



# Town of Simsbury

933 HOPMEADOW STREET

SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

## **OPEN SPACE STEWARDSHIP AND POLICIES WORK GROUP**

September 6, 2023

4:30 P.M.

Main Meeting Room, Town Hall

## **REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

### Call to Order

1. Adoption of June 7, 2023 Minutes
2. Discuss / follow up re: POCD
3. Fall educational events
4. Invasive Species Discussion
5. Other Business

### Adjournment

## **Open Space Stewardship & Policies Work Group**

**Wednesday, June 7, 2023**

**4:30 PM- Via Zoom Video Conference**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT**

**PRESENT:** Margery Winters and Susan Masino

**ALSO PRESENT:** Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks and Recreation was also in attendance.

### **Call to Order**

Ms. Winters called the meeting to order at 4:32 PM. She amended the agenda to include item (2) Public Audience.

#### **1. Adoption of May 3, 2023 Minutes**

The minutes of the May 3, 2023 Open Space subcommittee workgroup meeting were accepted with the amendment under Homegrown National Park Co-Branding. Ms. Masino clarified that she did not speak to Mr. Tallamy but spoke to the co-founder of Homegrown National Park (name to be determined).

#### **2. Public Audience**

There was no public audience.

#### **3. Discussion on Belden Forest Hemlocks**

Ms. Masino stated she spoke with Dr. Carol Chia who is the person who has the beetles that can be released to eat the adelgid and she agreed there isn't much of an issue and not even enough adelgid to feed her beetles at Belden Forest. She will follow-up to see the mortality rate at Stratton Brook Park.

#### **4. Discussion on Traprock Ridgeline Protection**

Ms. Masino stated for the next meeting they wanted to have little boxes maybe in the POCD to highlight special things, she hasn't written anything yet but maybe that would be a good target for the next meeting. They could also think if there are other topics like the Traprock Ridge or light pollution that would be good as highlight boxes.

#### **5. Discussion on an Ecological Study**

Ms. Masino stated that there is no update, it is just something they need to think about for Capital planning. Mr. Tyburski shared that at some point this summer they should get dates from the Town manager's office regarding the capital planning discussion, he will relay the date to the group when he finds out. Ms. Masino stated before Town Forest Pond is done with the allocated money, she would like an opportunity to speak to Mr. Tyburski to confirm it is the right time of year and that it is dredged enough. Mr.

Tyburski stated that he believes the Engineering Department is looking at doing it in-house with the Public Works staff.

## **6. Discussion of field management at the Triangle**

Ms. Winters shared that a few weeks ago Ms. Heard and member from the pollinator pathway toured the fields with DEEP to get their evaluation of the status of the field. They noticed there was a large amount of oriental bittersweet and mugwort. One of the recommendations was to mow it early after the birding season, August 1<sup>st</sup> was suggested. She stated that this doesn't match up with their meadow mowing policy but this is an invasive plant plot. Ms. Winters also shared that they need to look into how else they can control these invasive plants which also goes back to the fact that the Town needs an invasive plant management policy as well. Ms. Masino commented that this may be the perfect starter project for them to focus on, she would suggest having Mr. Allen come out to get a consult and price for this one specific project. Ms. Winters stated there will be multiple stages of this project including re-seeding. Ms. Masino suggested for the next meeting they attach the service forms that she did before to see if those would be acceptable to move this forward. Ms. Winters also suggested that when they do mow on August 1<sup>st</sup>, the suggestion was that someone walk in front of the mower due to potential box turtles.

## **7. Other Business**

Ms. Masino shared that the third episode of the Beaver Pond Wildlife series at Simsbury Grange will be held June 8<sup>th</sup>, with social hour at 6:00, the movie at 7:00 and then a Q&A with the filmmaker after. Also, this week, you can drop off entries for the Agricultural Fair on Saturday. Ms. Masino stated that they have previously talked about having a joint session on light pollution and invasives as part of the pollinator pathway series. She commented that Greenwich is doing just that. She wrote to Avon because she thought they were doing one but she hasn't heard back yet. Ms. Winters stated that Canton is doing one next week. Ms. Masino suggested that on the next agenda they look to schedule this.

Ms. Masino also wanted to suggest having Simsbury Open Space partner with a couple of other groups to bring the Beaver Pond movie to Cinestudio in Hartford. Ms. Masino also shared that she is co-author on a big report called Wildlands in New England that was just released. Mr. Tyburski shared that Burgers on the Bridge is happening currently on the Flower Bridge.

## **ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Heather Taylor  
Committee Clerk

July 11, 2023

To Mr. McGregor Mr. Chalder, and Ms. Smith -

Please accept these comments about the POCD as part of the public record.

The Open Space Committee will provide additional comments after our next committee meeting. Based on an initial discussion we expect to be providing text boxes and links and some general text that can easily be incorporated.

Thank you for your work and for considering my comments and suggestions below.

Susan Masino  
41 Madison Lane  
West Simsbury

Open Space Committee  
Simsbury, CT

Vice President  
Simsbury Grange #197

Professor of Applied Science  
Trinity College

1. Specific comments:

- a. Please add Simsbury Grange as one of the events/organizations listed. The Grange has been in Simsbury since 1931, we are the caretakers of a classic and historic Grange Hall, and we host the only certified agricultural fair in the Farmington Valley. We are non-partisan and nondenominational. (PS side note - Join us for live jazz on August 2).
- b. A "Plan Implementation Committee" should be explicitly interdisciplinary. Similarly, any Future Land-Use Plan that is more "specific and forward thinking" should incorporate interdisciplinary science as well as a robust and valid assessment of community perspectives.
- c. In the history section highlight our recent 350th (during covid unfortunately)
- d. Consider using the word "values" wherever relevant and in conjunction with the word "ambience." We risk a connotation/interpretation of ambience that suggests mood and appearance over fundamental substance. People near and far love how the town "looks" but a focus on appearance is not the (sole) intent of the POCD or the sentiment of the community. The real focus is/should be values, and these are reflected/manifested in our ambience and community wellbeing (which includes our beauty and strong sense of place).
- e. The bus transportation section should/could be more specific. We cannot have a "livable community" with public transportation unless it is reliable for the public. For example, there is

no service on route 10 South of Rt 185, despite the numbers of people and businesses on that section. There is no service in the evening nor on the weekends. The service is also limited during the week and does not work for most jobs. People don't realize that if they buy a bus pass they can get an emergency ride if needed. A strategic plan and public education re: public transportation should be a priority as a community lifeline that welcomes and supports people.

2. The POCD has comments/quotes from citizens. These are a nice touch but I suggest removing comments unless they reflect/align with other sources (i.e. peer-reviewed research, valid public opinion poll, previous town votes, 2016 phone survey - which I believe was done in a statistically valid way). Otherwise the statements risk distracting from and diluting more valid data / suggestions / comments. Most of the surveys/feedback at meetings do not represent the town as a whole (or at least there is no evidence that they do) and this should be taken into account.

3. Selling or divesting of small pieces of open space has been discussed and examined three (?) times over nearly 20 years, and the town attorney issued an opinion on it. In each case it was rejected after much thoughtful discussion. The POCD is overlooking this work. Some comments:

- To address the main concerns (maintenance) we moved forward on developing policies to reduce or eliminate mowing.
- To address the motivation (these bits of land are "useless") we engaged in discussions regarding their public benefits – wildlife corridors, potential siting for a neighborhood energy or other communal benefits in the future, flood mitigation, areas where kids can play, potential new trail connections, etc.
- The public sentiment on this is clear (both in town and beyond) – not in favor in general.

For these and other reasons, considering disposal of public land which is held in the public trust is a serious matter that must be proven to be in the public good. It should be subject to a public hearing and perhaps a citizen vote. Until recently these basic public trust safeguards were lacking at the state level, resulting in serious problems. As a result, several years ago 85% of the voters supported a constitutional amendment to ensure a public hearing and full disclosure with respect to state land. This is imperative in town as well.

4. Some claims in the POCD are too strong and/or seem to imply no other options.

Too strong:

- a. claiming that we are now in a "new normal" and outlining what that is is too strong. We have no idea if that is true and we may be at an inflection point. The pandemic was just declared "over" on May 11 and in parallel there is a lot of interest and grassroots energy in deep local commitments, less reliance on supply chains - which could mean more local sustainability, more community resilience, less on-line shopping etc. A more accurate framing for the report is we are doing the plan four years early to take stock of what's going on and to acknowledge that things are changing – (and will continue to change). It's true and I assume this is why we're doing the POCD right now.
- b. Similarly, saying that should implement the entire plan (and implying that not doing so is irresponsible) is also too strong, per above. The reality is that things may change further, or more quickly, or change direction. At the same time the town's finances may change, new

disruptions may happen. We need to recognize and make it explicit that having a good plan and being flexible are both part of being a good community.

Options and alternatives could be suggested:

- c. “older people tend to live in households with a smaller number of people.” This is a sad reality that is contributing to a loneliness crisis in our society (and also related to public health spending). Perhaps Simsbury could think of creative ways to help older people connect and cohabitate and, in doing so could even contribute to our stock of naturally affordable housing. There are models of cohousing where several older people will share a home and can even share a caregiver. This could free up houses, benefit everyone involved, and work within our existing infrastructure which is the most immediate, cost-effective, and climate-friendly option by far.
- d. Related to this, the sidebar on adaptive reuse on page 45 should be connected directly to creating affordable housing opportunities. Unless that connection is explicit people may not make that link. We need to identify common sense solutions.

5. Some of the language is negative, and/or too vague to provide any future guidance.

- a. one goal is to *maintain and enhance our sense of place*. If part of that means not harming our existing community ambience and values then this should be expressed more specifically as a “first do no harm” spirit of the POCD. Otherwise “maintain and enhance” may be interpreted and translated very differently by different people, which is not the goal of the POCD.
- b. the page on “Fiscal Conditions” is very hypothetical (and negative, without a clear basis for it). This should be adjusted or removed - not the right frame or mindset for an aspirational POCD.
- c. No one is building one-story buildings in the center of town, we don’t need to “encourage or **require** multi story buildings.”

As final points: we all know that people love the town, love living here, and love to visit. We should be proud of it, and in many ways we are well above other towns.

As a citizen and a scientist I keep coming back to baseline questions (that should be happening at every level). The goal of a POCD should be a well-run town built on common values that is ready to adapt and take care of the community. Simsbury is a leader in so many ways, and willing to listen and adapt.

Meanwhile, the explicit goal of every POCD (in every town) to grow and develop. Who benefits, and what is the end game? Growth is by definition not sustainable - which is why we need to be really strategic. Protecting our community lifelines requires that we prioritize healthy food, clean water, natural ecosystems, etc. Otherwise we are harming everyone.