

February 8, 2007

Open Space Committee

Present: Patte Doran, Charles LaMuniere, Susan Payne, Joann Caldara, Phil Dutton, Diane Dupuis

Susan Payne called the meeting to order at 5:10pm.

Membership

Introduce new: Susan Payne introduced new member Phil Dutton.

Renew commitment for 2007: Pam Osborne will email members to see where interest of membership stands.

Review TPOCD

Chapter 3 "Preserve Rural Character": Members has been asked to review this information for discussion.

Strategies Summary: Susan Payne referred to Chapter 3, page 3-20, section B Open Space, of the 2003 Plan of Conservation & Development. Ms. Payne noted that the following strategies have been accomplished: 1. Establishment of an Open Space Committee, 2. Adopt Conservation's Open Space Plan goal and actions 3. Development of evaluation tools for Town acquisitions based on priorities and criteria, 4. Establishment of an open space fund for Open Space and Land Acquisition. To be done is: 5. Prepare, implement and regularly update open space action plan. Susan had at hand a map with all permanently protected open space for the Town of Washington which she calculated was up to 24% as of December 2006. She went on to state that publishing a report on the status of permanently preserved open space either in the Annual Report or Town Newsletter would be a good idea.

Patte Doran questioned if the requirements for PA-490 have become more stringent and if there was a possibility of losing land which is now in PA-490 status. Phil Dutton answered that he believes it is still feasible for the tax advantage to seek PA-490 status for farm and forest land.

Members began discussing tax abatement for permanently preserved open space, Chick Treadway and Dan Sherr worked on this last year. Charles LaMuniere recalled discussion at a Selectman's meeting and there being opposition because it favors property owners with large parcels of land. Patte Doran asked if a property owner puts a conservation easement on their land, does that land have to come off of PA-490 status. Patte will investigate in the Assessors office. Mr. LaMuniere added that you would have to allow people who already have permanent easements on their property the tax benefit, which when figured would amount to \$125,000.00 in tax abatement. There was discussion on the management/monitoring of the Town owned easements. Susan Payne noted that the Conservation Commission monitors the Towns easements and set asides at the present time. Private land trusts such as Steep Rock and Weantinoge have monitoring programs in place as well for their own properties. Patte Doran felt that development of criteria was important, but also noted that small pieces could be important too. Susan Payne agreed that criteria was a good idea but you would need to look at parcels on a case by case basis. Phil Dutton inquired about what the monitoring duties were. Mr. LaMuniere answered that you look for clear cutting, dumping etc. it differs with each easement, usually the goal is to preserve the characteristic of the parcel.

Set Goals for 2007: Members discussed several goals for 2007 which included revisiting tax abatement for permanently preserved open space, published report on open space protection and investigating

available parcels for open space preservation. Patte Doran felt that the Open Space Committee could do the leg work for possible open space parcels, such as rating and criteria. This was done several years ago on parcels of 25+ acres in Washington. Members discussed the problem of not identifying parcels by owners name and the sensitivity that needs to be maintained when investigating properties. Two properties that are on the market, that members discussed were the Larsen Farm on West Shore Road (which is 110+ acres) and the property on the northern end of Macricostas Preserve.

Members went on to talk about the Marbledale area and the need for preservation of green space. Reference was made to the center of Kent's "village zone" and the possibility of having a limitation on road widening (of Route 202), do some tree planting and preservation of historical structures to enhance the Marbledale area and perhaps encourage a more thriving business district.

There was continued discussion on open space preservation to conserve/control natural resources, bridging corridors of open space and preservation of river corridors.

At the next meeting members will target properties and evaluate their potential, discuss the Open Space Fund's funding, Charles LaMunier will contact Dan Sherr and Chick Treadway about tax abatement, Susan Payne will work on an article for the Town's newsletter about permanently preserved open space in Washington and Patte Doran will check on the question about easements and PA-490 land.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30pm.

Next scheduled meeting of the Open Space Committee is March 8, 2007 at 5:00pm.

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L. Osborne, Secretary