

NEWINGTON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

February 11, 2016

Chairman Bernadette Conway called the special meeting of the Newington Open Space Committee to order at 6:35 p.m. in Room L101 in the Newington Town Hall, 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT.

I. ROLL CALL:

Commissioners Present:

Commissioner Carol Anest
Commissioner Gail Budrejko
Commissioner Bernadette Conway
Commissioner Sharon Dunning (arrived 6:40)
Commissioner Carol Wojtowicz

Town Staff Present:

Craig Minor, Town Planner

Town Officials Present:

Mayor Roy Zartarian

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 14, 2014:

Commissioner Gail Budrejko made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Carol Wojtowicz. All were in favor.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Possible Revision to Provision #3 of the Town Council Resolution establishing the new Open Space Committee:

Chairman Conway reviewed Provision #3, and the fact that this language prevents the Committee from being pro-active:

- "3. Upon request from the Town Council, the Open Space Committee shall make recommendations to the Town Council as to Open Space implications on such issues as the acquisition of real property, the sale of Town property, the protection and utilization of existing Town owned property, the financial impact of property acquisition with or without external funding sources and potential use of the Capital Improvement Fund."

Town Planner Craig Minor suggested the following sentence be added to Provision #3:

“The Open Space Committee may make recommendations to the Town Council whenever deemed appropriate by the Committee.”

Commissioner Carol Anest made a motion to ask the Town Council to revise the Resolution as suggested, seconded by Commissioner Budrejko. All were in favor. Mr. Minor will send a memo to the Acting Town Manager to address this.

B. Review Work Done by Previous Open Space Committee:

Town Planner Craig Minor said that he reviewed the minutes of the final months of the previous Open Space Committee in 2011, and it appears that their attention was focused on Cedar Mountain and the Toll Brothers subdivision. Chairman Conway added that the Committee also looked at acquiring other open space parcels, in order of importance (farms, etc.) and establishing trails and corridors. The problem was many members of the committee also served on other land use boards, so there were frequent recusals. Mr. Minor said that he will make copies of the last 12 months of minutes of the old Open Space Committee and send them to the members, for their information.

C. Open Space Inventory and Map:

The Committee then reviewed the “Open Spaces Land Use” map dated 4/30/2015 in the agenda packet. Town Planner Craig Minor said that the Town Plan and Zoning Commission is in the process of creating a new zoning district to be called “Open Space Zone”, and this map was prepared by the Town’s GIS department for that purpose. Chairman Conway said there was another map that the old Open Space Committee had, which also showed wetlands and greenways. Mr. Minor said he would find that map and provide it to the Committee. Commissioner Budrejko asked how “protected” are these open space parcels? Mr. Minor replied that there are several degrees of protection. The most protection is afforded by a conservation easement on file in the land records. Open space owned by the Town without a conservation easement is only somewhat protected, because the Town Council could someday decide to sell or develop it. A privately-owned farm might not be protected by a conservation easement, but the family that owns it might feel very strongly about keeping it in farming. This led to a discussion about the definition of “protected open space”. Chairman Conway said that this Committee needs to come up with its own definition for the purposes of the Committee’s work. Mr. Minor was asked to come back to the next meeting with more information on types of protection.

D. Town-Wide Open Space Management Strategy:

Chairman Conway said that this suggestion, made by Mayor Zartarian at the last OSC meeting, is a good idea. There ought to be one single over-seer of all the various types of Town-owned open space. A long discussion ensued over the definition of “open space”, and whether a parcel needs to be accessible to the public to be deemed “open space”. Should the presence of a building disqualify a parcel from being “open space”? The consensus of the Committee members was that lack of access would not disqualify a parcel from being deemed “open space”. Mr. Minor said that he was tasked by the previous Town Manager to create a few parking spaces on the east side of Mountain Road for people who want to hike along Old Highway, which is Town-owned.

Commissioner Budrejko wondered how other municipal Open Space Committees handle this issue. Commissioner Wojtowicz said that she has some examples from other towns that she can share with the Committee. Mr. Minor said that Cromwell's Open Space Committee also wrestled with the definition of "open space". He added that it may be difficult to attend one of their meetings as suggested last month because they also meet on the second Thursday. Chairman Conway said we could cancel one of our meetings to go attend theirs, possibly in April.

Mr. Minor offered to talk to the various Town department heads who have some jurisdiction over Town-owned open space (the Parks and Rec director, the Facilities Director, the Superintendent of Schools, etc.) about developing some sort of Town-wide Open Space management plan.

E. Funding Sources and Opportunities:

1. CT Greenways Council: The Committee discussed the recent email from DEEP about Connecticut's program of officially-designated "greenways." The email included the legal definition of "CT Greenway" and what it takes to get a local greenway designated as a "CT Greenway". There appears to be funding available to help towns prepare an application to have a local greenway designated as a CT Greenway. Chairman Conway said that she would talk to Newington resident and DEEP employee Alison Clark to get more information.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

David Goodale, 1741 Main Street: Mr. Goodale is the Executive Director of the Deming-Young Farm Foundation. In his opinion the existence of the farm house and barn shouldn't prevent the Deming-Young Farm from being considered "open space". He said that someone once told him that the farm could be considered a "greenway". He told the Committee that Town Planner Craig Minor is working on a STEAP grant application to pay for major repairs to the farm house, and possibly to the barn which is also in disrepair. Mr. Goodale said that according to Town of Newington Facilities Director David Langdon a structural assessment will be done soon to help the Town decide what to do about the barn. Chairman Conway said that she agrees with him about the definition of "open space".

John Bachand, 56 Maple Hill Avenue: (1) the Town should monitor the status of the old Cedarcrest Hospital, which is "surplus" State property. He has been told by OPM that they intend to take DEP's recommendation to retain some of the land as "open space" before selling the rest. (2) He agrees that we need to come up with a better name for the "Marcap Property". Maybe a naming contest? (3) The Humane Society has a "no trespassing" sign on the eastern end of Old Highway, which is public land. Commissioners Budrejko and Anest said they would take this up with the Town Council.

V. COMMITTEE MEMBERS COMMENTS

Commissioner Wojtowicz gave an overview of the "Newington Open Space Trust" (NOST, Inc.), including the fact that it needs some new board members. She will have more information next month. Her understanding is that NOST, Inc. is to be the recipient

of the Balf property (the "Toll Bros" site) when the Town acquires it. She said that Stanley Sobieski has told her about some private open space which is at risk for development.

Commissioner Dunning confessed that she isn't sure where some of the open space parcels that people are talking about are. Are there photographs available of the Deming-Young Farmhouse, and Cedarcrest Hospital? Dave Goodale said that he would be happy to lead a tour of the farm.

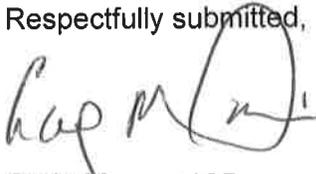
Town Planner Craig Minor distributed flyers describing an upcoming conference on open space being conducted by the CT Land Conservation Council on March 19 at Wesleyan University in Middletown.

Commissioner Anest announced that the Newington Town Council will be holding a budget meeting in Room L-101 next month, so the Open Space Committee will have to meet somewhere else. Mr. Minor suggest going across the hall to Room L-100.

VII. ADJOURN

Commissioner Budrejko moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Wojtowicz. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Minor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "C".

Craig Minor, AICP
Recording Secretary