

Open Space Committee
Wednesday, October 7, 2020
4:30PM- Via Zoom Video Conference
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT

PRESENT: Eric Wellman, Margery Winters, Susan Masino, Helen Peterson, David Bush, Tim Walczak

ALSO PRESENT: Maria Capriola, Town Manager, Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation, Tom Fitzgerald, Management Specialist, Mike Glidden, Planning Director and Zoning Compliance Officer, Tom Hazel, were also in attendance.

Absent: Anne Erickson, Bill Rice

Call to Order

Mr. Wellman called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM

1.) Public Audience

No public audience.

2.) Approval of Minutes

Ms. Peterson made a motion to accept the minutes with the change of adding a more complete view of what was received from the public audience during both Board of Selectmen public hearings regarding the Holcomb Street acquisition. Ms. Winters seconded the motion. The Committee members voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2020 meeting as amended.

3.) Updates (Oral Reports)

Parks and Open Space Master Plan – Mr. Tyburski reported that a link was sent out with today’s packet of the most current draft of the Master Plan. Weston & Sampson did take the majority of our feedback. The date is set for October 26 at 5:00 p.m. for a special presentation to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Tyburski stated that his intent is to have the draft posted on both the Open Space Committee’s webpage and the C.P.R. Commission’s webpage and eventually, once complete, the document will reside on both sites permanently. Mr. Tyburski reported that they are already beginning to check boxes off the list, i.e. the pollinator project and there’s going to be an irrigation system installed at Hop Brook Park that was mentioned in the plan.

Status of Potential Disposition of Holcomb Street Parcel– Mr. Wellman reported that the Trust for Public Land continues to secure the grant funding that would make the acquisition possible. They did a presentation to the Board of Finance last month, he anticipates that if this does goes to referendum it would go in the spring. Ms. Peterson questioned if there would be an opportunity to speak to the Board of Finance or exchange thoughts with them. Ms. Capriola stated that they did have some groups recently send correspondence directly to the Board of Finance and then the Finance Director included that correspondence in their packet under “communications”. Ms. Capriola stated that if the committee

as a whole or individual committee members wanted to send a letter that could be included. All of the referrals were forwarded to the Board of Finance, which included the positive referral the Open Space Committee had provided. All but one commission have provided positive referrals. Mr. Wellman stated that he felt there was a general sentiment with the Board of Finance that we include this project with all of the other capital requests, the question is whether the land owner would be willing to let us wait those additional months before finalizing the deal.

Ms. Capriola shared a draft of a summary of sample larger scale open space purchases, Ethel Walker (part 1, 2, and 3), the "Triangle" and Meadowood acquisitions were discussed along with purchase price, town's share, percent of town funds invested, other funds invested, cost per acre, town's cost per acre and grants received/anticipated. Mr. Bush stated that he felt this was a great analysis of the value in this acquisition of this special parcel. Ms. Peterson requested that it be emailed to the committee. Ms. Masino commented that the Ethel Walker acquisition also included almost 3 million dollars in private fundraising so that might change the figures. Ms. Masino stated that on the issue of affordability, one of the perceived conflicts is that we shouldn't preserve Meadowood because we need affordable housing, she would like to reorient people that there's no reason why we can't have both. Ms. Masino asked Mr. Glidden that even if we put affordable housing on Meadowood, her understanding is that we don't reach the nine percent threshold. Mr. Glidden stated that the Planning Commission is working on updating or creating an affordable housing plan for Simsbury, which the community is required to develop once every five years pursuant to the general state statutes, which says that 10 percent of your total housing stock has to be deemed affordable. Right now Simsbury is at a healthy 4.74%. In order to get to the 10%, 481 affordable units would have to be added in one year.

Status of Disposition of Holcomb Street Parcel – Mr. Wellman reported that the Board of Selectmen voted 5 to 1 to move forward with selling that parcel to the abutting homeowner and they have asked the Town Manager to negotiate with the property owner and bring an agreement back to the Board of Selectmen. One thing that was asked was that the bike path easement be part of that agreement. Ms. Peterson questioned if there was a timeline anticipated for that negotiation. Ms. Capriola reported that they are working on that now and it is currently in the town attorney's hands, he is working on a draft outline of the agreement. They hope to have it wrapped up no later than the end of the calendar year. Ms. Masino re-asserted her position that this should be an even swap.

4.) Policies/Policies Work Group

a. Natural Stewardship Policy –

Ms. Masino stated that she should look over the draft in comparison with the original document just to see if there's any key things in the original document that should be reflected in the excerpt that's in the policies. Ms. Peterson stated she was surprised by the brevity, asked if this was the preamble or if this is it. Ms. Masino stated that this is an attempt to get that longer document into standard policy format. Mr. Wellman stated that it was also suggested that as agricultural leases and related matters are discussed, that those are taken as a group to the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Peterson questioned if paragraph 2 limits the intent that this would only be for the 4 major forests that we have in our inventory, it does not address other areas in town as well. Mr. Tyburski stated that he feels the next sentence allows the board of selectmen and the Open Space Committee the flexibility to remove and add other parcels, the intent here was just to give a starting point with the big four and then adding as there is time to review thoughtfully and recommend those parcels to the Board of Selectmen for inclusion. Mr. Winters stated that they decided to go with those four because those properties were targeted for management. Mr. Wellman asked if there were any other properties that came to mind that should be added. Ms. Masino discussed a few potential properties to add. Mr. Wellman asked Ms. Masino if she was proposing that those additional parcels are added to the document once their names are clarified. Ms. Masino stated those were discussed at the last work group meeting after going over the whole map. Ms. Winters stated that she had submitted something at the last working group meeting regarding mowing practices for meadows hopefully to be discussed at the next working group.

b. Agricultural Leases-

Ms. Winters stated that there is a lot of good information out there showing what different towns are doing and different types of leases. She stated that she is curious how we make those decisions because there are a variety of leases, for example, short-term, long-term, and rotating. She stated that one of the suggestions was coming up with a farmers committee, to have some oversight because at the last meeting it was learned that the town engineer was in charge of the leases and there should be a better process than that. Ms. Masino stated that at a prior meeting, the principles that we wanted, i.e. simple forms, longer leases, organic wouldn't be required but it would be like organic or transition to organic. Ms. Masino stated that what they would like to do is pull together the best samples from other town's and cobble that together based on those principles that we want to support. The other thing never finalized was the 15 point checklist

Mr. Wellman said it would be nice to tackle one topic each month and bring it back to the committee for review and to bring those as a package to the BOS.

c. Pollinator Pathway Program, Possible Grants –

Mr. Wellman shared that the Board of Selectmen has supporting pollinator pathways as one of their goals. New England Pollinator Pathway has a real interest in doing a showcase in town that would be visible and a way to demonstrate to the public some of the value and one area that was suggested or one project is a wild flower garden in the median on Iron Horse. Mr. Wellman stated it was suggested that that could be a possible showcase project. He stated he wanted to plant the seed that this is something this work group could take on, not now but a little bit down the road in advising and shepherding this process. Mr. Wellman stated that this could be an opportunity for this committee to add value in this area.

132 **ADJOURN**

133 Mr. Bush made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Masino. All voted in favor. Motion
134 passed. Meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm.

135

136 Respectfully submitted,

137 Heather Taylor

138 Committee Clerk