

April 20, 2005

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Present: Patte Doran, Eileen Hearn, Phil Markert, Susan Payne, Joann Caldara, Chick Treadway

Acting Chairman Chick Treadway called the meeting to order at 5:05pm.

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the March 16, 2005 meeting was made by Susan Payne, seconded by Patte Doran and passed unanimously.

Discussion of the proposed Washington Rural Character Preservation (Tax Relief) Ordinance. Dan Sherr prepared a handout entitled "OS Tax Relief Sub-committee 041605" which was distributed to members. This handout was the information Dan Sherr submitted to the Board of Finance. It included information about proposed Open Space Tax Relief, property eligibility for the tax relief and the estimated revenue impact. The proposed "Washington Rural Character Preservation Ordinance" is to provide tax relief to Washington property owners who place permanent conservation easements on properties meeting defined criteria, the eligibility for these properties is: in the Villages properties over 3 acres and in other areas properties over 10 acres, the relief is based on assessment at 25% of "rear acreage" rate and only available on "developable/buildable property". Currently 7562.6 acres are covered by PA-490 in Washington. Steep Rock Association holds 1467 acres in easements, 857 under the towns PA-490. Large properties and properties under 10 acres not already in PA-490 adds up to 253 acres. If you include Steep Rocks annual addition of conservation easements of 175 acres the total "worst case" for year one would be 428 acres at \$112 per acres the total impact of the tax relief is \$48,000 for year one. Members felt these estimates were very reasonable. Joann Caldara gave members copies of an article from the Hartford Courant entitled "The Open Space Scam".

Key Selectman, Board of Finance and Town meeting dates. Chick Treadway gave members the following list of meeting dates and encouraged members to attend if they could.

May 5th at 7:30pm Board of Finance Budget Hearing

May 17th at 7:30pm Town Meeting

Board of Selectman meet every other Thursday (they are meeting tomorrow April 21st) check their agenda for discussion of the Open Space issue.

Chick shared with member's information on two proposed bills that Congressman Andrew Roraback spoke about. The first bill is increasing the state conveyance tax with the revenue going to open space, farm and land preservation. The second bill would provide 10,000,000 annually to purchase farms, also eliminating the need to wait for approval for bonding.

Review the application of the evaluation criteria to Potter Farm Property. Members were given an Evaluation of the Potter Farm. Susan Payne explained the point system and criteria for parcel evaluation. This evaluation system was used by the Open Space Inventory Subcommittee for it's evaluation of 25+ parcels.

Application of the evaluation criteria too the Dibble Property.Members gave the following evaluation for the Dibble Property:

1- Size 50 acres

2-Agriculture 25
3-Natural state 50
4-All water resources 0
5-Habitats 20
6-Cultural 35
7-Aesthetics 50
8-Contiguity to existing permanently protected open space 25
Total Points 255

In describing the Dibble property as a "gateway" to Washington members began discussing the Route 202 corridor, which lead to discussion on the growth in New Milford and potential for increased traffic on Route 202. Members discussed the pros and cons of commercial and residential development and a need for protection beyond the boarder of Washington. Members would like to see different groups doing parallel work i.e. land trusts combining their efforts.

Members also discussed townspeople's feelings about affordable housing and open space conflicting with each other. It has always been made clear that affordable housing and open space are working together.

Review of Homework. This topic was tabled until next month's meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:20pm.

Next scheduled meeting of the Open Space Committee is May 18, 2005 at 5:00pm.

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L. Osborne, Secretary