

Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: January 25, 2021

Time: 7:02 p.m.

Place: Internet/Zoom call hosted by Beth O'Connor

Attendees:

Members: Andy Brengle, Co-Chair, Wayne Castonguay, Co-Chair, Erin Coates-Connor, Jeff Denoncour, Katie Hone, Ralph Williams, Andre Lacroix

Associates: Ed Monnelly

Staff: Beth O'Connor, Open Space Steward; Kristen Grubbs, Town Planner

Guests: Monty Monroe

1. Citizen queries

None.

2. Minutes from September 28th and October 26th 2020 meetings

One amendment to the Executive Session minutes was proposed by Andy. Ralph Moved to accept the minutes with amendments. Jeff seconded.

3. OSR Plan 2020 – Presentations and EEA Acceptance & Revisions

On Dec 15 the MA Division of Conservation Services sent a conditional acceptance letter for Ipswich's OSR Plan along with some requested edits. For example, DCS wanted us to mark and discuss where the wildlife corridors are.

Jeff volunteered to help with the ecological items on the list.

Beth discussed the request to provide paper surveys for those who don't have access to computers. Given Covid-19 complications, we need to figure out how to disseminate paper surveys. The survey currently prints at 30 pages, so some formatting changes would be necessary. Katie suggested we see if we can get a waiver or a delay for a year given the situation. Beth said there is no specific deadline, but it would be best to wrap it up sooner than later.

Andy presented a PowerPoint presentation of the OSR Plan to the Select Board on January 4th. The select board had questions about whether we got the survey out to enough people and wondered why there weren't more people responding to the survey. They were otherwise impressed by the report.

Andy will be presenting the report on February 3rd to the Conservation Commission.

4. Community Development Plan

Open Space is prioritized in the recent Community Development Plan, listed in the number one goal. Open space also appears in the vision statement and some other areas of the plan. This is an important foundational document for the town going forward for the next 15 years or so.

Kristen Grubbs, Town Planner, updated the OSC on the CDP and recognized Andy as a great representative of the OSC on the CDP. The CDP is in the final stages, currently working on goals and strategies. The CDP Steering

Committee is currently working on presentations and tools for outreach and sharing information about the plan.

5. UMass Amherst Cost of Service Study

Andy discussed the Cost of Service tool developed by UMass Amherst that he is using to calculate the cost/benefits of conserving land in Ipswich vs. developing it. The results can be used to show how open space is an economic benefit to the town. The tool shows how conserving land instead is more cost effective than developing it, especially where it saves on the cost of community services (fire, police, etc).

6. Kamon LAND Grant Conditions

Beth updated the OSC on the purchase of the Kamon property. We received the \$400,000 LAND Grant from the state to use to purchase the Kamon property. In addition to the Grant, the Town is chipping in \$350,000 from the Open Space Bond, and Greenbelt is chipping in the last \$400,000 to cover the rest of the cost. We can't expend any money on the purchase of the Conservation Restriction until the start of the new fiscal year on July 1, 2021. Greenbelt holds the Purchase and Sale, which extends until June. Greenbelt can negotiate with the landowners to delay the Purchase and Sale a few weeks until July, or they can front the money for the purchase and then the town can close the balance with Greenbelt. We have to June 30, 2022 until we need to complete all the items required by the LAND Grant (conservation restriction, baseline monitoring, signage, etc.). We don't expect the land to be open to the public until later in the summer. The Conservation Commission will hold the conservation restriction on behalf of the Town.

7. Open Space Zoning Amendments for 2021

Kristen Grubbs updated the OSC on two open space zoning amendments – one for the spring town meeting and one for the fall town meeting.

At the spring meeting, there's a plan to look at the Great Estate Preservation Bylaw, which identifies certain properties in town with historic buildings on them and determines what can be developed on those properties. There is a current buyer for the 55 Waldingfield Road property, which falls under the Bylaw. The buyer is a research and development company who is interested in redeveloping the property for the business use, which would be done under the Bylaw. A minimum of 40% of the property would have to be preserved as open space and allow public access. The Bylaw would need to be tweaked for it to be applicable to this property, and the Planning Board is considering such changes. If this comes to town meeting and is successful, permitting will likely be in the summer.

Katie raised concerns of what the land development might look like (traffic, scenic changes) and what the Bylaw might restrict. Kristen shared that there would be a maximum of 30 to 40 employees working there.

Another concern is that the current use of Julia Bird trail already exceeds the parking available. A small off-road parking area could be considered.

At the fall meeting: Open Space Preservation Zoning (OSPZ) Bylaw. The OSPZ Bylaw allows properties to be developed by clustering the development in order to preserve open space. If property owners preserve up to certain amounts of land (50%-70%), they receive density bonuses. Ipswich's OSPZ could use some improvement as more developers are using it. There's a plan to work on this over the summer in advance of the fall town meeting. Kristen suggested a working group to discuss the current zoning bylaw and potential improvements.

Ralph discussed how developers don't always follow through on their promises on the OSPZ. We need teeth in the bylaw to hold them accountable.

Katie discussed potential issues of development being done by right instead of by permit. Kristen explained how by right can attract developers to build by cluster and preserve more land than A & R development through special permit. If the town has a tool that states exactly what we want in our bylaws, then we can have more control over prioritizing open space in development.

8. Open Space Manager Position

This position has been open for a while now, but the Open Space Manager's responsibilities are currently being handled by other Planning Department staff members. There is discussion about restructuring the Department, and Kristen may spend more time supporting the Open Space Program. If the Planning Department is not restructured, they will likely re-post the job posting and continue to try to fill the Manager position.

9. Other Items Not Reasonably Anticipated

Ralph asked for updates on the status of some trails and Beth provided updates:

North side of Mile Lane to the reservoir – will eventually connect to the future Koseneski open space trail:

Beth will be working on this trail with an Eagle Scout candidate. Beth believes it won't take long to reestablish the trail given that it already exists and is currently overgrown. Ralph volunteered to help flag the trail.

Pony Express:

There's no plan to connect an official trail from Candlewood Road to the interior of the Pony Express property. An issue with some wetlands along the road appeared, which is where the trail easement falls. Ralph asked if the abutting property owner might be open to a land swap that will make the trail connection possible with an access easement.

300 High Street:

Beth spoke with Dave at Greenbelt who works on Stewardship. The Town owns the land and has a lease with the landowner immediately to the north on High St. to use the paddock on the front of the property to graze his horses. However, there's interest at the Water Department to expand the Dow Reservoir to help alleviate water supply issues. The Water Department would need to do some land assessment survey work first. If reservoir expansion were to happen, a portion of the back of the town's property would potentially be under water, interfering with the possibility of a connector trail there. We've already established trail access at the Dow Brook Conservation Area, and since a High Street public access connection runs into complications, establishing public access trails to the watershed land at High Street isn't being considered a priority by Greenbelt. Ralph explained how a trail there would be ideal to connect the trail through Jewett Hill to the watershed by an off-road connection to Pearly Landing, moving the Bay Circuit Trail off 1A.

Monty Monroe voiced interested in being involved in any Open Space projects. He asked about the possibility for advance work on Kamon Farm to walk around the property and discuss ideas for public access. Beth said that Greenbelt will likely be leading those discussions but will want our input.

Monty also asked if there are any updates on the Candlewood Road Golf Course property. Andy updated that the property is currently not on the bond list, but this past fall Andy, Jeff and Hannah took the first steps to get it on the bond list. Andy suggested we add it to the bond list along with other properties at the next fall Town Meeting.

10. Executive Session

After a unanimous roll call vote, on a motion from Ralph, seconded by Jeff, the Committee agreed to enter Executive Session at 8:25 p.m.

At 9:10 p.m, the Committee exited Executive Session and returned to Open Session after a unanimous vote on motion from Andy, seconded by Jeff.

11. Adjournment

The Committee decided to meet next on Monday, February 22nd.

At 9:11 p.m., Andy moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Katie, unanimous by roll call vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Erin Coates-Connor