

July 20, 2005

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Present: Dan Sherr Chairman, Patte Doran, Eileen Hearn, Charles LaMuniere, Joann Caldara

Guest: Addy Roberts

Dan Sherr, Chairman called the meeting to order at 5:05pm.

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the May 18, 2005 minutes was made by Patte Doran, seconded by Eileen Hearn and passed unanimously.

Dan Sherr started off the meeting by informing members that the Open Space Committee is on track to meet the goal of permanently preserved Open Space for this year. Washington has 25,000 acres. The Open Space Committee is committed to increasing the permanently protected open space to 20% by the year 2015. This would mean an increase of 250 per year to reach their goal.

Mr. Sherr also mentioned that at the August meeting Susan Payne will be discussing properties north of Meeker Swamp and the former Dibble property.

Tax Relief Ordinance: Dan has been working toward getting tax relief for property owners who give permanent easements on their properties; originally he was proposing an ordinance which would give tax relief for permanently eased property. There is enabling state legislation which permits towns to give tax relief for open space. This legislation states that the permanently protected open space has to be in the possession of the municipality. Atty. Federer researched for Dan could the definition of "municipality" include Steep Rock Association, unfortunately they do not qualify and it is not feasible to transfer the properties from Steep Rock to the Town. Atty. Federer suggested looking at PA 490 for open space with a requirement that the open space be permanently preserved. It's the understanding of members that the town is allowed to add the requirement of the PA 490 for open space be permanently restricted. Dan went on to explain how the Town of New Milford handles PA 490 for Open Space. The applicant has to prove to the Planning Commission that the land proposed for PA 490 is considered open space under the Town Plan of Conservation and Development, then they go on to the Town Council for approval and finally to the tax assessor who gives the new valuation. New Milford follows the State mandated process but does not have the requirement of the open space being permanent. Dan will be meeting with Atty. David Miles on Friday. Patte Doran stated that the key is permanence and questioned who would do the oversight. There was discussion on the degree of tax relief given open space, establishing criteria and size requirements. Dan went on to say the first step is to get tax relief for the easements already held by Steep Rock, Weantinoge and the Town. Dan's goal is to have the wording for the ordinance done for the August meeting; he has been keeping Steep Rock Association informed along the way.

The Depot Study: Members were given three hand outs by Dan Sherr. They were a Boundary Map, a Depot Study Option and a sheet with consolidated information on the survey results and recommendations. Dan Sherr walked members through the various future scenarios for the depot, these included realignment of River Road closer to the Shepaug River, expansion of the Washington Art Association with housing along Canoe Brook and a street that wrapped around the Town Hall, a foot bridge from River Road to the school property and a community in the old town garage area etc. Addy Roberts explained that there will be many drafts; this is an opportunity to give the Town choices. Charles LaMuniere added you can not control change but this can help direct change. Charles was still concerned about parking. The planners have assured townspeople that the parking will be there.

Dan asked Charles LaMunier to speak about the possibility of doing an Annual Report on the State of the Environment; this would be done through the Washington Environmental Council (WEC). The report could document wetland and water shed issues, invasive plants, changes to open space, housing density, runoff, legislation etc. You would be able to see changes and after five years see what is happening in Town. The document would be simple, pragmatic and give indicators for the town. It will be a benchmark. There is a lot of information that needs to be put together, a lot of which is already available. There will need to be a paid editor to put the final yearly product together.

Meeting adjourned at 7:05pm.

Next scheduled meeting of the Open Space Committee is August 3, 2005 at 5:00pm.

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L. Osborne, Secretary