

## Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Jan. 23, 2023

Time: 7:02 p.m.

Place: Internet/Zoom call hosted by Molly Shea

### **Attendees:**

Members: Andy Brengle Co-Chair, Wayne Castonguay Co-Chair, Andrea Lacroix, Monty Monroe

Associates: Ed Monnelly, Larry Eliot

Staff: Molly Shea, Open Space Manager

### **1. Citizen queries**

None

### **2. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes (November 28, 2022)**

Andy moved to accept the minutes from the November 2022 meeting, seconded by Monty, passed unanimously.

### **3. Chairs report on meeting with Town Manager**

Wayne and Andy met with new Town Manager, Stephen Crane, on January 19. Wayne said that Crane appeared knowledgeable about program and had done some homework. He asked if OSC had an idea of when the Town could have enough open space. Wayne said, yes, and that we have identified the priority parcels targeted for protection. Crane is an advocate of the Community Preservation Act. Crane said he sensed that the citizenry was “change averse.” Spoke of a “cognitive dissonance” between desire for more affordable housing, but in opposition to adding density to current housing stock and in-town residential areas. He discussed 161 Topsfield Road as a worthy affordable housing project and agreed that it had potential as for open space/trails. He is not a big fan of the MBTA Section 3A multi-family zoning requirement, as it applies to town’s like Ipswich, saying it’s a blunt instrument. He said he was surprised that he didn’t hear more about 40B as a concern among townspeople, adding that when he worked in affluent communities like Concord, 40B was treated as kind of a bogey man. Andy said he should attend a Planning Board meeting when the Bruni project is on the agenda, and he might change his mind. Crane said they are actively interviewing candidates for planning director (to replace Ethan Parsons). The new Town Manager resisted any lobbying by OSC members on behalf of the OS program budget or salary increases, saying he doesn’t discuss internal staff business with outside parties. Andy said he lobbied anyway, noting that the program was self-sustaining and the beneficiary of significant volunteer input at considerable cost savings to town, not to mention all the grant and private money leveraging. Wayne invited Crane to tour properties in the spring, and Crane said he would like that.

As an addendum, Molly, noted that the Town Manager’s proposed FY 2024 budget to be presented to the Selectboard and Finance Committee in February would not include the

increases requested except for program expenses for legal and appraisal fees. She said most departments did not receive requested increases.

#### **4. Updates on OSB Parcel List**

Molly said review and cleanup of the list continues. The last official list she could find was from 2015. Some discrepancies remain, but Molly expected to have them corrected in the next month or so. She wants to create a document that we can update easily for future changes that come along. She is also going to update parcel maps to reflect corrections.

#### **5. Updates on Plover Hill Water Tank Cellular Leases**

The Water Department has agreed to allow two leases on the water tank tower. Historically, it has hosted only one tenant cellular provider, AT&T. An RFP was posted in late 2022. AT&T and Verizon have applied for the leases—20 years total, but with 5-year renewals. AT&T has renewed their lease and Verizon will start theirs, hopefully, in the beginning of FY 2024. The two leases will bring in a total of \$74,000 to start, and increase by 3% annually, effectively doubling the cellular income to the OSRWPF. Also, hotel/motel tax income has been rising and is higher than earlier anticipated, at \$58,000 to date (with two quarters left in the fiscal year). The program budgeted \$40,000 income from the hotel/motel tax.

#### **6. Updates on CR Amendment re. 45 Pine Swamp Road and trail connectivity**

Molly reported that an amendment to the conservation restriction (CR) was submitted January 12 to the state Department of Conservation Resources for review. If the state approves the CR amendment, it will come back before the Select Board and Conservation Commission. The Town continues to hold the CR.

Background: Greenbelt acquired Nat Harris's property allowing for partially protected trail from Linebrook Road to Kamon Farm. Greenbelt has been negotiating to get a portion of the Dos Santo property but the CR needs to be amended and does not allow for new trails on that property. However, the old woods road should provide enough access and there is currently a trail connector to the Town's Turkey Hill property.

#### **7. Mass. Open Space Conference**

The Massachusetts Open Space Conference is online and set for February 2, 9, 16 and 23, Molly reported. Anyone can register to attend the sessions, which are usually one hour or hour and a half sessions at lunch time. Monty said he has found the sessions very interesting.

#### **8. Summer Intern**

Molly and Beth were posting for a summer intern. The FY 2024 budget includes a slight increase in stipend for the position. Usually college-age or graduate school level students with interests in environmental science and land protection apply.

#### **9. Committee and Program Goals for 2023**

Wayne asked members what they thought would be good goals for the committee or the program to set for the rest of 2023.

Wayne: update the open space bond list and maps. This would be of benefit to the newer members and Molly, by introducing them to the process of assigning priorities to the various parcels. It's mostly a qualitative exercise; prior attempts to do it scientifically and objectively didn't satisfy everyone. Andrea suggested an offline session to familiarize newer folks.

Molly: the committee could look into overlaying priority bond list parcels to see where water supply zones intersect and flood zones exist and chart out where climate impacts might be greatest.

Andy: it would be interesting for the committee (and program) to try to identify the answer to Stephen Crane's question, "what is enough open space" in the Town. Is there a consensus amount, or would people disagree on how much is enough? Monty said the issue came up at a recent conference, and especially as an answer to opponents who say we can't afford more or already have enough open space. Some folks believe you can never have enough open space, with climate change advancing and the need for carbon sequestration and other ecological benefits. Also, the benefits to property values. Andrea says when she sells real estate, people remark on how beautiful Ipswich is because of the open space.

Wayne: a work plan could be good to work up for 2023.

Monty: the adjacent parcels around 161 Topsfield Road, could be a good OSC project reviewing their potential as areas for trail easements. Some of those parcels are useless to their owners because they can't build on them. The OSC should be proactive with ideas for better uses, which could also help other departments trying to decide how to locate housing.

Molly: the OSC could get involved with the MBTA Section 3A zoning effort. A Town subcommittee is at work on how Ipswich should comply with the requirement. While 3A focuses on increasing housing within half a mile of the train station, it also includes promoting housing on a percentage of land outside the half-mile area. The OSC and program staff could educate themselves on the 3A process in anticipation of weighing in on areas targeted for 3A multi-family zoning where an open space aspect or issue is involved.

Molly: would like to clarify with any incoming planning director how the open space program manager's duties fit into the larger planning department's operation. In other words, what role do we play in the overall Planning Department's goals/objectives? What role do we play in project review? OS program staff seem to get pulled more and more into supporting projects and planning department business outside of their traditional duties.

Wayne: we can continue this conversation at the next meeting, and maybe formalize it. Molly said she would make a list.

Wayne added that he still wants to restore the open space program manager position to its former strength, and fund the position for more than 19 hours per week. Admitting it was his pet peeve, Wayne said, "we've been stuck with that odd structure for so long, I don't want to lose track of the fact that it wasn't anything our committee approved." He said with improving revenue to the program, we had good ammunition for pushing the cause.

## **10. Other Items not Reasonably Anticipated**

Monty informed the committee that the front field at Kamon Farm is still off limits, despite his attempts to discuss with Greenbelt opening it to the public. He is still working on getting collaboration from Greenbelt on this.

## **11. Executive Session**

No Executive Session items to discuss.

## **10. Adjourn**

Next meeting is February 27, 2023

With no further business to discuss, Andrea moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Andy, passed by unanimous vote at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Brengle