

From: Susan Mazurski May 12, 2009 10:29:04 AM
Subject: Open Space Committee Minutes 05/06/2009 DRAFT
To: SimsburyCT_OpenMin
Cc:

MINUTES

DRAFT

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE Regular Meeting – May 6, 2009

1. Call to Order

Mary Glassman called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. in the Main Meeting Room at the Simsbury Town Hall. Committee members present were John Loomis, Margery Winters, Dunny Barney and Helen Peterson.

2. Public Audience

Regarding the use of the Meadowood Triangle, Susan Masino stated that she believed that the Town purchased this land to be a wildlife corridor. She stated that many people would like to see the Triangle used for different purposes, including farming, grasslands, recreation fields, etc. Ms. Masino stated that the Town went out to RFP for a minimum of one year for farming the land. Through this RFP process, she stated that the Town chose a conventional farmer. Some people have raised concern regarding the use of pesticides. Many diverse groups in Simsbury have been heard regarding this and many other issues.

Ms. Masino stated that she gives the Board of Selectmen a lot of credit that they have now changed their minds regarding using a conventional farmer. She questioned if there were other issues why other farmers were not selected. She stated that she has been in contact with George Hall, who put in his proposal for all 40 acres. He has stated that he has the capacity and would like to farm the Triangle in order to rest some of his land. Mr. Hall currently has organic and non-organic land. She stated that he is knowledgeable regarding pesticides and he would be able to help the Town get organic certification.

Ms. Masino stated that regarding all of the green initiatives in Town and given the goals for local sustainable farming, she would like to see this in Simsbury. She would like to get this issue back on track; she does not want this issue to be shelved.

Regarding the Tree Committee, Diane Nash stated that they had a great turnout for Arbor Day. She thanked the Open Space Committee and the Town

for their purchase of a tree.

Ms. Nash stated that the schools were closed for spring vacation on Arbor Day. Yesterday, Tootin Hills School planted a tree that was purchased through the Tree Committee. She stated that those student collected money for an environmental project; they voted to buy and plant a tree. Ms. Nash stated that Central School had a Green Day last week. Although they did not have the money to buy a tree for Arbor Day, they are saving their money to hopefully buy one next year. Also, the parents at Ethel Walker School donated trees for their campus.

Ms. Nash stated that the Tree Committee has finished the mapping of identifying the trees, although there is still a great deal of work to be done. She stated that four new volunteers have recently joined the Tree Committee.

Mr. Barney made a motion to send out a certification of appreciation to the students of Tootin Hills School. Ms. Winters seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Ms. Glassman thanked Ms. Nash and the students for bringing a lot of attention to what the Town is trying to do.

Regarding the Meadowood Triangle, David Gault stated that there has been a great deal of input already and the Town has a lot of information from the community. He hopes that the Open Space Committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen regarding what should be done with the RFP and what is pending.

Ashley Lane stated that he has grown up in Simsbury and has been associated with farmers all of his life. He knows the farming community. He stated that he is currently a volunteer for George Hall. He feels that the Board of Selectmen were wise in their choice to table their discussions regarding the Meadowood Triangle. Mr. Lane feels that there is still plenty of time; the land could be ready for planting within two weeks of signing a lease.

Mr. Lane stated his concerns regarding any farmer signing a one-year lease. He stated that Mr. Hall wanted to sign a 5-year lease, although he would take less than 5 years. Mr. Lane stated that it will take 3 years for the Town to achieve an organic certification for this land. He stated that many residents voiced their concerns regarding the use of pesticides and that they would like to see a non-chemical farming alternative. He stated that Mr. Hall is an organic farmer. He asked that this Committee make a recommendation that the Board of Selectmen consider an organic option at their next meeting. Mr. Lane stated that it is not too late to plant this land, although they will need to start within the next 2-3 weeks.

3. Review/Adopt minutes of April 1, 2009 Regular Meeting and February 25, 2009 Special Meeting

Several edits were made to the April 1, 2009 minutes.

Mr. Barney made a motion to approve the April 1, 2009 minutes as amended. Ms. Winters seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Several edits were made to the February 25, 2009 minutes.

Mr. Loomis made a motion to approve the February 25, 2009 minutes as amended. Ms. Winters seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

4. Update of Barndoor Triangle

Ms. Glassman stated that when the Town sent out the RFP, they did not distinguish between a conventional or organic farmer. She stated that the Board of Selectmen had discussions regarding the uses for this land because so many people had different views of what this land should be used for. The consensus of the Board of Selectmen was to use the land for farming, but possibly no longer than for one year. She stated that the Town wanted to get crops in the ground for one year because the Board of Selectmen did not have a conversation regarding what should be done long-term. She stated that if the Town decides to go organic, they would need a longer commitment. The Board of Selectmen felt, in this interim period, that the Town should commit to a one growing season lease.

Ms. Glassman stated that there was not any public comments until the Board of Selectmen chose a farmer; this is when the Board decided to table this issue. She stated that they did not want to lock in with a long-term farmer because they did not know what the land would be used for.

Ms. Glassman stated that several policy decisions need to be made: if the Triangle will be used for farming; and what the Town's policy will be for the land, if it will be for organic farming only on the Triangle or for all Town owned land.

Ms. Glassman stated that there is no rush to form a consensus. The Town bought this land as open space. She feels that it is unfair to the farmers who spend time bidding on land; it is important to tell the farmers what kind of farming that the Town is looking for. This is the Town's obligation.

Mr. Beach stated that if the Town would like to have organic farming only on the Triangle, the farmer would need to be certified organic. This means that they cannot use pesticides or synthetic chemicals. He stated that

there is a list of products that cannot have been applied to the land within the past three years. Mr. Beach stated that there are several companies that will certify the land. He stated that the Town will need to keep extensive records for what has been applied to the land. The company will inspect the land as well as the record keeping. Mr. Beach stated that he could have someone from the company come in talk to this Committee at their June meeting. Mr. Beach stated that he has also talked to the Executive Director at NEOFA, who had the same basic definition and same requirements for organic farming. Ms. Glassman asked that Mr. Beach contact NEOFA to see if they could also come to the June meeting.

Mr. Beach stated that the DEP determines which chemicals are safe. Best management practices are also put out by the DEP.

Ms. Glassman stated that some of the chemicals that people were concerned about were allowed by the DEP. She stated that the Town needs to figure out what the best practices are to use. Mr. Beach stated that there needs to be some kind of benchmark established based on the land as to what the criteria is. Then a list can be made that will fit the criteria.

Mr. Beach stated that the nutrient value of the soil needs to be built up. Also the Town needs to use organic products on the land in case they decide to go organic. He stated that the land will need lime applications, 3 tons of lime per acre.

Ms. Winters suggested planting a Buckwheat cover crop with green manure.

Ms. Winters stated that the soils are not adequate for farming right now. If the Town wants to preserve the land for long-term farming, they should consider a field-type planting. She stated that there is a great need for native plants for pollination. If this land could be seeded with a native plant grass mix, this would boost the native pollinators in the area.

Ms. Peterson stated that there is a big range of knowledge necessary to developing policies. Now that there is no deadline, the Town can take the time to have conversations that will bring a consensus, which is necessary to make this meaningful.

Mr. Loomis stated that the first consensus needs to be to replenish the soil. Ms. Glassman stated that the Town will be getting the soil report from the farmer who had been selected through the RFP process. She also asked Mr. Beach to invite someone to the next meeting to discuss organic farming and getting this land ready and what the costs would be to the Town.

Mr. Barney feels that these discussions have gotten very complicated. He stated that the Town has made clear decisions regarding the nature of soils

and protections of its water supplies. The Town purchased the Ethel Walker land, which was purchased with the clear idea that they were protecting the quality of the soils in order to protect the quality of the water. He stated that every plan of development has had this piece of land for farming because it is the highest quality farmland and, although depleted, the highest quality soils. He stated that this land has always been designated as a wildlife corridor and as an agricultural piece. Mr. Barney stated that he feels the policy decision has already been made. He feels that these public policy decisions state that the Town wants clean soil and clean water. He questioned why the Town would want anything other than organic farming on this land or a farmer willing to within three years to have the land certified organic. He stated that the Town needs to stay compatible with the decisions that have already been made. Mr. Barney stated that this should be a policy for all Town owned land. Ms. Glassman stated that they need to get a definition of what organic is and what will be and will not be allowed. She stated that she cannot vote on a policy for organic farming without a definition.

Mr. Barney stated that the Town has just paid for a recertification of the soil on the Town Farm. This has the definition of organic farming soil in it, as well as the land that George Hall rents at the Baker Farm. He stated that there is no prohibition regarding the use of manure; this is a choice made by the farmer. Ms. Glassman stated that raw manure is not a good practice for organic farming. She stated that several people today stated that they would not recommend this. Ms. Winters stated that although the neighbors may not like the smell, manure is a good practice for organic farming.

Ms. Glassman stated that more information was needed before moving forward. She stated that there is a possibility that the Town will be receiving a grant for grasslands. If this happens, this is another reason why the Town should not get into a long-term lease.

Mr. Barney stated that a study was conducted by UCONN which stated that Simsbury has enough tillable acres to feed the Town in an emergency situation. He stated that the 1250 acre tally includes developable land. The Triangle is prime farmland and is critical for food production in Simsbury.

Ms. Glassman stated that there is a consensus on this Committee to have a policy on organic farming for all Town owned land and they should invite people who can speak to them regarding the best practices regarding organic and conventional farming. They also need to get a status of the condition of the soil. Mr. Barney suggested having a special meeting in two weeks. Ms. Glassman agreed to have a special meeting if she receives this information on time.

Julie Meyer stated that this Committee should look at Westerly Rhode Island and what they did regarding grasslands.

Mr. Negrin stated that there are experts that can help the Town determine what the definition of organic farming is. He questioned why the Town would consider anything but organic. Ms. Glassman stated that some farmers do not meet the definition of organic farming, some are conventional farmers.

Mr. Negrin stated that the Town is spending a lot of money on recreational venues. He would like to make sure that the Open Space Committee is still going in the direction that this land be used for farming.

Sue Bednarczyk stated that the Town needs to consider this whole piece of land. She stated that if they do not want to go organic, they should consider wildlife. She stated that the Town needs to be mindful of wildlife.

Julie Meyer stated that she has done a great deal of research on the Meadowood Triangle. She stated that she spoke with someone at the IPM (Integrated Pest Management) Institute at UCONN, who suggested that the Town should have a policy to put any farmer who signs a lease with the Town through an IPM course.

Ms. Glassman thanked everyone for their comments.

5. Town Farm Status

Ms. Glassman stated that Ms. Nash is working with an attorney to draft a lease, which the Town Attorney will review.

Ms. Nash stated that Mr. Walsh did the paperwork regarding the organic certification.

Ms. Glassman stated that some of the land identified in the application was not owned by the Town. She stated that they need to know whether the property owners, whose land was included in the application, have given permission to be certified organic. She stated that the Town would need a copy of the letters allowing permission; the Town cannot file an application on someone else's land without permission.

Ms. Nash stated that the attorney stated that the debts from Friends of Town Farm Dairy are not transferable to the new Board. She stated that the only obstacle is the collateral to the loan. She has been assured that there are no obstacles regarding the new 501C.

In order to move things along quicker, Ms. Glassman stated that the Town could move forward regarding the leasing of the land so that crops could get planted. The leasing of the barn and the other building could be a separate lease.

6. Discussion of Regional Agricultural Commission

Ms. Glassman stated that this Committee discussed building expertise in the Town regarding farming issues; there was conversation about having an Agriculture Commission. The Farmington Valley Collaborative Towns are very interested in building a regional agricultural commission to talk about organic and conventional farming. She stated that the Town of Granby will host a meeting on May 20th at 8 a.m. at their Town Hall. All of the Farmington Valley Towns are very interested in combining expertise. Ms. Glassman urged the Open Space Committee members to attend this meeting.

7. Farm Lease Proposals

Ms. Glassman stated that the Town has been approached by several farmers to lease Town land, including Tulmeadow Farm, Rosedale Farm and Ryan Flower Farm. The Town did not go out to bid for this. These farms have a need to put more of their crops into production. Ms. Glassman distributed a memo from Mr. Sawitzke regarding what each farm is proposing in terms of crop, size and price. Rosedale Farm stated that they would only use low toxicity pesticides. Ms. Glassman stated that this term needs to be defined. Ryan Flower Farm stated that they are certified organic.

Ms. Peterson stated that they first need the definition of organic before anything can be determined.

Mr. Barney made a motion to table this issue until the next meeting. Ms. Winters seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Ms. Peterson made a motion to amend the agenda to include a proposal by the Simsbury Land Trust to discuss trails across Town open space. Mr. Barney seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

8. Presentation by Simsbury Land Trust

Mr. Howard stated that this is a request for access across Town open space for trails. He stated that the Metacomet Trail has been designated as the National New England Scenic Trail. It is now one of nine national trails in the United States. He stated that the Metacomet Trail, which is on the east side of Town along the ridge, is a great resource for the Town. One of the things that the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association is trying to do is to find a way to have an east-west trail from this National New

England Scenic Trail to the Appalachian Trail.

Regarding the west side of Town, Mr. Howard stated that the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association would like access to this trail across Town open space, with the promise that they would maintain the trail. He stated that there has been an easement granted to the Town; this would allow the trail to connect to the McLean Game Refuge. The Game Refuge has designated a place for this east-west trail to go through their property. Mr. Howard stated that part of the request for endorsement across Town open space and this easement would be to get the trail so it would be at the end of Westledge Road.

On the east ridge where the Metacomet Trail is now, through a generous gift that the Simsbury Land Trust recently received from Laird Mortimer, there is the Owen-Mortimer parcel. This is 28 acres of land that abuts Pennwood State Park and extends down to East Weatogue Street. He stated that this would allow access off of the ridge to the center of Town. Mr. Howard stated that they are proposing that the trail, which is off of the Metacomet Trail, come through the Town open space property into the SLT property down to East Weatogue Street.

Mr. Howard stated that this is all in the very early stages; they are trying to get the pieces of this system together. He is hoping that the Open Space Committee will endorse this idea prior to them going before the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Glassman thanked the SLT for all that they do. She stated that this is a great idea, although it would be helpful to have Town staff reports and the exact locations. She stated that this will be placed on the next agenda so that residents will know that this is being discussed.

Mr. Loomis made a motion to endorse the concept of this connectivity and the linking of the Metacomet Trail. Ms. Peterson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

8. Adjourn

Ms. Winters made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:03 p.m. Ms. Peterson seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.