

February 16, 2005

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Present: Dan Sherr, Chairman, Patti Doran, Jack Field, Eileen Hearn Diane Williams, Phil Markert, Charles LaMuniere, Susan Payne, Joann Caldara, Chick Treadway

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the January 19, 2005 meeting with the following correction on page (2) line (13) 1,500 acres should replace 15,000, acres was made by Susan Payne, seconded by Patti Doran and passed unanimously.

Review of Open Space article for the Town Times: Members received copies of the article Dan Sherr submitted for publication in the next issue of the Town Times. Dan plucked key information from the 2003 Town Plan of Conservation and Development. The information submitted covered selection of open space parcels and funding.

Discussion of the OSC proposal to the First Selectman for inclusion in the FY05-06 budget: Dan is looking toward submitting recommendations to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance, he feels three items need to be included in the 05/06 budget. These items need to be worked through by the Open Space Committee, then Dan needs to bring them before the Conservation Commission for approval, the Open Space Committee is a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission. The three items include establishment of the Open Space Committee, \$150,000 for funding for 05/06 budget year and tax abatement. First Dan wants to be sure of the establishment of the Open Space Committee as a "standing committee". Dan wants this clear from both a technical and legal stand point. Susan Payne stated that the establishment of an Open Space Committee was passed by the commission Chairs. Pam Osborne, secretary will research minutes and forward information to Dan. Secondly Dan asked Jack Field about recommending to the Board of Finance that \$150,000 be included in the 05/06 fiscal year budget to be put into the land acquisition fund. Jack Field began by stating that when you earmark money it needs to have a home. You can make a budget request which will then be held in a town fund. Jack went on to state that when the Open Space Fund was established it was to receive funds from the public fees-in-lieu, donations from the public etc. Jack explained the difference in the General Fund and the Non-recurring Capital Fund. Susan Payne stated that it's clear the Open Space Fund should be put in the non-recurring capital fund. The monies would not be used for the purchase of small parcels but saved up for a large purchase. Phil Markert interjected that there is a need to recognize the funds are set aside but it's not up to the Open Space Committee to say where the money is stored. Lastly Dan would like to present a plan for annual tax abatement for property owners who put permanent protect on their parcels. Charles LaMuniere asked about land that is already under conservation easement. Dan Sherr answered that these parcels will need to be picked up by the new proposal. Patti Doran stated that she assumes this abatement is to discourage people from developing their land. She questioned how this will work on property that is now farmed and is put on the market? Chick Treadway stated that the land can be put under conservation easement leaving a building envelope. Dan Sherr continued the discussion by stating that he wants to create understanding with the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance what the implications of the tax abatement are going to be, the tax abatement regulation needs to be written and approved at a Town Meeting. A subcommittee comprised of Dan Sherr, Jack Field and Chick Treadway will be working on wording for the tax abatement regulation at My Chef Saturday February 19th at 8:00am. Jack Field added that there are two unknowns; first what amount of abatement will you give landowners and secondly how much money are you talking about as a whole. You don't want to go with 490 for Open Space because that is only temporary you want permanent preservation from development as part of the criteria. Charles LaMuniere stated that you have to be clear with the public about the implications and probable tax increase. Phil Markert added that perhaps you could put an annual limit on the tax abatement. It was agreed that the

Assessor needs to work with the Open Space Committee on the abatement issue. Lengthy discussion ensued. The goal is to add 10% more open space by the year 2015. Questions arose such as finding a home for the easements if private land trusts don't want them, can the town refuse an easement, the need for criteria when accepting an easement etc. Susan Payne reminded members that there is a lot of information available, don't reinvent the wheel, she offered information from the Town of Greenwich which has tax abatement for permanently preserved open space and she suggested they contact Carlos Canal. Charles LaMunier will also see what information he can find from the Town of Kent. Dan Sherr will have an outline ready to present to the Conservation Commission at its March meeting.

Sub-Committee Action Plans: Dan Sherr would like to invite HVA and Planimetrics to do presentations for the Open Space Committee. Dan would like HVA to help members with identifying land to qualify for Open Space status and create a basis for desirability for preservation. He would like to ask Planimetrics to do a build out of Washington to show what could happen with development in town. For these presentations he would like to invite the housing diversity, planning and other land use commission/committee members. Dan would also like to create a data base for Open Space grant programs. Lastly he wants to have an Open Space communication program; he will circulate a list of groups and would like members to come up with a dialogue for addressing these groups.

Meeting adjourned at 6:46pm.

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

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L Osborne, Secretary