

Open Space Committee
Wednesday, February 2, 2022
4:30PM- Via Zoom Video Conference
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT

PRESENT: Margery Winters, Susan Masino, Kelly Kearney, Erin Leavitt-Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Maria Capriola, Town Manager, Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman, Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation, Tom Fitzgerald, Management Specialist, and Tom Hazel, Zoning Compliance Officer

Absent: Helen Peterson and Anne Erickson.

Call to Order

Ms. Mackstutis called the meeting to order at 4:33 PM

1. Public Audience

No public audience.

2. Approval of Minutes, November 3, 2021

The Committee members voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 7, 2021 meeting.

3. Open Space Workgroup Updates

No Mow Zone Signage- Mr. Tyburski shared that they are trying to educate residents as to why certain areas are unmowed. He stated that they created a No-Mow Zone sign which they will put around some of the places where they have changed their mowing practices so people know what's behind that reasoning. Ms. Masino shared that the sign may be difficult to read for people driving by so in addition, she suggested making the website a repository of information for best practice. She suggested minimizing the language on the sign and having a QR code that would direct people to the website.

Discussion on ARPA Funding for Open Space- Ms. Masino shared that ARPA funding is a one-time opportunity to infuse money that can help shore up critical items that support community health. She stated that one item that was on their Open Space Master Plan was getting a better handle on ecology. Ms. Masino stated another item that needs attention is some of the deferred maintenance from some of their areas getting excessive use during the pandemic. She discussed some of the Town's assets that need to be resuscitated such as Great Pond and some of the Town's trails. She also questioned how they can support their local farms. Ms. Mackstutis stated that they came out with the final rule in January and it has loosened up a lot of different ways they can use the funding. She stated that the workgroup is trying to compile a large list of items and where they originated from and then work from there to prioritize and look at the costs. Mr. Kearney asked if they knew when and how much money would be arriving. Ms. Mackstutis stated they already have 3.5 million and she believes they are receiving the additional funds in May. The funds have to be allocated by 2024 and used by 2026.

Discussion on Open Space Rangers Program- Ms. Masino shared that she spoke to Mr. Levine in Ridgefield and they have a very successful Ranger program. She stated they have signage, a yearly

party, and a whole training program. She shared she has talked to the Scout Troop that meets at First Church about possibly taking on Belden Forest. She stated that the goal would be for the nature preserve type properties to have a group assigned to them. Ms. Masino questioned how formally they want to do it. Mr. Tyburski shared that there are some logistics to be figured out with this but if there's the right people involved it could take some of the load off and he hopes this program would help with trail maintenance and illegal dumping. His only concern is how much the program will fall on C.P.R. to get it going and keep it going. Ms. Masino discussed doing a shared stewardship with Land Trust. She suggested that Mr. Levine come to the next meeting to provide more details about Ridgefield's program.

Discussion on Invasive Plant Removal Practices

Ms. Winters stated that they need to talk about strategies and policy regarding invasives in Town. Mr. Tyburski shared that it might be a good idea to identify one or two species to try to remove as much as possible and then next year move to another set. Ms. Winters shared that the Town's website would be a good resource to educate the public on these conservation issues. Ms. Capriola suggested one option might be a volunteer that would be willing to update the website.

ADJOURN

Ms. Masino made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Leavitt-Smith. All voted in favor. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 5:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Taylor
Committee Clerk