

## Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: November 22, 2021

Time: 7:01 p.m.

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

### **Attendees:**

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

Associates: Monty Monroe, Ed Monnelly, Lawrence Eliot

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

### 1. Citizen queries

None

### 2. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes (September & October 2021)

Move to accept from Wayne, seconded by Katie, with edits from Andy. Approved unanimously.

### 3. Follow-up to OSC Recommendation to Planning Board re. 55 Waldingfield Road

Andy summarized the conversation from the Planning Board meeting on 11/10.

Chip Nylen, ORA's attorney, stated that the business owner and OSC were on the same page, but there was some pushback from a Planning Board member based on some differences between our letter and their letter.

Carolyn Britt wanted to know what OSC means by the paddocks being the most valuable part of the property. ORA views the back part of the property abutting the Julia Bird property as the most valuable part.

Molly shared some follow-up conversation with Ethan Parsons, clearing up OSC's position on this issue. If applicable, Molly will share a draft of anything Ethan provides to the Planning Board regarding open space so the OSC can review and confirm that our position is clear.

Wayne suggested we make a statement that's as short, simple, and clear as possible; the paddocks are visible from the road and align with the biggest open space value as a scenic vista.

Jeff added that we should also make the point that grasslands are more significant to conserve than woodlands based on their status in Massachusetts.

Beth also wants to clarify that if the 8.8-acre CR area isn't considered "already protected" by the Planning Board in their interpretation of the Great Estates Bylaw and the 1997 Criteria for Evaluating Open Space, and is determined to be eligible by Planning Board to be counted towards ORA's 40%, then the wetlands that are already protected should not count. This point seems to be a challenge to get across.

Ralph pointed out another confusion to this discussion; the 8.8 acre CR is permanently protected, the Planning Board does not get to decide if it is protected, just if it is eligible to be counted in the Open Space calculation. It may be that the Planning Board are reading the bylaw separately from the 1997 memo. The memo seems to be considered as advisory, not a part of the bylaw. Ralph proposed OSC writes a very short new memo:

We recommend that the planning board protect the existing pastures. If additional land is needed to make up the 40% after the pastures are protected, the OSC would be amenable to other land areas to be included as approved by the Planning Board.

Wayne agreed with Ralph's proposal.

Ed suggested we include further justification for why the paddocks are most important, but Ralph thought that we don't need to continue to justify this in a new letter when the justification is already there. The letter should be as short as possible.

Monty asked about clarification on whether ORA is suggesting they will walk if the town insists the paddocks are conserved. Andy answered that that may be a development tactic. Further, it's not the OSC's job to consider the economics of the situation.

The next Planning Board meeting is December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Katie said she can go in person to make sure we have representation.

Beth suggested that if we leave our letter too short and don't include enough justification, it could be misinterpreted again. She suggested we include a few more details: that we consider the CR that already exists as protected land, so therefore we see the paddocks as the most valuable land to protect. As an advisory board, we advise that the paddocks be prioritized for permanent protection.

Beth asked if the OSC recommendation would stand to protect the paddocks if ORA agreed, but then took protection away from the western buffer area, as well as discontinued the proposed trail access in that same location, understanding that public access and open space set aside areas are separate issues.

Jeff suggested that the scenic value is the priority here over the access, so that prioritizes the paddocks. Access would still exist elsewhere, just not in a loop or on the western side. Katie agreed. However, if they cut off access through the driveway, access would only be through the Julia Bird property.

Molly will make sure that Ethan's summary points are the OSC's exact points. Andy volunteered to be an OSC point person for questions from the Planning Board.

An OSC member will be present to speak at the next Planning Board meeting.

#### 4. OSP FY '23 Budget

Beth updated us on budget issues. FY' 23 starts July 1<sup>st</sup> 2022. Open Space staff reviewed the budget last week. 85% of the budget covers staffing costs, with consists of staff salaries and benefits. The balance of the budget is towards expenses – about \$20K annually. We often under-spend our budget requests. The money is not withdrawn if it is not used – it rolls over. Revenue sources are now down to 2 consistent sources: a hotel/motel tax and the cell tower lease. The cell tower lease is up in 2023.

We have been operating in a technical structural deficit and have yet to run out of budget. We may be able to get a few more years out of the Open Space fund. We will eventually need to restructure our funding.

Chapter 61 Rollback: We had a big contribution when Koseneski rolled back. There was also a small contribution from a property that came out of chapter and changed hands. Beth isn't clear, but the rollback taxes may not come due until the property changes hands.

#### 5. OSC meetings going forward – December meeting date & attendance (Zoom vs. in-person)

In order to do a hybrid meeting, iCam needs to facilitate the meeting. The meeting needs to be in room A as well. Some OSC meetings are in conflict with the Select Board meetings. So a hybrid meeting may not be an option for us. Remote meetings are currently allowed by law until April, but if new legislation gets updated, then remote meetings can stay for longer. There was agreement to keep meetings remote for now, especially with rising cases in Essex County and potential problems with quorums with exposure/illness quarantines.

The December meeting will be December 20<sup>th</sup> at 7pm since December 27<sup>th</sup> is an observed holiday for the Town.

#### 6. Other Items Not Reasonably Anticipated

Monty asked about a Kamon farm update: Beth has not yet asked that question but will be going to the property tomorrow to do the baseline conservation restriction monitoring. Monty asked if Greenbelt could release an update through a newsletter or some other public notice. The land is accessible now but there is no parking available yet. The gates to the property are currently locked. The landowner gave a hunter access to the southern part of the property, but it's a very wet part of the property that isn't great to walk through.

Molly updated on a new CR: at last week's Select Board meeting, Greenbelt was granted a 184-acre CR on the Hezzey property on Argilla. There's no public access.

#### 7. Executive Session

The committee entered Executive Session at 8:19 p.m. on a motion from Ralph to enter Executive Session and then adjourn the meeting from Executive Session, seconded by Katie, and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Coates-Connor