

April 10, 2008

Open Space Committee

Present: Chairperson Susan Payne, Phil Dutton, Diane Dupuis, Ric Sonder, Joann Caldara, Charles LaMuniere, Phil Markert, Patte Doran

Guests: Mark Lyon, Kelly Boling

Susan Payne, Chairperson called the meeting to order at 4:35pm.

Susan Payne introduced Mark Lyon, First Selectman. Mr. Lyon was asked to come to the Conservation Commission to discuss the Commissions Acquisition for Open Space Fund. Ms. Payne said that she estimated the fund to be around \$500,000. Mr. Lyon said the fund has been discussed by the current Board of Selectmen through the budget process. Mr. Lyon stated that the fund currently has \$502,000 in it and the budget allows another \$150,000 to be added to that. The budget is also allowing \$50,000 to be added to the Housing Fund that is now \$178,000. Mr. Lyon is asking if the Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee have a sense of what they would like to do with this money. He asked if there was a plan to spend this in the not so distant future or if it was being saved and accumulated for something. The \$200,000 is approximately 20% of the goal of a total of \$1,000,000 a year in the capital budget. He asked if the Conservation Commission/Open Space Committee had a goal other than preserving open space with accumulative \$650,000. Mr. Lyon said the Board of Selectmen were questioning if there is an overall approach of the Open Space Committee and is there something out there of interest or should it be funded indefinitely or will the funds be used. Mr. Lyon said that his personal interest would be to see some sort of collaboration of Open Space and Housing. This could result in low impact use of the land and also provide a need. Ms. Payne said that the Committee does have criteria in evaluating parcels of land. She stated that if the right parcel came along she feels there could be collaboration between Housing and Open Space. The Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee is thinking along those lines and maintain an awareness of what comes on the market and if it is something they could present to the Board of Selectmen. Joann Caldara is keeping track of what is on the market. Ms. Payne said that the ordinance clearly states the goal is preserve open space and that up to \$6,000 can be spent on an appraisal and due diligence, etc. Mr. Markert pointed out that the Committee has had interest in a couple of properties and that the interest never progressed. One of these properties, he felt, did have the possibility of recreation, housing, and open space. The frustration is not being able to move on something because of the funding process. Mr. Markert said that at this time some land owner may need the funds and will approach the Committee if they know the money is there. Mr. Lyon said that it has to go through the Town of Washington's process and suggested that it would be a good idea to get most of the initial work done before a town meeting.

The Board of Selectmen feels that if the public knew the money was available what the Committee was looking for someone would step up. Ms. Doran stated that criteria were developed to judge parcels and feels that they are too fragmented. Her suggestion is to have mini regions and have criteria based on this. The parcel will then be known as an area that could meet certain needs such as housing or open space or both. Mr. Markert said that the only thing that the criterion can not include is whether or not the property is available and that the offer is opportunistic. Ms. Payne said that the criteria are being established so that there is a framework in which C.C. and O.S. can make a decision. Mr. Boling talked about the C.C. discussion about soliciting proposals. People could be asked and someone may be more likely to offer it to the town. The C.C. could look at the parcel and determine which would be the best value to the tax payers and bring it to the town meeting. Ms. Dupuis stated that she is afraid that this is going to get very competitive and create problems with the people that are offering their land. Mr. Boling believes that if

C.C. sets out clear criteria that a decision could be made objectively and presented to the town. Ms. Payne said that C.C. and O.S. want to be proactive and be able to make a suggestion to the town. Ms. Caldara asked if Housing is able to identify a parcel of interest that may have criteria that the C.C. and O.S. are interested in and then they could collaborate. Ms. Payne said that she would ask Wayne Hileman of Housing.

. Ms. Payne summarized that it is clear that the Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee are very interested in collaborating with Housing and that the goal will be to find something and move forward with it. She stated that the good news is that the continuation of the open space fund is perpetual and can be not withstanding from time to time the fund may be unfunded. Mr. Lyon stated that at this point in time there is not any consideration of not funding in the future. He expressed that there is sufficient amount of money that it is time to do something with it. Ms. Payne suggested that counsel be advised to interpret the percentage of the land, if bought in collaboration with Housing is to be allotted for conservation. Ms. Doran brought up the concern of following the exact wording of the mission statement. Mr. Markert said that the wording may need to be amended. Mr. Dutton said that in previous preservation projects people were upset because housing was not included. He received phone calls from people that thought it was confusing to be doing open space with housing with open space that cannot be walked on. He supports the idea of collaboration but thinks it adds another layer of confusion and will slow down the process.

Kelly Boling, Mark Lyon leave 5:15p.m.

Open Space Preservation Possibilities:

Ms. Payne asked Ms. Caldara if any parcels of interest have come on the market. Ms. Caldera said the collaboration would add a whole layer to the process. Ms. Payne said that they would have to find a willing seller to work with that time frame. Mr. LaMunier said that he has learned that it is hard to consider an application until there has been a site visit. The Open Space Committee discusses the available parcels. Ms. Caldera asked if the land is bought does it have to go through the procedures with Housing and Zoning. Ms. Payne said that C.C./O.S. would be buying the property. Ms. Caldera said that the collaboration would put produce time constraints on the purchase of the land that Open Space is interested in. Ms. Payne said that maybe the money should just be considered for property mainly on conservation/open space criteria. Mr. Markert suggested that a method would be to divide the land into 2 pieces with Housing buying one piece and Conservation/Open Space buying the other.

Ms. Caldera leaves 5:45p.m.

Ms. Doran said that there were three areas that she would like to bring to the attention of the Committee. The first is the McGoogle land, 31.36 acres. Ms. Doran gave an example as to how it could work if Housing developed a large a portion and maybe they would buy it and collaborate with Open Space and conserve a large portion. She also stated that there was a parcel on Nettleton Hollow of 105+ acres of unspoiled farmland. She asked what would be the criteria that the land would need to have if they were to approach Open Space. Mr. Dutton questioned how if the price would disqualify a parcel of land. Ms. Payne showed a map from Steep Rock that shows parcels. Mr. Dutton suggested that the Committee have a copy of that map and it would be useful. Ms. Payne suggested that Tim Abbott from the Greenway Project may be able to produce a more up to date parcel map for the Committee. Mr. Sonder suggested that it could already be on a disk. Ms. Payne said that she would check into the cost and availability.

Ms. Payne said that the Committee needs to come to some direction as to what they can bring to The Board of Selectmen. They need to figure if the collaboration is something they want to explore. Ms. Doran said that maybe it would help to modify the Conservation Commission/Open Space ordinance. Ms.

Payne and Ms. Dupuis said they were against that. Ms. Payne suggested that the Committee take one meeting to discuss collaboration. Mr. Markert recommended the possibility of presenting 8 possible properties that more or less have the criteria the Committee is looking for and discuss whether or not they are prepared to make a recommendation on one, maybe they are waiting for the price to come down and do not want to make the decision at this time.

Mr. Markert said it would be helpful to have a piece of paper that has all the available properties and compare them before they can make a recommendation the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Payne Agrees. Ms. Payne offered to ask George Blake for a larger map with plots. Mr. Sonder suggested getting a map from the Assessor's office. Ms. Payne said that she would look into it. Mr. Sonder stated that the money cannot be spent on anything else. Ms. Payne asked if the Committee invests town money in land, does it need to be visible for the public.

Minutes:

Ms. Payne suggested deferring the consideration for the Minutes until next meeting.

Charles LaMuniere leaves 6:05 p.m.

Motion: Susan Payne made a motion to adjourn; Diane Dupuis seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Susan Payne adjourned meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Submitted subject to approval,

Shelley White, Land Use Clerk