

September 15, 2004

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE Present: Patti Doran, Rod Funston, Phil Markert, Susan Payne, Dan Sherr, Diane Williams

Guests: Carlos Canal, Chris Charles, Press

Chairman Dan Sherr called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the July 21, 2004 meeting was made by Susan Payne, seconded by Diane Williams and passed unanimously.

MOTION: to accept the minutes of the August 18, 2004 meeting was made by Susan Payne, seconded by Diane Williams and passed unanimously.

The meeting began with the introduction of Carlos Canal from The Steep Rock Association. Mr. Canal is on Steep Rock's newly created Farmland Task Force which will work to preserve working farms and farmland in Washington. The Farmland Task Force is coordinating information using the Natural Resource Inventory Report and The Town Plan of Conservation and Development and will work in close coordination with the Open Space Committee. They are looking into fundraising which includes opportunities at the federal and state levels. This is a very competitive process and the farmer's informational package needs to be ready to go. At the town level Mr. Canal suggested that authority needs to be given to the Selectman to act, at present proposals need to go to a Town Meeting for a vote. They are forming an advisory group which includes farmers. Patti Doran asked about forming a consortium with other towns to preserve farmland. Susan Payne interjected that Weantinoge Heritage has formed a coalition of land trusts in the northeast. Mr. Canal went on to state that the problem is that the next generation in farming is not stepping up; you have an aging farmer population using the farmland as a nest egg. Dan Sherr asked about out of town farmers farming in Washington. Mr. Canal stated that there are 28 farmers listed with the assessor's office and not all names are familiar to him. There are 2300 acres of active farmland in Washington, 800 acres are owned by farmers and 1500 acres are owned by others and used by farmers. Mr. Canal went on to state that 2875 acres are under PA490 as of October 2003. Of these 2875 acres 1280 are owned by farmers and 1595 are owned by others leased to farmers. Included in the 1280 acres owned by farmers are Solley land eased to Steep Rock and land that the state has bought development rights to. Phil Markert noted that there appears to be more than 10% of the town being "farmed". Mr. Canal said that there are people who do not take advantage of the 490 tax break. He feels these are the vulnerable parcels. There was discussion about PA490 for open space and Chris Charles felt concern that property owners would chose PA490 for open space over PA490 for farming. Mr. Canal noted that the PA490 for open space would be at a higher tax level than the PA490 for farming. Members thanked Mr. Canal for sharing information about the Farmland Task Force and look forward to working together.

Members went on to look over the "white paper" on Open Space which will be in the special issue of the Town Times and the slides for the power point presentation on October 4th. Members decided to do a dry run on September 22nd for the October 4th Town Meeting presentation and have a work session on September 29th for the October 28th forum on Open Space. Chris Charles also suggested that there be a casual meeting of subcommittee members immediately following the October 4th Town Meeting. Members agreed to spend \$300.00 on maps for the presentation. Members are concerned about enticing people to come to the 90 minutes Open Space presentation on October 28th, this forum needs to be personal with interactivity. Dan Sherr will work on the second draft of the power point presentation for the October 4th Town Meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:45pm.

Next scheduled meeting of the Open Space Committee is October 20, 2004 at 5:00pm.

Submitted subject to approval,

Pamela L Osborne, Secretary