

Stow Open Space Committee

December 20, 2023

7:00 pm

Via Zoom

Attending: Vin Antil, Kathy Sferra, Bill Maxfield, Meg Costello, Laurie Burnett, Bob Wilber

Meeting began at 7:09pm

Agenda:

-Approve Meetings of October 30: Kathy moved to approve, Bill seconded. Minutes unanimously approved with no changes.

Conservation Department Update:

-Stow Acres:

Work process on North Course Climate Resilience Master Plan for Stow Acres in three phases: 1. Site assessment of natural resources and invasive species 2. Public outreach 3. Draft report and recommendations

General discussion: Results of survey are compiled. Over 500 responses. Overtly directional results: greater conservation, greater restoration of wetlands, greater climate resilience, less “established” recreational fields and buildings. Clear message: do not “overdevelop area”. Young people’s input missing. Question if adequate sports league/sports organization input. Upcoming targeted outreach for diverse voices in process: e.g.: sports groups, Nashoba students. Area being considered is approximately 110 acres, including 20 acres for driving range. Emphasis during request for input: “do not limit vision because of worry about cost; dream big and let us figure out the financing to keep affordable.” Vision accomplished over time. Series of meetings about Stow Acres planned for January and February and public forum in February. Later, public outreach assessment and consultants compile data and report. End of June 2024, Report must be completed under grant rules.

Driving range relocation ZBA hearing on January 8. Stow Acres Housing Development hearing for 40B plan ZBA hearing on January 25. Importance of attendance and support at these ZBA hearings, to continue the collaboration of owner, developer and town. 189 housing units planned for Stow Acres.

-Open Space and Recreation Plan: Report nearly completed. Accessibility inventory is the biggest aspect remaining.

-Parcel Updates: Connie Swartzkopf recently passed away, leaving two farm properties (331 Harvard Rd, 331 Taylor Rd) in unknown legal status. Outreach underway to executor.

-Cottages at Wandering Pond—Update from SCT

Site visit by SCT not yet completed. Bob will try to implement site visit again with SCT to verify interest in ownership for partial/entire parcel.

Kathy reported the Conservation Commission opinion is that the project as currently outlined does not comply with Wetlands Protection Act, specifically the “rivers” portion of this law. Developer intends to redraw entire plan after consulting with Planning and Conservation in January.

-CPC update: Vin stated that two applications received for this award year: 1. Randall portrait restoration of ~\$5K, 2. Bird Meadow housing of ~\$200K

Vin reported that CPA funds contributed for year was \$700K at local level and \$248K from state match of 32.3% Less state match compared with previous years. Funds left in bucket now total \$1,298,521. Funds available for next Annual Town Meeting is \$2,270,198 Each of three groups (open space, historical, housing) are allotted 10% of this amount, remainder into unreserved bucket.

-Select Board Meeting Recording Policy:

Discussion of recent Select Board policy regarding recording of town meetings, and plan for Select Board to submit a warrant article on this topic. Points made: question of sensitivity of subjects discussed: Possible use of executive session for land negotiations, terms of discussion not made public until sensitivity gone away. This approach lacks personal engagement, no connection with community. Recording for permanent storage makes “learning conversations” difficult; harder to change mind and have discussion to learn. Question about “transparency”: will this policy increase transparency or make more difficult? People less inclined to speak unless have fully formed thoughts if being recorded, which can cause stifling; people more reluctant to be publicly “wrong”; occurrence of “gotcha” moments where possible to go back into archive to pull excerpt out of context with video as “proof.” Issue of current difficulty in getting enough residents to volunteer for various boards, possibly exacerbated with this policy. OS Members agreed that boards need to have authentic conversations, members willing to take risk to be wrong. Permanent recording results in losing power of “learning conversations”. Also, there was the sense that there is a not a lot of public interest in OSC meetings given lack of attendance. General consensus: no change to current procedure at this time.

-2024 Meeting schedule

Agree on tentative third Wednesday of each month. Next meeting remainder of 2024 dates will be chosen. For now, January 17 and February 21.

Meg moved to adjourn. Vin seconded. Meeting adjourned at 8:28pm.

Approved Unanimously by vote of the Committee on 1-17-23