

Open Space Stewardship & Policies Work Group

Wednesday, November 1, 2023

4:30 PM- Via Zoom

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT

PRESENT: Margery Winters, Susan Masino, Karyn Cordner and Helen Peterson

ALSO PRESENT: Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation was also in attendance.

Call to Order

Ms. Winters called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM.

1. Adoption of June 7, 2023 Minutes

The minutes of the June 7, 2023 Open Space subcommittee workgroup meeting were accepted.

2. Fall Educational Events

a. Dark Skies

Ms. Masino shared that Open Space is co-sponsoring the Dark Skies event tomorrow night at the Simsbury Public Library. The event will be featuring Leo Smith, who is the Connecticut Coordinator for Dark Skies Association. It is co-sponsored by the Library, Pollinator Pathways, International Dark Sky, Lights Out Connecticut, the Conservation Commission and the Grange. Ms. Masino shared that the bottom line is to only use lights when we need them, keep them on a motion sensor or dimmer, always use the least light and make sure it is shielded. This will save energy but also has really big impacts for the health of the ecosystem.

b. Beaver Pond Wildlife

Ms. Masino shared that on Thursday, November 9 is the final part of their 5-part docuseries. There will be Tex-Mex chili, shrimp, vegetable platter, homemade beaver lodge cookies, sticks and logs that have been chewed on by beavers, and will be offering their bear deterrent whistles. Social hour begins at 6 p.m. and the film at 7 p.m.

c. Beyond Birdfeeders

Ms. Winters shared that Simsbury Pollinators and a variety of other hosts are supporting this event regarding what you can do in your yard to support the birds without putting up a bird feeder. This event will be November 30th at the library.

3. Invasive Species Discussion

Ms. Winters shared that they did ask for a quote for the pesticide application at the Barn Door Triangle from All Habitats (a group Simsbury Land Trust has used). The quote came back at 30-40k and it would be a multi-year project. She commented that they are going to need to start putting invasive removal into the budget. If they don't do anything this habitat is pretty useless as it will be taken over by plants that don't support native insects and native insects support native birds and other wildlife. The problem will get worse and worse each year. This item will take a lot of community education to various Boards and Committees.

Ms. Masino questioned if they could tackle just a strip at a time due to cost, it would also allow the soil to recover better. Ms. Winters commented that it would be difficult to control the invasives from spreading to the treated strip.

Mr. Tyburski shared that Open Space would need to do a presentation to the Board of Selectmen and education would likely be needed.

Ms. Peterson asked for follow-up regarding the dates they should start talking about the budget and how they need to prioritize their budget items. Mr. Tyburski commented that they are starting the budget early this year and are starting with the big items. He stated that if there are items that are going to be reoccurring year after year they go in as a service improvement which will be put together end of November/early December.

Ms. Winters asked if Mr. Tyburski had a line item for invasive removal and the amount. Mr. Tyburski shared he was going to put 70k over 3 years and not listing a specific property but just leaving it open so the stewards of the property and put it where they feel it would be allocated best. He shared that if the committee would like to make a request for the budget, they would do that through him and next month's meeting would be cutting it close. Ms. Masino shared that there is a case to be made in dealing with invasive's hotspots so they don't become a big expensive project. She also questioned if there are any invasive field projects that worked that they could bring as an example to the Board of Selectmen. She feels that it would be important to get what would be the idea and the plan from a range of different firms. Ms. Corder shared that a priority for her is getting a couple good quotes from reasonable companies and asking them to give references and examples of their successes.

4. Schultz Park

Ms. Masino shared that she has been over to Schultz Park and she believes they have enough species to be an arboretum. She noticed that someone received a Home Town Hero award for Schultz Park and she thought maybe they could engage that person to help move that forward.

5. Budget Items

- a. Invasive Species**
- b. Summer Interns**
- c. Other**

Ms. Masino shared that she has a service improvement form that they submitted too late last year.

Ms. Peterson shared that once an item like an intern gets in the budget, they need to make sure it is going to carry year to year as they need that assistance to keep healthy what they have. Ms. Masino asked if the service improvement form could be one for an annual budget allocation. Mr. Tyburski stated if they accept the proposal then it becomes part of the operating budget.

Ms. Masino shared that if they could get a baseline funding of about 25k, they could deal with some hotspots, maybe do some inventory and then deal with bigger projects on a case-by-case basis.

In looking at the request form regarding the intern, Mr. Tyburski shared that the staffing justification would need to be more specific with what tasks they would do and who would be supervising them. His hope is that Open Space would develop the work plan for the summer should they have an intern.

Ms. Winters shared that she feels the Town needs to come to the conclusion that management of these invasive species is not a part-time or when they feel like it task but get it along the same lines as road repair. Roads break down and they have to fix them.

Ms. Corder followed up asking what is going on with their plan for invasives and when they are going to get 6 steps that are definitive that they agree on. Ms. Masino asked if they need to have it in the budget before they send out an RFP. Mr. Tyburski shared that there are some funds now unallocated Open Space maintenance funds, roughly 80k, so that could be done off budget. However, they would need to submit a plan and he doesn't feel comfortable putting out to bid without the support of the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Masino shared that once they get consensus among themselves then they can bring it to the Board of Selectmen then they could move forward.

Mr. Tyburski shared that for the full Committee meeting in December they should get consensus for which of these things they want to move forward. They can work on the service improvement forms between now and the next meeting. Parks and Recreation and Open Space budgets need to be turned into the Town Manager's office by mid to late December. In January/February the Town Manager will decide which things they want to include in the operating budget and then present their budget late February to the Board of Selectmen. There are budget workshops following that. His recommendation would be to do a presentation to the Board of Selectmen in February; however, he is not sure how far out they are booked.

Ms. Masino will send out her drafts of the service improvement forms for everyone to make edits to and then they will finalize at the next meeting.

d. Other Business

Ms. Corder shared that she read in the Courant that there are plans on Route 10 going south for 500 more apartments and a large parking lot. She asked what role do they have as a Simsbury Resident to voice an opinion. Mr. Tyburski recommended as a private citizen to sign up for the agendas of Planning and Zoning so there is notice of those meetings, to attend and voice your opinion.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Taylor
Committee Clerk