

## Open Space Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: April 25, 2022

Time: 7:03 p.m.

Place: Internet/Zoom call hosted by Molly Shea

### **Attendees:**

Members: Wayne Castonguay Co-Chair, Andrew Brengle Co-Chair, Erin Coates-Connor, Katie Hone, Ralph Williams

Associates: Ed Monnelly, Larry Eliot

Staff: Molly Shea, Open Space Manager, Beth O'Connor, Open Space Steward

### 1. Citizen queries

None

### 2. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes (March 2022)

Erin moved to accept the minutes from the March 2022 meeting, seconded by Katie, pass unanimously.

### 3. Discussion on Revised Open Space Plan for 55 Waldingfield Rd (ORA, Inc.)

Molly shared some updates since we last discussed this. OSC provided a memo to the Planning Department on March 4<sup>th</sup>. ORA voted to postpone a vote until April 28<sup>th</sup> so they could have more time to put materials together.

There are revised plans on the Planning Department's website. Includes stormwater plans for 1A and 1B. Revised plans for phases 2 and 3 came in on March 28<sup>th</sup>.

We reviewed the latest plan submitted by ORA.

One new proposal: Area C – east of the existing barn – proposed rain garden.

Ralph questioned if the rain garden plan hint at future development of the eastern pasture.

Katie stated that she liked the idea of the rain garden – good pollinator habitat over monocrop pasture.

Proposed parking seems to have changed. It is now going around the loop drive. It's also in front of the barn (between the barn and the road) and between the barn and the cottage.

Katie pointed out that there are often many cars parked in the area between the road and the barn already on any given day, so it wouldn't look significantly different to have an actual parking lot there.

The proposed rain garden is on some of the lowest land on the property. Will a rain garden on such low land so close to the wetlands work the way they think it will?

It could prevent salt and oils from running off the parking lot and into the wetlands and pastures. Katie suggested that may be the purpose of the rain garden.

The rain garden may extend slightly into the C portion, which is part of the CR. Ralph and Erin questioned - Is a rain garden permitted under a Conservation Restriction? Beth said there are some permitted uses such as that.

Erin and Katie think the addition of the rain garden is potentially a good sign for future plans of the eastern field. This may point to improved pollinator habitat on this land.

Katie further acknowledged how ORA has mostly done what we asked them to do so far. If we remove our emotions from this and look objectively, this plan may be the best we're going to get. Although the plan leaves the eastern paddock out of the CR, it's also the "devil we know" when we consider other potential uses by other unknown buyers.

Wayne acknowledged that we asked ORA to conserve both paddocks in all our letters, and they have ignored that request to date. As such, Wayne does not support this proposal.

Katie and Ralph added that they both agree that we do ideally want both pastures protected and we should put it in writing that we haven't changed our opinion on that.

Wayne and Andy suggested that we have already written enough memos and don't need to write another one.

Ed added that this plan doesn't protect the frontage in the way the other Great Estate properties protect them. The other Great Estates have the buildings set back and not visible from the street. Building 1B is in the area that should be a setback. This is something that no one has really pushed back on.

Any updates on where the CR goes once it passes?

Beth said that the local conservation organizations including Greenbelt will not discuss or decide whether they would be interested in holding the CR until the special permit is approved. If an NGO doesn't take on the CR, then the town will be forced to take it on. The long-term land stewardship needs are quite a lot for the town with its limited staff. Beth said she can't speak for the Conservation Commission but thinks they would need to take it on if all other organizations refused, considering that the CR is required under the Bylaw. That is what happened with Turner Hill.

Wayne doesn't believe that we should be committed to using our Open Space budget and resources to monitor such a complicated CR that doesn't meet all our requests. There's an overall concern about the town taking on a long-term CR because it's not set up with funding the way NGOs are. NGOs should be priority for accepting this CR, with town as a last choice.

Erin asked if Wayne is suggesting that the town not take this land on as a CR at all even if our requests were met. Is it too much? Wayne answer no, his point is that the better the land is that is conserved, the more it benefits the town and the more and helps to offset the costs for managing the CR. It's another reason to support wanting our requests met.

Wayne thinks we should maybe get this CR concern in front of the Planning Board.

Erin and Katie will try to tune into the meeting on April 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### 4. Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article: 161 Topsfield Road

At our last meeting, we thought this warrant article would be fairly benign. Since then, the Select Board and the Finance Committee weighed in and suggested the OSC's thinking might not be such a good idea. They suggested a change to the focus of the Warrant Article to only address the affordable housing in the front of the lot, and not address the back part of the property yet so as not to tie up the back of the lot in CR resources right away. Ethan Parsons suggested there may be pushback on this article, and there may be some proposed edits to it. It is unclear how different people feel about the back part of the property – do they want to auction off for more housing?

The recent site walk went well. It is a nice property with thick vegetation.

Andy asked if there was a sense whether the back part of the property can even be developed. Molly said that there are some wetland areas there – particularly on either side of the upland slope. The layout of the landscape might make it difficult to develop into housing and roads.

Andy suggested that this sounds like the matter is still unsettled enough that the OSC doesn't want to move forward with any particular recommendation. Molly suggested we acknowledge that the OSC is interested in being part of the process regardless of which way this moves forward for now.

Beth said that it makes sense for the committee to say that that we've been on the property and see value in it; layout the values we see there and our interest to be involved in the process. The committee shouldn't take a position on where the line should be drawn but that there is open space value and we'd like to be part of the conversation about where development should be considered.

Wayne suggested we don't want a town committee, like the Select Board or Finance Committee, to make a motion that would tie our hands. It was suggested that any communication about any amendments be forwarded to Molly before the meeting. Molly will convey the OSC's thoughts to the Town.

Wayne and Andy both plan to attend spring Town Meeting and one of them will be ready to speak on OSC's behalf if an amendment is proposed at the meeting.

#### 5. Spring Town Meeting Warrant Article: Addition of Parcels on Bond List

Molly wants to make sure we make it clear that adding properties to the Bond List is not an intent to purchase property. There seems to be some confusion about what adding properties to the Bond List means. Wayne, Andy, and Molly will work together to put together a brief fact sheet and informative slides on these properties.

6. Other items not reasonably anticipated

None

7. Executive Session

The committee entered Executive Session at 8:19 p.m. on a motion from Andy to enter Executive Session and then adjourn the meeting from Executive Session, seconded by Katie and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Coates-Connor