

**OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE – SUBJECT TO APPROVAL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 2, 2015**

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CALL TO ORDER

First Selectman Lisa Heavner called the regular meeting of the open space committee to order at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 2, 2015. The meeting was held in the main meeting room of the Simsbury Town Offices located at 933 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT. In attendance was Ms. Heavner, as well as the following committee members: Helen Peterson, Don Rieger and Ferg Jansen. Staff included Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation Gerard Toner, and Assistant Director of Community Planning and Development Michael Glidden.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

No comments were made in public audience.

REVIEW/ADOPT MINUTES OF AUGUST 5, 2015

There were no changes to the minutes.

DISCUSS CHAPTER 21, FUND FOR LAND AND PRESERVATION ORDINANCE AND OPEN SPACE STEWARDSHIP POLICY

The board of selectmen asked the committee to look into updating and crafting an open space stewardship policy, which includes disposition. There has been feedback from committee members, the public and the town attorney, as well as looking at what other towns have in place. Ms. Heavner said town attorney Robert DeCrescenzo is scheduled to be at the next open space meeting to discuss the issue. There was some discussion on referrals to open space and what is permissible.

Ms. Peterson said the primary function of the existing ordinance, beyond identifying parcels for preservation, is stewardship, which has two parts maintaining the properties physically, and to protect their preservation. She said the open space inventory will help determine some of those issues more precisely. She noted that when looking at the original ordinance the fund account was established “solely” for purchase of open space, acquisition of development rights, etc. She said the original language didn’t talk about stewardship.

Ms. Heavner suggested to include the word “stewardship” and eliminate the word “solely,” but wanted to check if something like that had already been done.

Ms. Peterson wanted to address the issue of how the word “active” was used in the original language. She said the committee needs to understand passive and active recreation. She said it is difficult to reconcile preservation with active recreation.

Mr. Jansen stated the question of whether hiking is active or passive. There was some discussion of including the definition in the ordinance.

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Ms. Peterson said when the town acquired land for ball fields that land was for active recreation. Open space is about preservation. She expressed concerns about putting them together.

Mr. Jansen said the recently updated open space inventory has parcels that are neither active nor passive. He noted a parcel at the corner of Owens Brook and Firetown Road that fits that description.

Ms. Peterson said she understands the difference between passive and active, but when the issue of connectivity for hikers and biker is mentioned she has concerns that there is cross over from the lands being protected to being used actively.

Ms. Heavner said she strongly agrees with the sentiment of Theodore Roosevelt in that in order to preserve the lands we have to invite the public in. But there are some spaces that might be more appropriate for more active, more passive, or no entry at all.

Mr. Rieger thought in one of the documents there was a definition of passive recreation. He noted three kinds of property: conservation oriented, active recreation/parkland, and land that fell to the town through the subdivision process/conservation easements.

Ms. Peterson asked about having a lawyer review the deeds to see how they are protected. Ms. Heavner said that would be a large undertaking and there are cost considerations but it is something to look into to find out if pieces of that can be done. It was noted that the updated open space inventory, completed by intern Adam Hammershoy, contains a copy of the deed to each parcel.

Mr. Jansen said a question that needs to be addressed is what the purpose of selling any parcel is: to add it to the tax rolls, to relieve town of maintenance, and/or to add a housing subdivision.

Ms. Heaver said there has been some discussion of adding wording to rule out a subdivision. Mr. Rieger said the wording by Mr. DeCrescenzo ties the board of selectman's hands about subdivisions and he said there should be some leeway as there may be a case where a single home being built, for example, may be an appropriate use. More work will be done to assure that best practices go into the document, with various feedback and other input. More discussion will take place at the next meeting when Mr. DeCrescenzo is slated to attend.

OPEN SPACE INVENTORY UPDATE

Mr. Toner said the Mr. Hammershoy completed his work of inventorying open space parcels and did an "outstanding" job. Mr. Toner said Mr. Hammershoy went beyond what was expected and the information is a good basis to draw from when making decisions. Mr. Toner also thanked Mr. Rieger's for his help on the project. Mr. Rieger asked for a spreadsheet on the inventory so he can make changes to help with coding.

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Mr. Toner said there was nothing new to report on the Ethel Walker piece.

Mr. Toner discussed the forest management plan for Onion Mountain Park. A proposal went out for a timber harvest of 37 acres at the park and there was one bidder (the same company that did it over 25 years ago). The bidder has done work for the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection as well as the Metropolitan District Commission. The applicant will go before the board of selectman for approval. Mr. Toner said he, Mr. Glidden and the town's consulting forester will closely monitor the work to make sure it is done properly.

Ms. Peterson wondered if certain practices had changed in the intervening years, and she also recalled there was some upset over how some of the work was done. Mr. Toner said he is comfortable with the goals and the practice to create a sustainable healthy forest, but noted that the practice of 'girdling' or 'ringing' was done in the past. He said there are some questions about that process and in this harvest, of some 500 trees, one tree will be girdled. He said the monitoring will also help to prevent any issues with trucks and damage to the perimeter. He said the buffer was expanded to avoid any concerns with adjacent homeowners.

Mr. Rieger asked if the Southern Pine Beetle has been found on Onion Mountain. Mr. Toner thought not, but there was evidence on the Ethel Walker parcel near and including Stratton Brook. He said he would look into the issue.

Mr. Toner also updated the commission on a pond by the library and Metro Bis that has been cleaned up and cleared of overgrowth. He said the site may be used for wedding photography, as well as the library hosting programs there. Metro Bis contributed to the work and will continue to help with maintenance through a memorandum of understanding. The parcel will be formalized and added to the open space inventory. Mr. Toner said the site has some historical significance and is nice to have back in use. Mr. Rieger asked if the "No trespassing" sign will come off the small bridge; it will.

1 OLD BRIDGE ROAD

Ms. Heavner reported that town engineer Jeff Shea is talking with various consultants about landscaping and at the next meeting he will bring a recommendation. She said when it gets to the design phase, there will be input from various groups, such as the volunteers who work on the flower bridge, and go before the board of selectmen.

ADJOURN

Mr. Peterson made a motion to adjourn at 5:06 p.m., which Mr. Jansen seconded. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Stephanie Riefe