



*City of Bristol
Board of Park Commissioners*

INFORMATION TO ACCESS MEETING

<https://bristolct-gov.zoom.us/j/88962098471?pwd=tUIEr2YCTI5twltd8mgsAnQheYx9p.1>

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The regular meeting was held on Wednesday, November 19, 2025, at 6:00 PM in Meeting Room 1-2 in City Hall, 111 North Main Street, Bristol, CT 06010.

1. Call to Order

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Attendance

Members Present:

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Chair
Robert Fiorito, Vice Chair
Cynthia Donovan, Commissioner
Cecilia Garay, Commissioner
Leonard Lamothe, Commissioner
Aaron Weber, Commissioner
Mark Dickau, City Council Liaison
Sarah Larson, Deputy Superintendent
Jon Fitzgerald, Commissioner
Dr. Joshua Medeiros, Superintendent

Absent:

2. Approval of Minutes

a. Approval of Minutes: October 15, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Fiorito to Approve the October 15, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes.

Seconded by Commissioner Lamothe; all in favor; motion carried.

3. Public Participation

Jacqueline Mccauley of 19 Spring Street in Bristol, spoke about a homeless man who is living in Federal Hill Park. He initially sheltered under a turtle structure and now sleeps in the gazebo, often staying during the day. His presence is deterring families and children from using the playground. Jackie has called the police multiple times, but interventions have been inconsistent. She urged coordination between the Parks Department and Police to address the issue and connect him with services, while emphasizing safety and accessibility concerns for the community.

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson stated Jacky was very proactive in contacting the Parks Dept. The Parks Department, Youth and Community Services, and Officer Travisano from the Bristol Police Department coordinated to intervene. For about a week and a half, park staff repaired the landscaping each morning while the officer worked to stop the individual's behavior. Because the park is closed from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., staying there during those hours is a ticketable offense, but during the day the individual is allowed to be in the park unless violating a law or ordinance. Currently, the situation is being monitored, and there is little more the Parks Department can do, as the individual is legally permitted to be there during daytime hours.

Mayor Ellen Zoppo - Sassu noted that Officer Travisano, formerly the community wellness officer, has been promoted and replaced by another officer with mental-health training, ensuring continuity in support. The individual involved has consistently declined all offered services, including housing and warming-center resources. Police and Parks staff continue to prioritize diversion and service access but are also exploring enforceable options, such as ticketable offenses or rules related to personal belongings in the park. Both departments, along with external agencies, are actively monitoring the situation and maintaining daily follow-up efforts. The goal remains to encourage the individual to accept services, though this may take time

4. Superintendent's Report

a. Division Supervisor's Report

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson presented the Division Supervisor's Report; discussion followed.

b. Project Updates

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson presented the Project Updates. Phase 1 of the Page Park project is nearing completion, with substantial completion expected by the end of December and full closeout anticipated by April. Funding is already in place for Phase 2, and the department is preparing to go out to bid; the goal is to secure a contract and begin work in the spring to maintain continuity between phases. An update was also provided on the Rockwell Park revitalization. The state had planned to reassign staff to help oversee the project, but the newly assigned staff member left their position within a week. As a result, the department is back to waiting for the state to issue the MOU required to access funding and begin work.

Commissioner Donovan inquired about an update on the scoreboard fundraiser for the

Dennis Malone Aquatics Center.

Deputy Superintendent Larson Aside from that fundraiser and a few small donations, there has been no significant additional fundraising activity, and a swim-a-thon has not been held.

c. Year to Date Financials

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson presented the Year to Date Financials.

Commissioner Lamthe inquired about an update on vandalism.

Deputy Superintendent Larson referred to the year-to-date parks maintenance financials, noting repeated vandalism at the Mrs. Rockwell's Park outdoor bathroom, recorded as a line item. This incident marks the third occurrence. Despite existing measures such as electronic locks, that lock from 10 p.m.–7 a.m., and prior discussions about additional lighting, vandalism continues, and the exact timing is unknown due to lack of cameras. Staff are moving forward with plans to install stainless-steel fixtures in an effort to reduce future damage.

Commissioner Lamothe suggested a Tactacam Defend camera system that works with Cellular Service using solar power to operate; discussion followed.

d. Strategic Plan Updates

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson presented the Strategic Plan Updates, but it was not discussed.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Fiorito to place the Superintendent's Report on file. Seconded by Commissioner Donovan; all in favor; motion carried.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Lamothe to Move New Business Item B. up on the agenda. Seconded by Vice Chair Fiorito; all in favor; motion carried.

b. Presentation from Friends of the Hoppers Birge Pond Preserve Inc.

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson reported that a developer has purchased land off Ambler Road and Grassy Road, located within the park area. The Friends group met with the Mayor, staff, and the developer to discuss the situation. The Mayor recommended that the Friends group provide updates to the Commission regarding their ongoing work. An MOU outlining the shared stewardship partnership is currently being drafted and will be brought before the board for review.

Michelle Rudy of 102 Henderson Street in Bristol, who is representing the Friends of the Hoppers Birge Pond Preserve, provided an update regarding a proposed development on approximately 12 acres of privately owned land located within the center of the Hoppers Preserve. The developer plans to begin work on the eastern portion of the property and has proposed excavating approximately 145,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel, followed by construction of an estimated 2–7 homes.

The key concerns identified by the Friends of the Hoppers are the economic impacts, such as the potential loss of up to 12 acres of forested land, and more formal municipal-

style language. Geological impacts include removal of notable glacial formations, including rare kames, which are part of a larger, intact geological system within the preserve, and loss of unique educational and natural features. Hydrological impacts such as excavation of significant quantities of sand and gravel may depress the water table, posing risks to nearby springs and wetlands. Recreational impacts such as increased noise, light, and visual disturbance affect the preserve's wilderness-like experience, and several trails located on or adjacent to the parcels would be disrupted or eliminated. Lastly, The Friends group stated that the proposed development does not align with the City's Plan of Conservation and Development.

The developer has proposed a land swap, offering the western parcel in exchange for a five-acre section of parkland containing a prominent kame. The Friends group expressed opposition to the proposed swap due to ecological, geological, recreational, and wildlife corridor concerns.

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu provided additional context regarding the proposed development at Hoppers Birch Pond, including a six-acre parcel purchased by the developer, which extends into the core forest area of the preserve. The developer has proposed a potential land swap involving a five-acre parcel in an effort to consolidate residential lots and mitigate impacts on the preserve.

It was noted that the purchased parcel previously contained residential structures that have been demolished, and the property retains residential use by right, allowing for construction consistent with existing zoning. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu emphasized that, given zoning regulations, construction is likely to occur, and the City's land use boards, including the Planning Commission and Zoning Commission, will review any proposals carefully, including potential impacts to wetlands and wildlife corridors. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu has maintained ongoing communication with both the developer and the Hoppers Birch Pond Group to explore options that may reduce environmental and recreational impacts. The Parks Board's role in stewardship of the preserve was highlighted, and Commissioners were encouraged to remain informed as discussions continue and as future plans are formulated.

In regard to Ambler and Grassy Roads and Hoppers Birch Pond. Although the streets are unaccepted, prior city maintenance has established de facto acceptance, limiting legal preservation options. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu reviewed the 1988 binding referendum by the Save the Hoppers Committee, which passed 15,252 to 2,736, favoring preservation of the open space without sand or gravel mining while retaining the City's water rights. The referendum offers limited guidance for current development or residential use. Historical documentation includes Parks Board discussions and staff memos regarding potential Land Trust status. Staff continue to review records for additional protections. At the January 3, 2008, Board of Park Commissioners meeting, staff discussed a request from the Hoppers Committee regarding the feasibility of establishing a land trust for Hoppers Birch Pond. Assistant Corporation Counsel Ann Baldwin attended and noted that the original request was general and additional information was needed to evaluate feasibility. She reviewed relevant documents, including a dedication agreement, an open space grant contract, and the results of the November 8, 1988, referendum. Counsel indicated that a land trust may not be possible and that any changes to the property would require a site plan submitted to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). She also noted that determining a trustee would be a primary consideration. Commissioners acknowledged that the area benefits from existing protections, including

state DEEP designation, and expressed appreciation for the multiple layers of protection identified.

Commissioner Donovan inquired whether water usage or other water-related impacts associated with the proposed land development could be addressed directly with the developer, including privately. She noted that excavation of sand and gravel could negatively affect water quality and suggested that raising these concerns might help limit the extent of extraction, thereby protecting water resources and the park environment. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu noted that a wetland's delineation runs through the eastern portion of the property and that updated maps have been prepared. Additional features, including a discharge pipe, will also be considered. She emphasized that all relevant issues, including water impacts and earth removal, will be reviewed by the Wetlands Commission and the Zoning Commission, noting that multiple regulatory and planning processes will influence any proposed development. Mayor Zoppo-Sassu emphasized the importance of having the Hoppers Birch Pond Committee present to provide Commissioners with updated information, given community interest in the matter. Commissioners were encouraged to direct inquiries from the public to the Committee or City staff and to remain informed about upcoming land use board meetings. The Mayor noted scheduling updates for regulatory review: the Wetlands Commission application has been postponed to December, while the Zoning Commission review has been postponed to January and indicated that further discussions with the Committee will be scheduled to coordinate ongoing review and community engagement.

Erik Madsen of 70 Oak Hill Drive in Bristol, and Friends of the Hoppers Birge Pond Preserve board member, provided an update regarding the boardwalk around Birch Pond, noting that the existing 20-year-old structure has reached the end of its useful life and is in disrepair. Staff emphasized that closure of the trail is not feasible, as it would continue to be used by independent hikers. The Friends of the Hoppers requested authorization from the Board to apply for and solicit funding for a new boardwalk project. The proposed project would be completed in two phases:

Phase 1: Construction of an approximately 851-foot boardwalk on the west and north sides of the pond (estimated cost \$225,000–\$260,000) and 71 feet on the east side (estimated cost \$19,000–\$21,000). Materials would include high-quality treated lumber framing, stainless steel fasteners, HDPE plastic decking, and a toe kick; no railings would be installed, as the structure is less than 30 inches above ground or water.

Phase 2 (future phase): Development of a 5-foot-wide accessible walking path to interconnect boardwalks, including 1,100 feet on the west and north sides and 1,300 feet on the east side of the pond. Cost estimates for Phase 2 are to be determined.

The Friends of the Hoppers will oversee, coordinate, and implement the project through completion, seeking funding through partnerships with government, business, foundations, nonprofits, and private donors, including potential grants such as the Connecticut Recreational Trails Grant Program. The project aims to enhance conservation, passive recreation, and accessibility for city residents and future generations.

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson provided an update on the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process regarding the Birch Pond boardwalk project. Funding requests for planning and construction of the boardwalk have been submitted through the CIP process since FY 2023, with the FY 2024 budget specifically including upgrades for engineering

and planning to support both phases of the project, including the accessible trail. These requests have not been funded over the past three fiscal years.

Mayor Zoppo-Sassu noted that the Friends of the Hoppers had expressed willingness to support the project. It was recommended that the project be formally submitted to the City Manager for consideration in conjunction with the upcoming budget process, which will include review of CIP projects for the coming fiscal year. She emphasized that submitting the project for CIP review does not preclude simultaneous pursuit of grant funding, and that sufficient information, including costs and engineering estimates, is available to develop a funding application for Phase 1 of the project.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Fiorito to continue the discussion of the Boardwalk Project and refer the matter to the Budget Committee.

Seconded by Commissioner Donovan; all in favor; motion carried.

c. Approval of the Part-Time/ Seasonal Wage Increases Memo and refer to Salary Committee

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu presented the Part-Time/Seasonal wage increase memo to be referred to the Salary Committee.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Fiorito to approve the Part-Time/Seasonal wage increase memo to be referred to the Salary Committee.

Seconded by Commissioner Weber; all in favor; motion carried.

5. Old Business

a. Update on the Pequabuck River Watershed Association's 319 Grant Application for Kern Park

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson reported that Mary Ridings notified the department that the Pequabuck River Watershed Association's 319 Grant application has been selected for funding by DEEP. The project will redirect stormwater from the Ivy Drive culvert into a bioswale located at the former tennis court area, with the goals of reducing erosion and improving water quality. The Board previously endorsed submission of this grant application approximately one year ago. Deputy Superintendent Larson noted that the project will return to the Board in the coming months for review and acceptance of associated work plans, MOUs, and related agreements.

b. Update from the PRWA on the deliverables from their Thomaston Saving Bank Grant for Invasive Species Removal along the North Culvert

The Pequabuck River Watershed Association has submitted an update to the board regarding the completion of their grant-funded project to remove invasive species along

the North Culvert. This project was supported by the board in May, when the board endorsed the Association's application for grant funding. According to the Association, the project has been successfully completed, and the invasive-species removal work proceeded as planned. No further board action is required at this time.

c. Update on the Jim Cleveland Wildflower Field

Commissioner Donovan reported that the Shrub Road/Oak Hill Drive restoration estimate was originally \$87,000–\$118,000, driven primarily by extensive mugwort infestation. After identifying tasks that City staff and volunteers could perform, the cost was reduced to approximately \$80,000. Donor Jim Cleveland has committed \$60,000 and indicated he may contribute an additional \$30,000 if matched; staff noted that raising a \$30,000 match may be challenging. The restoration area is approximately four acres, and effective mugwort removal will require herbicide use, necessitating a public informational meeting to review the plan with neighbors. Staff will continue discussions with the contractor and donor regarding funding, in-kind contributions, and next steps, and will update the Board as information becomes available.

6. New Business

a. Consider the request from UCONN Conservation Ambassador Program Participant, Esha Osioh, to engage in storm-water quality testing at select storm drains throughout the park system this winter.

Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson introduced Esha, a Bristol Central High School student participating in the UConn Community Action Project (CAP), has selected the Parks, Recreation, Youth & Community Services Department as her community partner for the program. As part of her CAP requirements, Esha must complete a mobile community project.

Esha Osioh, a Bristol Central High School student participating in the UConn Community Action Project (CAP), provided an overview of her proposed project. Due to school email access limitations, she was unable to display her original presentation; however, she summarized the project content for the Board. Ms. Osioh explained that her project involves stormwater quality testing at selected storm drains within the City's Park system. The objectives include collecting stormwater samples following various weather events (rainstorms, snowstorms, etc.), identifying pollutants such as road salt, debris, and other contaminants that may impact water quality and local microorganisms, monitoring potential effects on ponds, streams, and other park waterways, and increasing community engagement and public awareness regarding stormwater pollution, including possible outreach through the Bristol Public Library. She noted that samples will be collected after significant storms and analyzed with support from her CAP mentor and program staff, who will assist with testing equipment and methodology. Ms. Osioh requested clarification on

safety protocols, identification of allowable storm drains for sampling, and confirmation that project activities align with departmental operational needs; discussion followed.

MOTION: Made by Vice Chair Fiorito to approve Esha's UConn Community Action Project and to authorize her to proceed in coordination with Parks staff. Staff will identify appropriate catch basins, ensure safety protocols, and serve as points of contact throughout the project.

Seconded by Commissioner Donovan; all in favor; motion carried.

7. Reports and Committee Reports

a. Fund Development & Advocacy Committee

None.

b. Policy & Strategy Committee

None.

c. Finance Committee

None.

d. City Council Liaison Update

City Council discussions have focused on encampments at Federal Hill Green, the Hoppers, Kern Park, and Rockwell. A small stakeholder group will meet Monday to address winter protocols, overflow options, and referral processes, noting limitations with 2-1-1 and regional service demands. Parks staff are invited to provide input. Solutions will be approached incrementally, recognizing that some individuals may decline services, with progress made one conversation and one person at a time.

e. By Commissioners

Commissioner Lamothe inquired about the residents of the three apartments across from old Sabino's restaurant, who had been parking in old Sabino's lot with permission. Deputy Superintendent Sarah Larson stated that the residents were required to vacate by December 31st, and the property owner has received a letter from the City of Bristol regarding this.

Mayor Ellen Zoppo-Sassu stated the culvert repair work has not yet started; the property owners' contractor presented plans to the Wetlands Commission, but they were deemed insufficient. The current focus is on completing the 27-foot section directly above the existing culverts. Work is complicated by active sewer, water, and gas lines, and coordination with the property owners is ongoing to schedule the project as soon as feasible.

Commissioner Lamothe inquired about the status of the “No Trucks Allowed” sign on the boulevard.

City Council Liaison Mark Dickau stated Ray Rogozinski has been working on this issue. In addition to the sign, pavement markings are planned to indicate “No Through Trucks” at ground level. From above, the markings may look unusual, but they will be clear to drivers on the road. Follow-up is needed to confirm the status of both the sign and the pavement markings and to ensure a final solution is in place.

Vice Chair Fiorito stated he was contacted by a watershed regarding the parking situation during the Eastern Regional Little League tournament.

Deputy Superintendent Larson stated that during the tournament, several visitors parked on or around the Mixed Street Field without permission from the Parks Department, New Britain Watershed, or the Water Department. The area is an aquifer protection zone, and the unauthorized parking violated the agreement with the Water Department. The issue was referred to our department and the police. Discussions are ongoing regarding preventive measures, including signage and possible snow fencing, with follow-up planned as spring approaches; discussion followed.

8. Adjournment

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Lamothe to adjourn at 7:38 p.m.

Seconded by Vice Chair Fiorito; all in favor; motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amaris Estrada
Recording Secretary
Board of Park Commissioners