

Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: February 28, 2022

Time: 7:05 p.m.

Place: Internet/Zoom call hosted by Molly Shea

Attendees:

Members: Wayne Castonguay Co-Chair, Andrew Brengle Co-Chair, Erin Coates-Connor, Jeff Deconcour, Andrea Lacroix

Associates: Monty Monroe, Ed Monnelly

Staff: Molly Shea, Open Space Manager; Beth O'Connor, Open Space Steward

Guests: Richard Nysten, Jennifer Williams, Nathaniel Pulsifier, Jack Whittier, Elizabeth Massey, Helen Weatherall, Cathy Taylor, John Lichten, Susanna Colloredo, Amy Fanning, Susie Glessner, Ariene Maginn

1. Citizen queries

None

2. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes (December 2021 and January 2022)

Wayne moved to accept the minutes from the December and January meetings, seconded by Andrea, unanimously passed.

3. Virtual Public Meetings

Virtual meeting permissions have been extended until July 15, 2022. We can reassess in May how we want to continue, but we will continue remotely for now and check in again in May.

4. Meeting Recordings

Should OSC institute a policy on recordings? Anyone is welcome to voice support in either direction for or against recording OSC meetings on Zoom. If anyone has any privacy issues or concerns that recordings may stop people from speaking freely, please speak up. Staff don't currently have a place to store the recordings – things need to be moved off the cloud regularly and they get stored in a place that's not accessible to the public and too large for email. Committee will continue to record meetings for now.

5. Discussion on Revised Open Space Plan for 55 Waldingfield Rd (ORA, Inc)

OSC reviewed changes on the map from the revised plan. Portion E is new – the western gardens are now proposed to be held under CR but weren't in previous plans. The original 8.8 acres under CR are no longer included in the proposed 40%. The western paddocks are also listed under the new CR. The eastern paddocks are left out. For the purposes of this discussion, the OSC is referring to the portion of paddocks along the road as the "western paddocks" and the portion to the east where the equestrian field is and behind the front building as the "eastern paddocks."

This discussion was first opened up to questions and comments by OSC members.

After questions about changes to proposed trails, Chip Nysten explained that ORA will maintain a trail open to the public within the bounds of the property. ORA also wants to utilize the neighboring Greenbelt open space, but in case that ever goes away, ORA will maintain a trail within their property along section B on the map. It will connect to the original 8.8 acres in CR. Jennifer Williams from ORA also elaborated on trail map plans. The trail hasn't changed; they have another map with sections set aside separately for horses and pedestrians. This trail along section B will be specifically for pedestrians.

Monty asked the question: where will the public parking be? What will be the arrangements for parking? ORA explained that parking will be in Section C on the southerly portion along the road – there will be 5 spaces with no restrictions. ORA is also considering expanding the parking to include more spaces on weekends. On average, the number of people who park at the current Greenbelt trailhead tends to be 2-4 cars currently, but that parking is along the road and not safe. Expanding parking on weekends would be safer and allow for more access.

Andy asked ORA to elaborate on future plans for the eastern paddock. ORA has stated in the past that they don't plan to build on this part of the property and will keep it open for equestrian use, but it is also not included in the proposed CR. What would the process be if ORA changed their mind in the future and wanted to build on the eastern paddock?

Chip Nysten answered this question. Based on previous feedback, ORA reduced the footprint of developed space from 72,000 to 30,000. The Bylaw controls for anything outside of the phases in the current plans. If there's any building proposed outside of the current phases, then it would need to go back to the Planning Board for approval. If ORA ever wanted to do work on the Eastern Paddock, that would need to go through the Planning Board. In this case, "building" includes all structures, including solar panels. The only exception is a run-in shed for equestrian uses (a 3-sided building, not a barn). It will take a considerable amount of money to restore the existing buildings, and the eastern paddock is being set aside to help finance the costs of restoration, with no plans to develop anything outside of equestrian use.

Andy asked if ORA anticipates any temporary structures on the eastern paddock like tents for holding events. ORA may put up a tent at some point for events but would follow any necessary procedures if they apply.

Wayne thanked ORA for answering our questions. Jeff seconded the thanks, and also asked how ORA plans to maintain the eastern paddock. Jennifer shared the plan to maintain it for

equestrian use – no irrigation, nothing damaging to the soil, just lawn and plant maintenance. some fences will need to be replaced but the plan is for replacing with split-fence to keep in the character of the town.

Erin, Andrea, and Jeff all voiced support with the current plan.

Wayne prefers to stick with the original recommendations of the OSC to prioritize conserving both of the paddocks, not just the western paddock.

Ed asked where the CR would go after the Planning Board makes a determination on it.

Chip Nylen spoke about the CR procedures. It must be conveyed or held. ORA does not wish to convey it, so need to speak to groups about holding it. They would like to go through a process to find the right NGO to hold it. The CR must be signed off by Cons Comm and Board of Selectment, in addition to other signatures for approval. In addition, ORA plans to extend and restate the original 8.8 acre CR to be open access, whereas it is currently private. Most proposed CRs are accepted.

Wayne asked Chip if ORA's preference is that the CR goes to an NGO or the town – is the town an option? Chip stated that they would love to give the CR to the town. We have stewards, staff, and a commitment in the town to support the CR. They will prioritize following the Bylaw and choosing the right group.

Next, the discussion was opened up to questions and comments from the public. Public comments are summarized below:

-Jack Whittier, 35 Waldingfield Road: The area in phase 1B, conservation area C, preserves an area adjacent to a parking lot for 35 vehicles. Why won't ORA put this parking lot in the back of the property, such as behind the barn?

-Elisabeth Massey, 920 Highland St, Hamilton: Elisabeth voiced concerned about what can happen on the land that is not permanently conserved. Once the property becomes commercialized, it becomes hard for the town to stop future development. What happens if ORA sells the property to someone who wants to develop the eastern paddock?

Jennifer and Chip responded to this concern: any future owner would also need to go through the Planning Board to develop that eastern paddock. ORA isn't looking for a leap of faith in their promises, they are looking for the Planning Board to hold them accountable in writing.

Andy added that the eastern paddock is also valuable as conserved land because it is contiguous with the Greenbelt property.

-John Lichten, 7 Waldingfield Road: John drives on Waldingfield Road every day and loves coming around the corner and seeing that open space that we're referring to as eastern paddock. Most of the property can be seen clearly when someone is walking or driving down the road, which is the fundamental issue of those who don't think this is an appropriate property for this project.

-Amy Fanning, 140 Topsfield Road: Section E is confusing and wants clarification: Are people saying this land is already being preserved so it shouldn't count towards the 40%?

Chip answered: There's nothing in the Bylaw that says this area must be preserved. It is not currently under permanent conservation. If it wasn't preserved, then landscape and buildings on this land could be changed in the future.

There were some back-and-forth exchanges between ORA representatives and some members of the public, wherein member(s) of the Friends of Waldingfield voiced their desire to purchase this property and put the entire property into permanent conservation. Andy requested a stop to this exchange, as the OSC meeting is not the correct forum.

Andy checked back in about feedback from OSC members.

Erin elaborated on her support for the current plan. ORA has listened to our feedback and gone back to revise their plan to include everything required by the bylaw, and everything the OSC recommended aside from permanently conserving the eastern paddock. This plan puts 40% new land under CR, has trail access, and protects the western paddock. Although we would like to see the eastern paddock conserved as well, Erin questioned what more the OSC can request of ORA given their adherence to the Bylaw. How do we move forward and decide what to include in a statement to the Planning Board?

Andy suggested we table further discussion at this point. We are missing members Ralph Williams and Katie Hone, who we don't want to leave out of this discussion. He suggested we get their input offline and then return another memo to the Planning Board, outlining the split support and concerns of OSC members. Wayne will brief Ralph and Katie on what happened tonight and get their input for the memo.

6. Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article: Add 39 Mile Lane and 3 Candlewood Rd to Open Space Bond List

Molly shared maps of 2 parcels to add to the Bond List at the spring town meeting as well as the draft warrant article. Wayne also suggested that we write some elaboration for the public that these properties are just being put on the table as important potential conservation land that we may want to conserve in the future, but we are not looking to purchase them now. Warrant articles are currently being reviewed by Town Manager and Town Council.

7. Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article: 161 Topsfield Road update

This is a warrant article from the Director of Planning and the Planning Board. This is a warrant to give authorization to the Select Board to dispose of the property at 161 Topsfield Road by designating the front as affordable housing and the back part as open space. The warrant lets future decisions about this land go to the Select Board. This property would be open space given to the town at no cost. The Director of Planning wants to go to the Fin-Comm meeting with OSC's support of this article.

This project has been on the radar for many years. In the past, two issues have come up: OSC would want to have a say on where the open space/housing line is in the future and prevent this project from being a land-locked parcel. Monty would also like to see future input for managing this land and potentially connecting it to other properties. It might be a good idea for the OSC to re-vote and to walk the land again. We don't want to constrain ourselves on the open space/development line until we have a better idea of how this land can realistically be developed and managed on the affordable housing side.

Monty suggested we put this property on a future meeting agenda and review maps.

Wayne moved that OSC supports this article conceptually and looks forward to working with the town to define the development line and ensure open space protection, seconded by Erin, passed unanimously.

8. Other Items not Reasonably Anticipated

None

9. Executive Session

The committee entered Executive Session at 8:40 p.m. on a motion from Andy to enter Executive Session and then adjourn the meeting from Executive Session, seconded by Andrea, and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Coates-Connor