

October 19, 2005

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Present: Dan Sherr Chairman, Patte Doran, Rod Funston, Eileen Hearn, Susan Payne

Guests: Valerie Anderson, Dick Sears First Selectman, Addie Roberts

Chairman Sherr called the meeting to order at 5:10pm.

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the September 21, 2005 meeting of the Open Space Committee as submitted was made by Susan Payne, seconded by Eileen Hearn and passed unanimously.

Update on New Preston - 202 Parcel negotiations: Dan Sherr began by stating that at the end of discussion at last month's Open Space Committee meeting members concluded that this matter should be referred to the newly/soon to be formed town Housing Committee. Since last month's meeting a developer made an offer to Mr. Moore, the developer was proposing to build 30+ active adult housing units. Chris Charles and Kelly Boling made a counter offer which was accepted and should be closing the end of October.

Review of OS parcel vetting process: Susan Payne explained the role that the Open Space Inventory Committee played evaluating 25+ acre parcels as discussed in the Open Space Plan. The object was to have a way of evaluating parcels that was objective. The following was the point system assigned for criteria evaluation:

1. Size (quality of size rather than mass/small parcel could be critical) 1 point per acre
2. Agricultural (cleared, open farmland, rural character) 0-50 points
3. Natural state (unbuilt, undeveloped) meadow, field, woodlands mosaic 0-50 points
4. All water resources (wetlands, streams/rivers, lakes, swamps, vernal pools) 0-50 points
5. Habitats (flora and fauna) 0-50 points
6. Cultural (archaeological, historic) 0-50 points
7. Aesthetics (scenic/view sheds/ridgelines et.al.) 0-50 points
8. Contiguity to existing permanently preserved open space 0-50 points

A maximum of 400 points could be accumulated; the following is point totals for four farmland parcels: Potter 255 points, Whitehead 222 points, Ferrence 170 points and Larson 277 points. Ms. Payne went on to say that the Open Space Inventory Committee did not name properties, but did create a map showing desirable open space parcels. Susan Payne and Patte Doran (who were members of the Open Space Inventory Committee) along with Dan Sherr went through the criteria and evaluated the Moore property on Route 202:

1. Size 50 points
2. Agricultural 5 points
3. Natural State 20 points
4. All water resources 50 points
5. Habitats 40 points
6. Cultural 5 points
7. Aesthetics 40 points
8. Contiguity 0 points

Total 210 points

*Please be reminded that this was just an exercise and not official evaluation!

There was continued discussion about the evaluation process and Patte Doran expressed the view that a parcel may not be desirable for open space but could be for housing. Addie Roberts agreed that the town's Housing Committee should come up with its own criteria for parcels that open space qualities are not paramount. Patte and Addie both felt that the Housing Committee could be alerted to prospective properties with open space as a side. Patte Doran felt that the term "affordable housing" has become blurred with emotional baggage. She feels Washington needs a range of housing options to maintain its rural character. Addie Roberts commented that this is an evolving process which people feel is better handled from within the town it self as opposed to outside pressures. Valerie Anderson suggested that the ordinance creating the town's Housing Committee be amended so the town could be a land owner. Dan Sherr will have more discussion on the evaluation process on a future agenda.

Update on follow up with Planning Commission - next steps: Dan Sherr has spoken with Addie Roberts, Chris Charles, Sarah Gager and Bill Fairbairn as a follow up to his visit to the Planning Commission. Dan feels there has been a change in the point of view/ methodology in the commission over the last several years. Addie Roberts added that the minutes from the October Planning Commission meeting reflect the Planning Commission's role in the acquisition of open space. There was a lengthy discussion about how the proposed tax relief for open space could benefit the "land rich", less financially well off townspeople, which would help maintain the quality of small town life. PA 490 has a life of its own which doesn't mean permanent protection. Valerie Anderson asked about providing both permanent and non permanent PA 490 for open space with different degrees of tax relief. Ms. Anderson also suggested making an inventory of permanently preserved open space; we may have more than we know. Dan Sherr ended the discussion by asking two questions 1) what will the tax relief for open space do to the cost of taxes. 2) What is the long range cost of open space?

Committee revisit of PA 490 Open Space: The committee needs to know if they push forward with the proposed tax relief for open space. Dan circulated a hand out on Public Act 490 - The Basics for members to read.

Meeting adjourned at 6:35pm.

Next scheduled meeting of the Open Space Committee is November 16, 2005 at 5:00pm.

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L Osborne, Secretary