Town Council would be approving, and the conclusion was that probably both bodies would approve, because the POCD covers town goals beyond just land use planning.

Stankov referred to a list of items in the agenda that he expects his office to be addressing in 2026, and some were discussed:

- Vendors for the dog park and southeast park projects were interviewed over the last two weeks
- The forest inventory grant was received and ConnWood will be inventorying most of the town owned land (about 1100 acres) with a focus on species present, tree stand health, and invasives
- The Whetten Woods Invasive Species Management project contract has been signed
- The PNRC discussed making a presentation to the Town Council and concluded that it would be useful given turnover since the last presentation. Late May was identified as a target time (after budget season) and there needs to be a decision about whether the management plan updates will be part of this presentation, or at meetings either before it or after it. There was also discussion about whether a similar presentation to PZC would be useful, and Stankov will contact Jennifer Kaufman to discuss the merits.

Morrow noted that the American Chestnut Foundation was seeking areas for wilding their developed blight resistant strain. The PNRC discussion concluded that we were generally in favor of making town land available, and this would be an optimum time given the recent loss of forest crown due to oak, ash and beech mortality. Barrett pointed out that the chestnut is allopathic, and this may affect the exact sites located.

Morrow also noted that he learned leaving isolated decaying logs on the forest floor was supportive of solitary bee habitat

The committee was informed of active legislative changes happening in response to complaints about recent changes in statutory 490 land valuations.

8. Executive Session in accordance with CGS Sec. w.200(6)(D)

No executive session was necessary.

9. Future Meetings:

The next regularly scheduled meeting is March 12th.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 PM by consensus (moved: Feathers; seconded: Barrett).

Respectfully Submitted,
Ken Feathers, Secretary