

TOWN OF SIMSBURY – CULTURE, PARKS, AND RECREATION COMMISSION and OPEN SPACE COMMISSION JOINT MEETING

Subject to Vote of Approval – Special Meeting Minutes – Friday, July 17, 2020 – 4 pages

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 a.m. by Eric Wellman, Chairman of the Open Space Committee via Zoom video conference. Culture, Parks and Recreation Commission members who were present included David Bush, Kelly Kearney, Gerry Wetjen, Rachel Wellman, Sarah Cramer, and Danielle Celli. Open Space Commission members who were present included Eric Wellman, David Bush, Margery Winters, Helen Peterson, Susan Masino, and Tim Walczak. The C. P. & R. Director, Tom Tyburski, Town Manager, Maria Capriola, and Zoning Compliance Officer, Tom Hazel, were also in attendance.

Others in attendance: Dan Biggs of Weston & Sampson

Public Audience:

None.

Presentation and Discussion of Draft Parks and Open Space Master Plan

Mr. Biggs shared that the hope is to take any last comments and roll them into the final draft and then put together the final presentation.

Ms. Peterson commented that she felt that the consulting group had a very good grasp on the fact that this is a citizen driven document and they did a good job of indicating that in their commentary. Ms. Peterson stated that there was reference to an index but the index was not there. She also stated that on page four there was reference to the management plans that the Town had ordered back in 2014-2015, however those documents should be considered outdated and were not acted upon for several reasons. Ms. Peterson also commented that in the document it discusses how important the advisory issue of the C.P.R. Commission is to the Parks and Rec Department as well as to the Board of Selectmen, however, she found no reference to the Open Space Committee and its importance. She believes somewhere in the document it should be recognized that the Open Space Committee must be advisory to the Town departments just as the C.P.R. Commission is to the Parks and Rec Department.

Ms. Masino commented that she has been looking into it and does think there is quite a bit that they can do with volunteers and citizens as long as they have some good guidelines. One specific comment she had was that on page 70, Ethel Walker Woods is not on the map. She also stated that there is a comment in the plan about returning open space pathways to neighborhoods or to adjacent neighbors, however, she doesn't believe anyone suggested that during the process and would like to refer back to comments made at previous meetings as to the value of these little spaces. Ms. Masino also brought up the pump track, stating that she is hesitant to start adding more items to the Town's maintenance roster. One thing she is concerned about is that she did send numerous documents such as manuals, policies, etc and she does not see that in the plan. Mr. Tyburski commented that the appendices were not uploaded to the Town's website, however the email the Committee received a few weeks ago did have a link for the appendices.

Ms. Masino also discussed the carbon programs listed on page 102, stating that there are good carbon programs and not so good carbon programs and that is something that should carefully be considered. There are a couple properties in Town that could be put in a carbon program, such as the corridor that connects the Eastern Wild Way, which would basically bring the Town money for 20 years, so she feels that that would be a valid conversation to have.

Ms. Winters commented that not all neighborhoods have homeowner's associations and doesn't think there is anyway for the Town to have ultimate oversight, so she would feel very reluctant in turning those areas over to the maintenance of a HOA. Ms. Winters also stated that she feels that the document is very good for recreation of our open space but it is not the only purpose of our open space, she is not sure there was enough emphasis on the fact that the citizens in their responses talked about the use of open space for passive recreation.

Mr. Kearney commented relative to the walking paths and the maintenance, stating that well maintained paths lead to greater use, he believes we need to make that a priority, less they become overgrown and underutilized. Mr. Kearney stated that once this final document is adopted, it needs to have structure so that long after we are gone and have moved on, others can follow the plan itself and relate to the structure that was set-up. Mr. Kearney stated that one of the things that concerns him the most is having a document that doesn't get turned into a living breathing plan, one of the things he hopes to walk away with is specific actionable items.

Ms. Masino shared Mr. Kearney's sentiments that this be a living document that is a hub for information.

Mr. Biggs acknowledged the fact that there does need to be a dedicated library for that information, although it may not be appendices as noted, it has been acknowledged that there is a need to have these documents brought forward for others to access them.

Mr. Wellman asked Mr. Biggs if parking was generally something he found that people complained about or if there is some unique opportunity that Simsbury has.

Mr. Biggs stated that there are always complaints of not enough parking so it is a constant balance between the desire for more parking vs recommendation to have better walking/biking access to a park facility or between facilities to quasi to discourage one stop parking and to encourage other uses to be active to get to the park. Mr. Biggs stated that it is a constant struggle on every park plan.

Mr. Wellman stated that if we are going to spend money on parking, he would like to focus on ADA and accessibility. Mr. Wellman shared his sentiments that he appreciates that sprinkled throughout the document is the mention of pollinators, native plants and grasses that require less maintenance, as well as protecting habitats. Pollinators are one of the priorities that have risen for the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Wellman also commented that he was surprised to see what Simsbury spends per capita on parks/open space versus towns we like to compare ourselves to. He stated that this is a testament to Mr. Tyburski and his team and what they do with the limited amount of resources. Mr. Wellman stated that he is going to need the help of the group, along with the BOS to have subsequent conversations on how we fund these things that are priorities.

Mr. Tyburski stated that many neighborhood trails are falling apart and with Covid-19, these trails become even more important as school access paths. He stated that looking forward it is important to address these paths.

Mr. Bush commented that under Belden Forest, Ethel Walker Woods and Onion Mountain, there are recommendations regarding either determining which trails are redundant, which should be abandoned or moved, he stated he would appreciate specific examples or recommendations under Weston & Sampson's expertise so that as funding comes in we would be able to look back on the document and state that it was a specific recommendation and needs funding.

Mr. Bush shared Ms. Masino's sentiments that he is not aware of anybody that asked for a pump track, stating that the Town has enough to maintain as it is and from a liability standpoint that is a large mistake. His standpoint is that that should not be part of the document.

Mr. Tyburski commented that the pump track recommendation came from the focus group meetings and the survey that went out to the Town, although specific locations were not discussed.

Mr. Bush also stated that under Part Ten, Section 1.4.1, maintenance standards are discussed, the more specific we could be the better so that we can use those to request funding.

Mr. Biggs stated that there are “standards” for quality of maintenance but there is a lot of variability on how they would be enacted to their staffing or funding.

Mr. Kearney questioned if those standards are typically included in documents such as this.

Mr. Biggs commented that usually they are a staff document supplement to share with the Town’s staff to be guidance for them. Once it is put in a document and goes out to the public, the expectations are set and we don’t want the towns to struggle or fail with not being able to meet those results.

Ms. Cramer commented that when you look at what our Town is spending compared to other municipalities, what we can do is one thing but we want to know what we could be or should be doing.

Mr. Biggs stated that the one thing he would caution on the numbers comparing other municipalities is that if a municipality were to contract a lot of their work compared to doing it in house, you may see increased costs as a result.

Mr. Tyburski stated that they are operating at a deficit compared to what many of the comparable towns are.

Ms. Celli commented that she was also surprised on the Town’s spending compared to other towns versus how much we use them. She questioned if Memorial Pool and the splash pad were a priority.

Mr. Tyburski stated that Memorial Pool is over 60 years old and the pool mechanics are at the end of their life, along with many other things. The Town will need to make a major decision in the next few years on the viability of that facility, which is why it is high priority, we are looking at either a shut down or renovation.

Mr. Kearney asked if Section 10 - Goals and Action Plan, are prioritized in order of importance. Mr. Biggs stated that the items are not prioritized. Mr. Kearney asked when the document goes to the BOS will the items be prioritized. Mr. Biggs stated that there is a page that gives a prioritization of all of the goals and indicates which of the goals should be started first. Mr. Kearney stated that he would expect two things, a prioritized list of action items and the low hanging fruit from an existing resource standpoint.

Mr. Wellman stated that he looks forward to the partnership with Parks & Rec and being able to guide on some of those recommendations as we head into budget season.

Ms. Masino stated that looking back at the RFP, one of the goals of this was to take care of the things that we have so dealing with any problems that are progressive is a priority and also any actions that will save us money would be a priority.

Mr. Tyburski urged the committees to get him any final comments so the document can be finalized and brought before the BOS

Adjourn

Mr. Bush made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Winters seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Taylor, Commission Clerk