

Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: September 27, 2021

Time: 7:02 p.m.

Place: Internet/Zoom call hosted by Beth O'Connor

Attendees:

Members: Wayne Castonguay Co-Chair, Andrew Brengle Co-Chair, Katie Hone, Ralph Williams, Andrea Lacroix, Jeff Denoncour, Erin Coates-Connor

Associates: Larry Eliot, Monty Monroe, Ed Monnelly

Staff: Molly Shea, Open Space Manager, Beth O'Connor, Open Space Steward, Kristen Grubbs, Town Planner

Guests: John Harden from Olsen Wilson Architects, Jennifer Williams from ORA, David Santomenna from Trustees, Laurie Paskavitz

1. Citizen queries

None

2. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes (July 2021)

Ralph moved to approve the minutes as written, seconded by Jeff, accepted unanimously.

3. Outreach from Beverly OSC member

Beth received an email from an OSC member from Beverly. The chairperson is trying to connect with other local committees on ideas, successes, etc. Beth can give someone their contact information if someone is willing to reach out. David Alden St. Pierre. Andy and Katie are interested in contacting him.

4. 161 Topsfield Road Town Property

This is a town-owned property taken in tax title a few years ago. There's been recent interest in perusing the parcel with the idea of taking the portion on the frontage (around 20 acres – extends along road and towards Pineswamp Road) for affordable housing and setting the hilltop aside for open space conservation. The Planning Board gave the go-ahead for exploring ideas for how to conserve part of this land. The front third might be developed, with the back third conserved.

5. 55 Waldingfield Road, ORA – Great Estates Preservation Zoning submission

Molly shared the site plans provided by ORA. The existing restriction along the river is 8.8 acres. ORA has proposed 7.7 acres of additional conservation around the perimeter of the property.

ORA submitted a trails and public access plan showing a horseshoe shape around the property, with access that goes back to the river, and a driveway with access to the property.

We reviewed the applicable criteria for evaluating land for conservation along with maps that show how the proposal meets those criteria:

- Land bordering inland wetlands, rivers, streams, and floodplains, especially bordering the Ipswich River
- Forest land, especially if contiguous to other forest land or providing wooded corridors between tracts of forest.
- Land containing some unique natural, cultural, or historical feature: Waldingfield Road is a scenic road
- Land with trail systems or hiking/running/riding access, or land linking such systems.
- Active agricultural land to be kept in production: There are some existing pasture areas on site.

The OSC should develop recommendations before the next Planning Board meeting that take these criteria, maps, and the proposal into account. What areas of property are priorities for the town to have as permanently protected open space? What entity might serve as Grantee of a conservation restriction? Trail layout?

John from Olsen Wilson Architects explained the intentions behind the planning decisions. They tried to conserve as much of the existing property as possible with as little impact into the existing gardens and undeveloped land. They planned phases 2 and 3 for the back of the property, making it contiguous with the Greenbelt CR. They also developed a route from Waldingfield road to the conserved property, so that CR will have permanent protected access in a way that doesn't exist now. The buildings have a 250 ft setback from the two pastures.

Committee members asked clarifying questions about how the layout of the trails worked. Beth and the architects explained how the current trails and proposed trails differed.

Ralph was wondering about the feasibility of ORA's proposal to relocate one of the trails to the back of the property. Jennifer Williams from ORA explained how one of the existing trails that is heavily used is going to be slightly re-routed in one section, with the intention that they connect well with the surrounding trails and the current public access and creating a clearer loop around the property. Ralph highlighted that one of the most important issues is providing permanent trail access along the non-conserved part of the property that connects access between the parking lot and the Julia Bird property. Jennifer explained that with that land in conservation in perpetuity, that access can never be restricted and the gate leading to the Julia Bird property will remain open. Ralph also suggested that OSC needs to walk the proposed trail change to make sure that it is passable, that it's not too steep or too wet. Andy mentioned that the OSC should include input that the correct types of trails that will properly fit the land type and land use.

Beth pointed out how part of ORA's calculated 40% of land to conserve is land that is already in conservation under a Greenbelt CR. The Bylaw defines that previously conserved land cannot be counted in the 40%. [The bylaw in fact is silent on that point, although it cites a 1997

guidance document containing verbiage advising that “...land already protected, such as wetlands, will not count toward the open space to be proposed in the plan.”] She suggested the OSC should therefore decide which part(s) of the property we would recommend adding to conservation if the Planning Board decides more of the acreage would need to be conserved.

Jennifer Williams explained why ORA is not planning to move the pastureland into conservation to meet the 40% requirement. Primarily, Jennifer said it immediately lowers the value of the land and prevents future use of that land for an agricultural tax credit. ORA also worries it will lower the value if they ever sell the land. Additionally, they are paying for the 8.8 acres of CR land, so they would like to include that in their 40% since it is already part of their land that they can't use on a piece of property that is already small. They have no intention to ever put buildings on the pastureland.

What's next: what is our deadline for making a recommendation to the Planning Board? Their next meeting is October 21st. Katie suggested we plan another OSC meeting before that meeting or designate a special sub-group.

Volunteers for special sub-group: Ralph, Katie, Andy. Andy will send an email to coordinate a meeting.

Kristen suggested that the OSC decide where we recommend are the most important parts of the land to conserve if there can't be a conservation restriction on the entire parcel.

Katie proposed we hold our October committee meeting on the 3rd Monday in October so that everyone can agree on the sub-group's proposed recommendations before the Planning Board meeting on the 21st. The sub-group will meet before the next full OSC. If anyone else has comments or recommendations, they can email them to Andy. Molly will send out the maps.

6. Other Items Not Reasonably Anticipated

None.

7. Executive Session

The committee entered Executive Session at 8:59 p.m. on a motion from Erin, seconded by Andrea, and voted unanimously. The committee exited Executive Session at 9:45 p.m.

8. Adjournment

After noting the date of the next meeting as October 18th, the committee voted to adjourn at 9:48 p.m. Ralph moved to adjourn, seconded by Jeff, approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Coates-Connor