America 250 | CT Commission Meeting
Wednesday, July 15, 2026 at 10:00 AM
Legislative Office Building, Hearing Room 1E
Hartford
Draft Minutes

Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzbiPkIt1VQ

Attendees

Commissioners
Denise Merril (Chair) (In Person)
Jason Mancini (Vice Chair) (In Person)
Ilene Frank (In Person)
Sally Whipple (In Person)
Andy Horowitz (In Person)
Amrys Williams (In Person)
Margaret Khan (In Person)
Cathy Labadia (In Person)
Steve Armstrong (In Person)
Megan Baker (In Person)
Tom Scanlon (In Person)

Staff
Cyndi Tolosa (In Person)
Rachel Gonzalez (In Person)
Scott Wands (In Person)
Michael Werner (In Person)
Arianna Barker (Virtual)

The meeting started at 10:03 a.m.

Welcome
Chair Denise Merrill opened the meeting with a welcome and brief comments about the activities of July 4.

Approval of Minutes from April 15, 2026 meeting
Motion: Steve Armstrong
Second: Deborah Schander
Discussion: One correction to the spelling of Amrys Williams' name.
Vote: Yes (12), No (-), Abstain (-)

Vice Chair Jason Mancini offered brief remarks of gratitude for the efforts that have gone into planning & executing programming.

Commissioner Updates
This section begins at 2:45 in the recording.

Commissioners gave brief updates on the work being done at their organizations for the 250th as follows:
Deborah Schander shared that the Museum of Connecticut History at the Connecticut State Library recently opened their exhibit “Connecticut’s Revolution,” which details Connecticut’s role in the revolutionary war.

Ilene Frank shared that the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History opened their 250th exhibit, “Rebellious,” in April. This exhibit looks at the legacy of revolution in Connecticut. The museum also participated in Hartford Bonanza with a scaled down traveling version of the exhibit.

Andy Horowitz shared that the Office of the State Historian had partnered with the Connecticut State Department of Transportation on a series of 38 historical panels that highlight objects and tell a story about Connecticut’s role in the revolution. These panels are on display at rest stops around the state.

Megan Baker shared that the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity hosted a 2-day program for the 250th, which included panels, a quilt project, and artwork. Panels reflected on the 250th and the program was used as a launching point for future projects, including a 250th podcast hosted by Melvette Hill and Civic Sitdowns this fall.

Margaret Khan shared updates from libraries in the Connecticut Library Association, which have offered hundreds of programs connected to the 250th. She highlighted programs from several libraries, and noted that on the whole, programming embraced the themes of the commission.

Sally Whipple shared that the Connecticut Democracy Center at Connecticut’s Old State House hosted an event with Senator Chris Murphy as well as other events around July 4, and were able to share Connecticut’s role in the revolutionary period with visitors. They also have upcoming programs for educators and Rochambeau Day.

Cyndi Tolosa shared an update from the Connecticut Office of the Arts on behalf of Liz Shapiro. Old New Gate Prison & Copper Mine is presenting a play, “Escape from New Gate,” and will be hosting a reenactment.

Cyndi Tolosa shared an update from the Office of the Secretary of the State on behalf of Arienne Orozco. Their primary initiative has been “Flat Roger Sherman” and other civics resources available at civics101.ct.gov.

Scott Wands shared an update on CT Humanities’ granting efforts on behalf of Jason Mancini. To date, CTH has awarded 100 projects tied to the commission’s themes with grant funds totalling $934,000. These included a banner exhibit in Vernon, a bilingual project on democracy in Stamford, and a documentary film tied to the archaeological excavation of the Battle of Ridgefield site. He noted that the 250th is no longer considered a funding priority, but that 250th projects may still apply and will be considered.

Amrys Williams shared that the Connecticut League of Museums’ annual conference in June was themed to the 250th, and that their members are still embracing the 250th in their own programming.

Denise Merrill shared remarks on the legacy of the commission, which she sees in the many projects that were shared and in the grassroots & local collaborations that have been ongoing.

National/Regional Update
This section begins at 37:35 in the recording.

Cyndi Tolosa shared updates on national initiatives as follows:

- The America250 commission's time capsule was buried in Philadelphia, and Cyndi participated in a panel on WNPR with others from Connecticut and Tom Medema from the federal agency which was responsible for the capsule.
- Freedom 250's Great American State Fair and America 250's National Block party both recently wrapped up.
- Organizations around Connecticut participated in the nationwide bell ringing at 2:00 p.m. on July 4, America's Potluck on July 5, and the Spirit of America Declaration of Independence Reading on July 8.

Work Plan Updates
This section begins at 41:04 in the recording.

Cyndi Tolosa shared recent and upcoming work being done by staff, including:

- Commission sponsorships of events around the state, including a Yardgoats game and an event in Greenwich with a tall ship in June, and events in Hartford and New London thus far in July. Commissioners are encouraged to attend upcoming events sponsored by the commission as they are able.
- Non-profit affiliate organizations and municipalities were eligible to receive a stipend from the commission for their 250th work. In total, 102 affiliates and 82 municipalities applied for & received this stipend.
- The CT Visit CT250 Landing Page is still live and includes hundreds of event. Staff is receiving updates that new events have been added almost daily. This section of the site will be live through 2026, and staff has received positive feedback from the general public and excitement that events will continue throughout the year.
- While it wasn't possible to fully fund a "Connecticut Summer at the Museum" program, the commission is sponsoring free days at museums tied to other events around the state - for example, many museums in Hartford were free in connection with Long Weekend July 1-5.

Denise Merrill noted that commissioners should take the opportunity to thank sponsors if and when they are able. Sponsors are listed on CT250.org, on the back of the America 250 | CT Passport book, and in many other places.

Subcommittee Updates
This section begins at 46:20 in the recording.

Rachel Gonzalez provided an update on the work of the Governance subcommittee on behalf of Arienne Orozco. The final application deadline for affiliates was in June, and the final total of approved affiliates was 260 - surpassing the commission's goal of 250.

Amrys Williams shared that 159 municipalities out of 169 have provided a contact person to date, and encouraged commissioners to continue encouraging municipalities to provide a contact and to sign on to the recommitment document.

Cyndi Tolosa added some comments about the recommitment ceremony in Hartford on July 4, which was attended by Denise Merrill, Governor Lamont, and representatives of many of Connecticut's municipalities. Those who attended found it to be a very meaningful event to commemorate the moment. The concept of recommitting to the ideals of the Declaration came out of early conversations by the commission. The final recommitment document will be installed in the Museum of Connecticut History's exhibit and then will be preserved in the State Archives.

Steve Armstrong noted that this was an opportunity for teachers and students to participate in local history, and thanked the educators who participated. In total, 182 students participated in the local history certificate program. Cyndi Tolosa added that the certificate program will continue into the fall.

Cyndi Tolosa requested that commissioners share their visions for what staff should prioritize for the remainder of the year. Denise Merrill noted that an upcoming project will be white oak tree planting and education programs in collaboration with the University of Connecticut Extension program, DEEP, and potential COGs. Jason Mancini encouraged members of the public and other organizations to bring their ideas to the commission and to CT Humanities.

Public Comment
This section begins at 59:20 in the recording.

No public comment.

The meeting ended at 11:03 a.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 21, 2026
Location TBD