

Stow Open Space Committee

January 17, 2024

7:30 pm

Stow Town Building

Meeting opened at 7:41pm. Present: Bob Wilber, Bill Maxfield, Kathy Sferra, Meg Costello, Laurie Burnett. Absent: Vin Antil

Agenda:

-Approve December 20 Minutes: Bob moved to accept minutes as amended, Bill seconded. Unanimous vote to approve.

-Annual Report:

The annual report for the town by the Open Space Committee is due. Bill will provide the rough draft, with editing guidance from Kathy. The committee authorized Bill as chair to submit the finished report.

-Cottages at Wandering Pond – Update:

At the Conservation Commission meeting on January 16, 2024, the Commission determined that the plans provided by the developer for Cottages at Wandering Pond did not meet the riverfront protection regulations. The changes to the plans requested by the CC involve pulling the development away from the river, to comply with the standards for river protection.

Question of how to convey the public land: three categories of land here: 1. SCT interest in land abutting Hale-Corzine 2. Other functional open space with public benefit 3. Smaller spaces around houses are not conveyed but best owned by HOA.

SCT performed a site visit, followed by discussion at a recent meeting about their interest in owning portions of this property. SCT has no interest in smaller portions but is willing to help with managing other portions of open space if CC accepts those portions.

Serious issue of invasive plants at Cottages. Question of ownership and responsibility for management and removal of invasive plants. Site is not a simple property, needing an environmental site assessment prior to any decision about ownership.

The Kettle Plain Open Space owned by the HOA connects with Cottages. Question of transferring this land to SCT or CC to create larger parcel for public access. This would require consultation with the HOA. There are numerous issues complicating a regional trail perspective, including management of invasives. Both SCT and CC are maxed out on land management responsibilities. Question: is there is an alternative to ownership? Notion of HOA with public rights embedded within the agreement on ownership between the town/trust and the HOA.

Discussion of concept of hybrid version of ownership of public land (HOA with CC or SCT): have functional public open space with explicit rights, or “rights, not obligation.” Challenge is to protect enduring public access rights. The agreement needs to be absolutely clear about public use. Bob

and Kathy will speak with Bruce Wheeler about plans for public land at Cottages. Planning connections along the emerald necklace trail network with Hale-Corzine, Cottages, Arbor Glen will shape the public land plan that Kathy and Bob present to Bruce Wheeler.

Question of trash on site. Site needs a lot of cleanup of trash and invasives. Kathy will speak with Bruce Wheeler about plans for maintenance of open space on the development.

-Conservation Department Update:

Stow Acres will require more capacity for land management than the town currently has. This is a subject already under discussion. Issue of maintenance (time, labor, cost) needed to respond to storm damage, encroachment, major weather events requiring identification and remediation of safety hazards.

-Stow Acres:

A community open house is scheduled for Stow Acres on February 12 at Pompo. Exercise: "what do you want at Stow Acres?" In recent survey, heard strong call for restoration of wetlands, conservation and trails. Effort to reach out to youth groups. Need new recreation plan for Stow. How much recreation area is needed? Volume of usage?

-Open Space and Recreation Plan:

Open Space Plan is essentially completed, with only minor edits pending.

-1:1 Analysis

How much new land got developed? How much got conserved each year? How to count? We continue to be above a 1:1 ratio, with more open space protected than land is developed. This may change next year.

-Parcel Updates:

The Conservation Commission now has a key parcel of land adjacent to Flagg Hill under agreement. The owners will donate the 7.5 acres to the town. This has been a priority for more than 20 years and the owners are now willing to donate the land. Members of the Committee noted the significance of this gift and their appreciation for the family's decision.

-CPC Update:

Vin absent so cannot provide update. Kathy reported that SMAHT requested additional money for Red Acre project.

-Confirm Remainder of FY 2024 Meeting Dates:

Next meetings: every third Wednesday. Feb 21. March 30, April 17, May 15, June 19.

Meg moved to adjourn at 9:15pm. Kathy seconded the motion. All approved.

Minutes approved unanimously by vote of Committee on 3-20-24