

Open Space Committee
Wednesday, January 4, 2023
4:30 PM- Simsbury Town Hall
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - FINAL

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

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

Absent: Anne Erickson, Erin Leavitt-Smith, Kelly Kearney

Call to Order

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

1. Public Audience

2. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Winters made a motion to amend the October 12, 2022 minutes to reflect that Ms. Peterson was absent. Ms. Masino seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor. Ms. Peterson suggested that the minutes reflect a “take away” with each item or how the discussion is left and will be moving forward.

3. Native Plant Policy for Municipal Landscapes

Ms. Winters shared she put together a Native Plant policy based on what she has seen from other towns. It would keep the Town from potentially putting in something of no use and bring awareness to the plantings around Town. Ms. Mackstutis asked what drove the Committee to create this policy. Ms. Winters stated they have been working on this for years and it did go hand in hand with the pollinator pathways. The other thing they should be discussing in the future is an invasive plant policy. Ms. Winters stated many areas in Town have been contaminated by invasive plants, it is not more difficult to plant the native plants it just requires more thoughtfulness. Ms. Masino stated that this Native Plant Policy is what they conceptualized as part of the Town’s toolkit. Ms. Peterson asked if the subcommittee was happy with the draft as it is, if so she is happy to move it along. Ms. Mackstutis stated that she heard it is hard to get native plants, does this make it difficult to find plants for the areas we need to cover and does it increase the costs filling these spaces with native plants. Mr. Tyburski stated that he thinks more of their local vendors are adding these to their inventory. He stated it is hard to say cost wise as costs are all over the place right now but as a whole, yes they may be a little more expensive. However, natives do typically last longer so in the long run they may save money. Ms. Masino stated that bringing in plants with soil from other places carry really significant risks, i.e. eggs that destroy forests.

Ms. Peterson made a motion to move the Native Plant Policy onto the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Winters seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

4. Recommended Mowing Practices in Simsbury Open Spaces

Ms. Winters shared that they have been working on this for a while and they have been looking at recommendations from various group. Mr. Tyburski shared that they typically mow after the first frost. They have been in discussion with Pollinator Pathways to get away from the annual

mowing of all of the fields because a lot of the pollinators winter over in some of those grasses. The recommendation for mowing practices for pollinator fields is that you mow in early spring or late winter. The only grassland habitat field is the Barn Hill triangle. The Audubon would be happy to help identify the birds and get involved in that project. Ms. Winters also stated that the National Resource Conservation Service actually gives people money not to mow their fields as frequently (she is not sure if Towns qualify), every other year is a better policy and it would actually save money for the Town. Ms. Masino stated some other strategies are mowing half a field or every other year you mow one half of the field. Ms. Winters stated that Simsbury Land Trust has numbered their fields. Ms. Mackstutis asked Mr. Tyburski for his thoughts. Mr. Tyburski stated that mowing every other year might be difficult because their staff has to mobilize to get over there so in the long run it might cost them more to mow half a field but mowing every two years saves a few thousand dollars a year. Ms. Peterson stated that she feels this policy is the beginning of an important procedure because you can't always get to best practices until you have tried some.

Ms. Mackstutis asked Mr. Tyburski if it is every two years and it talks about numbered fields would be easy for them to do? Mr. Tyburski stated they aren't talking about that many fields, 5 at most. Ms. Mackstutis asked if the wording needed to be changed where it reads "mow every two years" maybe it should read a little more flexible. Ms. Masino suggested it read "approximately every two years".

Ms. Corder made a motion to move the Mowing Practices Policy onto the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Masino seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

5. Trap Rock Ridge Enabling Legislation

Ms. Masino shared that this enabling legislation was done in 1998 and she is sure Simsbury was part of the initial discussion as all our ridges are listed in it and it was listed in our POCD multiple times. The goal today is for Open Space to say "yes, we support this". It basically just regulates the top of the ridge. This is considered a very special habitat we have in Connecticut. The Onion Mountain Trap Rock Ridge is the only one in Connecticut that doesn't have a trail that goes exactly down the spine which allows special stuff to grow there. Ms. Peterson stated since we are advisory to the Board of Selectmen, it is time to point out that it slipped through the cracks and it is long overdue. Mr. Tyburski states he believes it needs positive referrals from all the Land Use boards before it goes to the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Peterson suggested it go to the Board of Selectmen first. Ms. Winters agreed that it go to the Board of Selectmen and they get a letter from the other Commissions. Ms. Mackstutis confirmed that the Open Space Committee essentially needs the Board of Selectmen to say that they support the legislation. She suggested that this item is presented during the January meeting along with the other Open Space items and the Town Manager can state if she believes it is best coming from Open Space or the other commissions down. Mr. Tyburski stated that he believes the Open Space items are on the 1/23/23 Board of Selectmen Agenda.

Ms. Masino made a motion to send a positive recommendation for Trap Rock Ridge Enabling Legislation to the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Winters seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

6. Dark Skies

Ms. Masino shared this became time sensitive as there is an official briefing paper on behalf of the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters on Dark Skies and Light Pollution. She has been in touch with Leo Smith and Rob LaFrance and there are a number of groups concerned about this. She asked Mr. Fitzgerald to research what was in the previous POCD but she hasn't had a chance to track that down. They did have a Dark Sky policy, this isn't written up right now as a policy, it is just a public education issue but it could be in the upcoming POCD. This is a topic for the workgroup. Ms. Winters said Stamford has regulations and Newtown has a policy. In the last POCD, it was identified that Zoning should be working on regulations. Ms. Winters stated they are working on this in Conservation and they are hoping to make a referral to Zoning. Ms. Peterson stated that this is a universal problem so she feels that the POCD needs to address this first. Ms. Winters stated that Conservation will be discussing their recommendations for POCD, it is a partial review only. Ms. Mackstutus asked since it is in the POCD, is this something Planning should do? Ms. Winters stated she can reach out to Erin and ask her. She stated Conservation has had a joint meeting with Planning about the POCD so they are going to be sending them a list of suggestions for it and it could include regulations that other towns have put together. Ms. Masino stated one of the big issues is that everyone wants to replace their lights with LED lights and when the lights all rolled out there was no recommendations for what the lumens were, etc. Ms. Winters stated that Conservation will be making this recommendation for possible regulations to Planning and Zoning. Ms. Mackstutus recommended this be including in the January BOS meeting along with the other items so they can advise of the path it is going on.

Ms. Masino shared the Homegrown logo she received regarding co-branding. She stated they discussed a launch later this spring where they would put it on the website, etc. They would be the first town to do this co-branding and she can include this in the 1/23 Board of Selectmen packet as well.

ADJOURN

Ms. Winters made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Peterson. All voted in favor. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 5:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Taylor
Committee Clerk