

**CALL TO ORDER**

First Selectman Lisa Heavner called the joint meeting of the open space committee; conservation commission/inlands wetlands agency; and culture, parks and recreation commission to order at 6:05 p.m. on Wednesday, June 17, 2015. The meeting was held in the program room of the Simsbury Public Library, 725 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT. In attendance was Ms. Heavner, from open space, as well as the following committee members: Ferg Jansen, Helen Peterson, and Don Rieger. In attendance from conservation: vice chair Darren Cunningham, Don Rieger, Patrick Spaulding, chair Margery Winters, and Jim Morrison. In attendance from parks and recreation: chair David Bush, Kelly Kearney, and Gerard Wetjen. Staff included Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation Gerard Toner; Town Engineer Jeff Shea; and Assistant Town Planner Rachel Platt.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**PUBLIC AUDIENCE**

John Schaefer had comments on the Ethel Walker Woods Master Plan Summary Report draft dated April 2015, and the Forest Management Plan from 2014. He reiterated earlier comments made at a recent open space meeting that the plan lays out too intense a level of development, and has too much emphasis on access and not enough on preservation. He said the town's emphasis should be on preservation of this unique ecosystem. A copy of his comments was given to the meeting clerk.

When discussing Ethel Walker Woods, Jerry Lintner has questions about accessibility.

Ms. Heavner gave a short background as to the genesis of the joint meeting, and commented on the idea of having a member of parks and recreation on the open space committee.

**1 OLD BRIDGE ROAD PROPERTY**

Ms. Blatt gave a presentation on the ideas submitted from the public on the property. She said of the ideas that were submitted there were three that appeared most often: boating, kayak launch, and pavilion. Other suggestions included a kiosk, restroom and drinking fountain, among others. There was also mention of a letter from the Connecticut Audubon Society expressing interest in establishing a Simsbury Audubon Center, location to be determined.

Ms. Heavner said it seemed one area of consensus was that the house was not something anyone wanted to keep.

Food sales on a case by case basis were mentioned, but not having a permanent structure. It was stated that having a permanent toilet was cost prohibitive so bringing in a Port-o-let seemed the better option.

There is the possibility for grant money from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, said Mr. Shea, which would go toward work down there that he is looking into.

Mr. Jansen said whatever is done should be open air and maintenance free if possible, inviting for hikers and river use but not a lot of work.

Ms. Peterson agreed, adding that one of the ideas submitted, for a public beach, seemed impractical for the site. She said Simsbury has an awful lot of facilities and sometimes the town's appetite needs to be restrained when it comes to development.

Mr. Rieger said canoe and kayak access to river should be easy at the location. In addition to the Betty Hudson property there is the contiguous triangular space. He said it's important to treat the whole thing as one parcel. He said there is a need to get rid of invasive plants at the site and to stabilize the bank, and plant native plants to enhance the property and manage the flow of people.

Mr. Wetjen said once the building comes down everyone will get a better sense of the whole property as the vista is shut off by the house.

Ms. Peterson asked after the building is taken down are there restrictions as to what can be put back up again? Mr. Shea and Ms. Heavner said there are restrictions as the land is in a flood zone. There are also timing issues with taking something down and putting something back up.

Mr. Spaulding said he supports an open and scenic look for the site, keeping it simple without big structures.

Ms. Winters said the town would be one hurricane away from removing anything put there; even a pavilion could be washed away. She said it may not be the best planning to put a structure where one was just removed. She suggested a seasonal tent.

Mr. Bush said water access was the priority. He said another primary concern has to be maintenance of the site. Mr. Toner's department is stretched thin as it is and would have another site to maintain. He liked idea of plantings holding the bank in place, but said consideration has to be given to the cost for maintenance. He was supportive of a facility or structure there as shade seems to be what people gravitate toward.

Mr. Morrison said the bank is the most erodible part. He suggested instead of a retaining wall maybe sloping the area back.

Mr. Kearney reiterated the need to consider the cost of ongoing maintenance for any structure that gets put there.

There was some discussion on an open-air permanent pavilion and a seasonal tent and which is more expensive. Mr. Wetjen said the Simsbury Farms Golf Course tent runs \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year to maintain.

Mr. Jansen said rented canoe/kayak storage would not be a best use as the administration of that would be difficult. Other agreed for various reasons with that assessment.

Ms. Heavner mentioned that a marketing study of the town said recreational access to the river was an asset for the town.

At the end of the discussion Mr. Heavner said: "Let the minutes reflect the sense of conservation, and open space, and parks and recreation that taking down the Betty Hudson house is the first appropriate action."

A future step could include asking an architect to make recommendations for what to consider.

**ETHEL WALKER WOODS MASTER PLAN**

Ms. Heavner said the two things that the town knows it is going to do in regards to this property include getting rid of dangerous tree hangers and putting up some signage.

“We’re looking to keep this pretty much the way it is,” said Ms. Heavner of the property, noting there are restrictions on the grant used to purchase the property.

Mike Doherty of Milone & MacBroom made a presentation on the property where he discussed:

- Master plan goals
- Inventory and analysis
- Proposed master plan improvements
- Proposed phase 1 improvements

There was discussion on various topics including access, accessibility for all levels of ability, signage, trail maintenance, invasive plants, and parking. It was also reiterated again to keep in mind maintenance costs and the additional labor falling to the parks and recreation department. There was also some concern about how to gain access for maintenance to the site, and in some instances it seems it will have to be on foot.

Mr. Doherty said it was estimated phase 1 for 2016 would cost \$150,000. Mr. Shea said there is an open space improvement budget and that \$145,000 to \$150,000 is earmarked for Ethel Walker Woods.

There was some discussion on the trail system in place, which was originally for fire equipment access. Limitations on horses and bicycles on the trails were discussed.

Mr. Cunningham said he bikes the area frequently and has not seen anyone bike off trail.

Next steps include Ethel Walker will review the plan, and the town will move forward with some improvements.

Mr. Wetjen asked if outside contractors would be used for some of the work and Mr. Shea said he thinks it can be done with volunteers.

Ms. Heavner said if adopted, the plan would be adopted by the board of selectmen, as that is the adopting board and then the selectmen may form an advisory board for management of the property.

**ADJOURN**

Mr. Rieger made a motion to adjourn at 8 p.m. and Mr. Spaulding seconded, all voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stephanie Riefe