

Open Space Commission
Wednesday, March 4, 2020
4:30PM- Board of Education Conference Room, Town Hall
REGUALR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT

PRESENT: Eric Wellman, Susan Masino, Margery Winters, Anne Erickson, David Bush, Bill Rice

STAFF PRESENT: Maria Capriola Town Manager, Tom Tyburski Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation, Mike Glidden, Planning Director, Jeff Shea, Town Engineer

Absent: Helen Peterson, Tim Walczak

Call to Order

Mr. Wellman called the meeting to order at 4:30PM

1.) Public Audience

Mr. Wellman asked if there were any members of the Public who wished to speak.

Diane Nash spoke to not being in favor of the sale or disposition of open space. She is concerned a homeowner could then subdivide and change the characteristic of a neighborhood. An idea of a life-use lease for the current abutting homeowner to the Holcomb Street parcel was mentioned by Ms. Nash. She feels we are rewarding someone for encroaching on open space.

John Schafer spoke to the proposed Holcomb Street transaction and recommended leasing the property versus selling it.

Mary Bolbrook spoke about a center for biodiversity. She said how open space increases our quality of life and that it is harmful to the town to carve up open space for short-term financial benefits. She urged the commission against the Holcomb transaction.

Bill Cordner stated he was oppose to the sale of open space and the proposed Holcomb Street transaction.

2.) Approval of Minutes

- a) A motion to approve the January 8, 2020 minutes as presented was made by D. Bush, seconded by M. Winters. All voted in favor. Motion passed.

3.) Updates

Parks and Open Space Master Plan – Tom Tyburski gave an update to the Committee on the Parks and Open Space Master Plan. He stated that the goal is to give a presentation to the Board of Selectmen on April 27th.

Stewardship, Policies and Land Management Work Group – Mike Glidden stated that the Town’s new code compliance officer will be doing research and helping with the work group. M. Winters recommended we have a policy and criteria for the purchase and sale of open space.

4.) Open Space Referral on Sale of Open Space on Holcomb Street

Jeff Shea started with the trail easement overview. He mentioned that the State right of way at the Route 10/315 intersection is not sufficient width for a bike path and that the proposed path is the most favorable alignment. Mike Glidden gave an overview on the Holcomb Street referral including the comments from the Planning and Conservation Commissions. Conservation suggested a deed restriction with no future construction on the parcel. E. Wellman read into the record (a copy has been placed following these minutes) a letter written by H. Peterson. It stated her opposition to the proposed transaction because the town lacks a stewardship policy.

D. Bush stated that the Holcomb parcel abuts another piece of open space and has a drainage easement. He questioned if a subsequent owner could develop that parcel. He stated that he supports a deed restriction to not construct on the parcel. Mike Glidden stated that 2 regulations prohibit the subdivision of the parcel. D. Bush supports not subdividing the parcel in the future. E. Wellman stated he would support a deed restriction not allowing construction. M. Winters stated she likes the idea of leasing the property. D. Bush stated the importance of the bike path as it is a critical piece to connect Bloomfield and Tariffville as well as it being a part of the East Coast Greenway.

E. Wellman agreed that the town needs a policy for stewardship. He said that we would be losing a piece that is inaccessible to our residents but gaining an asset in the bike trail that is accessible to all residents of Simsbury. S. Masino inquired about standards of bike path construction. Jeff Shea responded that we aspire to conform to standards set but that some older parts of the bikeway don’t comply with modern design standards. S. Masino stated that wildlife corridors and pollinator pathways don’t require public access. She would be willing to consider a life time lease for this parcel instead of a sale.

E. Wellman motioned to enter into executive session, seconded by S. Masino, to discuss purchase and sale of real property at 133 Holcomb Street at 5:15pm. The 6 commission members, Maria Capriola, Mike Glidden, Tom Tyburski and Jeff Shea went into executive session.

The Commission left executive session at 5:48pm.

E. Wellman moved, seconded by S. Masino, to recommend to the Board of Selectmen a positive referral for sale of the property at 133 Holcomb Street with a deed restriction that no future structures are placed at that parcel or that a life time lease be considered. In favor: Eric Wellman, Anne Erickson, David Bush and Margery Winters; Opposed: Susan Masino and Bill Rice. The motion passed 4 to 2.

5.) Pollinator Pathway

M. Winters gave an update on the pollinator pathways and some pilot projects at Simsbury Farms. E. Wellman stated he would like to see pollinator gardens happening in town.

ADJOURN

D. Bush made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by B. Rice. All voted in favor. Motion passed.
Meeting adjourned at 5:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Maria Capriola
Town Manager

From: Helen Peterson

Date: March 4, 2020 at 12:01:21 AM EST

To: Wellman Eric

Subject: Wednesday's Open Space Committee meeting

Hello Eric,
Greetings from NC. I sincerely regret not being at the Wednesday meeting. May I request that you provide each member with a copy of this email and respectfully ask that you read it aloud into the record, as I address my concerns re the Referral under agenda item 4.

As I understand the Referral, it is the result of the town's need to purchase an easement along Tariffville Rd. for the bike path...a very laudable project! One that should be pursued independently.

The owner of that property has requested in turn to purchase from the town a one acre plus parcel of open space abutting his property on Holcomb St. (and accepting his appraisal is not in the best interest of the town).

My comments remain more importantly to the issue of should the Town sell a parcel or any parcel of open space land AT THIS TIME?

As I read the referral, a number of assumptions are appallingly incorrect and misleading.

' The town of Simsbury does not maintain this area.....nor has plans for future maintenance of this area.'

Incorrect! The town DOES MAINTAIN the areain its natural state as intended in part and appropriately as conserved land.!

I strongly urge the committee to pay close attention to the meaning of the words maintain and maintenance as inferred in this referral. Are we still assuming, collectively within our town government, agencies, departments, officials and staff, that to 'maintain' an area means only mowing, cleaning, or actively altering its use?? What has happened to all the meaningful discussions we have had based on credible emerging science of the value of 'maintaining' an area of open space in its natural state?

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131 As to 'no future plans' ? What of our many discussions and efforts re the emerging value of open space
132 for connectivity, wild life corridors and the pollinator program? Where might this area fit? Further, this
133 area is no less an important area within greater conserved land as it relates to the health of the Earth.

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135 I could go on and on but let me go back to why I stated it would be ill advised for any sale AT THIS TIME.

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137 My responsibility, the Committee's responsibility as the designated Stewards of the Town's open space,
138 is to advise and assist the administration, the BOS, in making good, important decisions re our
139 conserved lands.

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141 What is hindering our ability to do this effectively right now is the lack of a stewardship Policy. It is
142 important that we get this done! And certainly before this or any such Referral can be considered.

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144 Such a sale now allows a precedent we cannot live with rightly. Without a viable and worthwhile Policy
145 that truly reflects the value that all our residents place on our conserved lands, we are at risk that a
146 dangerous precedent will dictate our Policy. And we are at risk that the Planning and Conservation
147 Commissions will continue to make decisions without 'that Policy' to guide them.

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149 I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to be part of this committee's deliberations from a distance.
150 Thank you!

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152 Helen

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154 P.S. The referral states that the abutting property owner has 'maintained the area of open space over
155 the years'. Was that with or without the town's knowledge? Again, without a Policy, inappropriate
156 practices and precedents will occur.

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