

**OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE – SUBJECT TO APPROVAL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – June 3, 2015**

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CALL TO ORDER

First Selectman Lisa Heavner called the regular meeting of the open space committee to order at 4:35 p.m. on Wednesday, June 3, 2015. The meeting was held in the main meeting room of the Simsbury Town Offices located at 933 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT. In attendance was Ms. Heavner, as well as the following committee members: Derek Peterson, Helen Peterson, Don Rieger and Ferg Jansen. Staff included Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation Gerard Toner, Town Engineer Jeff Shea, and Director of Community Planning and Development Hiram Peck.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

John Schaefer had comments on the Ethel Walker Woods Master Plan Summary Report draft dated April 2015, and the Forest Management Plan from 2014. He said some of his previous comments were addressed, but he still has serious concerns with the philosophy of the plans. He handed out his comments to the committee. He is concerned that the master plan still calls for too intensive a level of development, that access should not be emphasized, that the forest was meant to be preserved and not used as a source of income, and that any fire district access should be monitored carefully.

He said he agreed with Susan Van Kleef that: “The first goal of the master plan be about sustainable land stewardship, preservation of ecosystem health, and diverse wildlife habitat, not recreation.”

He also commented on discussion about the town possibly selling off some of its open space. He said he had serious concerns on that issue as well. He said the bar should be set very high for this.

Mr. Peterson asked Mr. Schaefer to expand on the fire district access comment. Mr. Schaefer said it grew out of some back and forth between town staff and consultant Milone & MacBroom. He said access to a site for safety reasons can sometimes get carried away. Ms. Heavner said no permanent structures will be allowed there due to the grant received for the purchase. She said the grant states passive recreation only. Ms. Peterson commented that the original trails from 50 years ago were there because of the fire department. She said 8 miles of trails were created on that parcel over the years, which created a lot of erosion and damage.

Diane Nash said selling off problem parcels may seem like a good idea, but there are people who bought property in areas where these attractive parcels separate lots. She said there is no problem to solve, but one might be created if these parcels are sold. Ms. Heavner said the need for a policy regarding open space acquisition and deacquisition came about from a request by the board of finance to sell Dewey Farm and Ms. Heavner said she will not do that without a policy.

Frank Plona, from Collinsville and a member of Trout Unlimited, commented on the Ethel Walker Woods Master Plan. He left a copy of his comments with the committee. He noted an omission of a dam

on the blue trail crossing Stratton Brook. He said it is due to an artificial structure not mentioned in the report. He said dams on small streams fragment trout population during spawning times. He mentioned more areas of concern with debris and sand and said certain sections are in very bad shape. He said the group has not seen brook trout there in years. He said Trout Unlimited would be willing to go in, at its own expense, and make improvements to the stream.

Sue Brachwitz also commented on Ethel Walker Woods, handing out her comments to committee members as well. She said the highest priority should be preserving the land with minimal disturbance, protecting it from human-caused damage such as logging, and preserving ecosystem health and diverse plant and animal habitat. Something this size and relatively undisturbed is increasingly rare. She said it should never be used as a source of income. She also commented on parking (additional or any improvements are unnecessary), trails (left unmarked but not closed, except to bicycles), and invasive plants. Her idea for handling some of the invasive plants is to use goats versus chemicals.

Susan Masino said at Ethel Walker Woods there needs to be some effort to control invasive plants. If some measures are not taken the phragmites could eradicate the marsh.

REVIEW/ADOPT MINUTES OF MAY 6, 2015

There were no changes to the minutes.

OPEN SPACE INVENTORY UPDATE

Mr. Toner introduced Adam Hammershoy, who is working as an intern and is from Trinity College. He is walking and cataloguing 17 parcels in town with the help of an app on his phone and GPS. Everything from boundaries to plants and wildlife is documented and then put on file using Microsoft Word.

1 OLD BRIDGE ROAD UPDATE

There was no formal 1 Old Bridge Road update. The comment was made that consensus building was underway and it seemed as if opinions were moving toward passive use for the property.

DISCUSSION OF ONION MOUNTAIN PARK INQUIRY

Mr. Toner said there is a forest management plan and the area is being marked, as some trees will be harvested. This is done with conservation officer oversight. He said the last management plan for the area was done 20 years ago. He said a plan would come before the committee before any action is taken, and the public would have the opportunity to comment.

Mr. Toner said he did not hear back from Steve Philbrick of the Canton Land Trust about possibly joining or connecting trails from a parcel on the Canton side that would connect into Simsbury's trail.

ETHEL WALKER WOODS MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Ms. Heavner said this was still in the preliminary stages and there will be plenty of time for comments from the public. She said there are some constraints that come with the grant, such as posting a sign the land is open to public within a certain time frame and making sure the area is safe.

Mr. Shea said nothing has changed since the last open space meeting and that the draft report was on the town website. He would prepare a transmittal for Ethel Walker School to look at and comment on.

Ms. Heavner reiterated that this is a slow and steady process that will move with a cautious and thoughtful approach, as the property is beautiful the way it is.

DISCUSS MATTERS FOR JOINT MEETING ON JUNE 17, 2015

Members decided the meeting between open space, conservation, and parks and recreation would cover the 1 Old Bridge Road property, and the Ethel Walker Woods Master Plan. The meeting is at 6 p.m. at the Simsbury Public Library on June 17.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Jansen brought up the issue of open space areas between properties that might be sold to a homeowner. On the plus side it would lessen the maintenance burden on the town and add the property to the tax rolls, although when it is a conservation easement there is a tax reduction. There are myriad things that may happen to the property that were not intended: it could be mowed, or become a Christmas tree dumping ground, etc. Mr. Peck said the zoning commission has begun to change its thinking the last few years about taking open space for sake of open space. Mr. Rieger said when there are easements there needs to be some policing effort of those properties. Mr. Peck said there is no quick solution to the issue, but that a policy can be developed with public input.

Mr. Rieger said the recent triathlon event left trees that were painted, and he wants the organizing group to clean it up. There is paint to cover white markings, as well as a variety of ways to mark trails.

There was also discussion on the meeting schedule as some members are away in the coming weeks.

ADJOURN

Mr. Jansen moved to adjourn and Mr. Peterson seconded. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 5:33 p.m.