

Open Space Committee
Wednesday, December 2, 2020
4:30PM- Via Zoom Video Conference
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES - Adopted

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

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

Absent: Anne Erickson

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. Winters made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 2, 2020 as revised. Ms. Masino seconded the motion. Ms. Masino made a motion to approve the minutes from November 4, 2020 minutes as presented. Mr. Rice seconded the motion. The Commission members voted unanimously to approve the minutes with Ms. Peterson abstaining.

3. Policies Work Group Update

Model Agricultural Lease and RFP

Ms. Winters shared the RFP that the work group put together. Ms. Winters asked if the application deadline of January 31, 2021 and applicant notification date of March 15, 2021 was sufficient. Mr. Tyburski suggested that the application deadline get moved up to mid-January and the applicant notification date to mid-February. Ms. Winters asked who the proposal should get submitted to. Ms. Capriola said she will be working to see if maybe planning might be the point of collection, perhaps it can be flagged now but it will likely be her office or planning. Ms. Winters shared that they added the fee proposal form from what Mr. Tyburski sent to her. Mr. Rice questioned if there was a Simsbury agricultural land use agreement policy. Ms. Winters stated that while they want the RFP to be simple, they also want to explain to the farmers what they would like to see happen on the land. Mr. Rice asked if on the Fee Proposal Form the fees were identified someplace or is the applicant expected to fill this in. Ms. Winters stated that she believes that in the past the applicant fills it in. Ms. Masino stated that one thing she was wondering about was making this exclusive for established farmers, she would like to see some language to say that we will also consider applications from startup farmers. Mr. Rice asked if she wanted to give any preference to the startup farmer or just make a statement saying not only established farmers but those relatively new will also be considered. Ms. Masino suggested to make the first sentence "applicants can be regularly established in farming but may also be trying to start a farm", she doesn't want to disadvantage the long-term farmers who have been taking care of the town farmland. Ms. Masino stated that the language on the front page makes it sound like a five-year lease and at the end of that there would be another RFP but their intent is to make it a rolling 5 year lease that can be broken by the farmer at any time but so the farmer always knows they have up to a five-year time horizon if they want. Mr. Bush suggested

some simple language such as “farmers of all levels and experience are encouraged to apply.” Ms. Peterson stated that she thought it would be a good idea that in order to be able to exit, it should be stepped leasing. For example, if it is a startup leaser, you might want to limit it until such a time as the town feels comfortable to continue it. Mr. Bush suggested “the town retains the discretion to determine the length of lease based upon the applicant’s level of experience.” Ms. Peterson stated that she would not put that qualifier in and just say that the town has the discretion. Ms. Masino suggested to say “we will execute up to a rolling five-year lease agreement” and then that fixes that problem.

Ms. Capriola stated that what would be most helpful today is to have directional support from this Committee, technically to issue an RFP or RFQ there is no formal action needed from this Committee but the input is very helpful. Now the work group, Mr. Tyburski, Mr. Hazel and Ms. Capriola can start doing some formatting to make sure everything is consistent with the Town’s purchasing policies.

3. Updates

Status of Potential Meadowood Acquisition- Ms. Capriola shared that they have been working on assessing the various barns on the property. They are trying to determine how many of the barns can realistically be saved and preserved, how many might be able to be used for farming purposes versus which ones are really too far gone to be saved. One thing that is terrific is that the Trust for Public Land, through a state grant, as well as through some funds from a private foundation, there is some funding available to us to preserve some of the barns and do some restoration work and will be looking at perhaps submitting a grant to the state office of preservation that would enable more of a structural engineering analysis of those barns

Status of Disposition of Holcomb Street Parcel – Mr. Wellman shared that at the BOS last meeting, they approved an agreement, where we would purchase an easement along 315 for a bike path and we would also sell slightly less than an acre of open space behind 133 Holcomb Street. Ms. Capriola stated that the agreement has not been executed by the owner of 133 Holcomb Street yet. Mr. Bush asked if there are any particular issues that remain to be resolved in order to get it signed. Mr. Wellman stated that from the Board of Selectmen’s perspective “no” this is the agreement that was negotiated and approved with a five to one vote.

ADJOURN

Ms. Peterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Winters. All voted in favor. The motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 4:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Taylor
Committee Clerk