

NEWINGTON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting Minutes

June 13, 2019

Chairman Bernadette Conway called the regular meeting of the Newington Open Space Committee to order at 6:30 pm in Room L-101 of Newington Town Hall, 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT.

Commissioners Present:

Chairman Bernadette Conway
Commissioner Carol Wojtowicz
Commissioner Dunning

Commissioners Absent:

Commissioner Chris Miner
Commissioner Gail Budrejko

Town Staff Present:

Town Planner Craig Minor

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TOWN OF NEWINGTON, CT
2019 JUN 25 AM 11:49
Donna O. Hayes
TOWN CLERK

I. ROLL CALL

The presence of the above members was noted.

II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Wojtowicz made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Dunning. All were in favor.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. March 14, 2019

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

V. NEW BUSINESS

a. New Plan of Conservation and Development

Town Planner Minor introduced Glenn Chalder, AICP of the planning firm Planimetrics to the Committee. Mr. Chalder has been chosen by TPZ to help prepare the new POCD. Mr. Chalder had assisted TPZ with creating the current POCD, and was the Interim Planner between the previous Town Planner and Craig Minor so he is quite familiar with Newington.

Mr. Chalder described the POCD update process. He said that a POCD typically contains a chapter devoted to each of twelve major topics (housing, environment, open space, emergency services, education, transportation, etc.). A Public Information Meeting will be conducted by TPZ in August at Newington High School to give residents the opportunity to express what they like and don't like about the Town and the direction it is going. Several exercises will be conducted, including one where participants are given a limited amount of "planning bucks" that they can "spend" on things that they like. Mr. Chalder was asked if TPZ will also be using social media to obtain input. He said yes, but an interactive event like the PIM is better because it engages folks in a back-and-forth conversation. That doesn't really happen on social media.

Each of the twelve POCD chapters mentioned above has three parts: an inventory, an assessment, and strategies for the future. Mr. Chalder directed the Committee members to look at the "Open Space Plan" (map) on Page 19 of the current POCD and the "Strategies" on Page 18. Some of the goals in the old POCD might no longer be appropriate, and there might be new goals that were not a priority ten years ago. For example, are greenways still something that the Town should try to assemble? Is the open space set-aside requirement in the subdivision regulations still a meaningful way to obtain open space, now that there is very little subdividable land left in Newington? Has the Town been successful in acquiring open space over the past ten years, and if not, could a more robust Open Space section in the new POCD make a difference in the future? These are the types of things that should be discussed.

Chairman Conway mentioned that the Open Space Committee has its own definition of "open space". Mr. Chalder asked the Town Planner to send it to him. Chairman Conway asked Mr. Minor to send it to the Committee members too.

Mr. Chalder said that in the weeks following the PIM the TPZ will conduct three special meetings that Mr. Chalder calls "listening sessions", to give TPZ the opportunity to hear from residents on a specific topic. One of "listening sessions" will focus on natural resources, and he encouraged the Open Space Committee members to come to that session (probably in September) and to bring their thoughts and recommendations. He suggested the Committee members look at the current "strategies" on Page 18 and propose additions and/or deletions. He also recommended the Committee look through the rest of the old POCD to see if there are any related issues that the Committee might want to comment on. For example, the concept of "complete streets" did not exist ten years ago so there is literally nothing in the old plan about bike lanes. The Committee agreed that it would hold a special meeting on July 16 at 6:30 to prepare comments for the "listening session". The Town Planner was asked to send everyone a copy of Page 18 and 19 in a format that members could make notes on, prior to that meeting. Glenn reminded the Committee that the goal of the POCD is to present a common vision of the town, for the whole town.

b. Trees at Indian Hill Country Club

Town Planner Minor directed the Committee's attention to the email in the agenda packet between Conservation Commission Chairman Jeff Zelek and Marc Weston, the groundskeeper at Indian Hill, regarding the recent and future removal of trees. The Town of Newington owns the property at Indian Hill and leases it to the country club management. Several Committee members stated that diseased trees of course should be removed, but healthy, mature deciduous trees simply because they are in the "wrong" place? Chairman Conway asked if the cutting of trees on the golf course is in the Open Space Committee's jurisdiction, and whether this is what the Conservation Commission is charged with doing. Mr. Minor replied that Conservation Commission Chairman Zelek probably wouldn't have "passed the buck" to the Open Space Committee if it were, that he would look into it. Mr. Minor was asked to find out which trees have been cut.

c. Old Highway on Cedar Ridge

Town Planner Minor directed the Committee's attention to the emails in the agenda packet. The Committee discussed the issue of hikers being denied access to Old Highway by the Humane Society. Mr. Minor said that he would find out if the Old Highway is Town-owned, or just an easement. Depending on what he finds he will draft a letter for the Open Space Committee to send to the Newington Town Council, asking the Council to take action on this. He will have that draft letter at the September meeting.

d. Old Urban Forestry

The Committee completed the survey on Urban Forestry from DEEP. Mr. Minor will submit it.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

VII. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

VIII. Adjourn

Commissioner Wojtowicz made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Dunning. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Craig Minor, AICP
Town Planner