

NEWINGTON OPEN SPACE COMMISSION

July 14, 2022

Regular Meeting

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IN NEWINGTON, CT

2022 JUL 21 AM 10:28


Town Clerk

I. ROLL CALL

Members Present

Gail Budrejko
Bernadette Conway
Sandra Austin Goldstein
Gia Pescarelli

Members Absent

Mitch Page

Staff Present

Renata Bertotti, Town Planner
Sonia Richmond, Grant Specialist

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The motion to approve the agenda was made by Gail Budrejko and seconded by Sandra Austin Goldstein. The agenda was unanimously approved with four voting YEA.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Gail Budrejko moved to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2019 meeting. The motion was seconded by Sandra Austin Goldstein. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion with four voting YEA.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review past actions

At the last meeting of this committee work was being done on a map of open space inventory parcels that was then incorporated into the Plan of Conservation and Development. Renata Bertotti told the committee that there was still a number of opportunities for them as a commission particularly to identify the open space parcels still existing and what parcels should

be preserved as open space and what methods should be used to do that and how to accomplish that. There is a number of things that the committee could still do, particularly relating to any grants that might be available. The Committee can also work to try to preserve areas that are valuable to the town. There has been a great deal of development over the past couple of years, and development and open space do not need to be in conflict. If there is a plan in place, many times concentrated development preserves open space. The committee should have received page 28 of the Plan of Conservation and Development which includes open space strategies, and also was included an e-mail from Councilor Budrejko to the Town Council in which she recommended the area for preservation and perhaps as a property to seek funding and grants.

There is a file in the open space committee holder that includes items discussed in 2010 and 2016. Prior to the adoption of the 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development developed a plan, an open space inventory list and created a definition of open space. The Commission could start by reviewing the list of open space areas and seeing if the list needs updating. Some of the properties listed could have been developed, owners changed and the list is probably in need of revision.

Councilor Budrejko stated that she thought the top ten properties had been identified from a list of approximately thirty and moving forward the list should be reviewed for those areas that were identified.

Renata Bertotti indicated that it might be helpful to actually meet in person within the next few months, and then the files can all be displayed, and the areas in question can be discussed. The pieces that are being identified by ownership, town, state or private can be entered into the town system so the information will be available in the future.

Discussion turned to the grant proposals and Sonia Richmond discussed the items that would make a grant competitive, near water, near a public access trail, and these can lead to possible funding for the grant. The recent grant available is due September 20th, so the committee should meet fairly regularly between now and that date if that is when the committee wants to apply for the grant. Sonia used the Newington Junction project as an example of the type of submission since there was historic value, geographical location, the foot traffic, all of those things made the grant attractive to get additional funding based on the public use.

This grant should revolve about preserving natural resources, what it means to the town, are their trails, how will the public use this facility, does the property border other towns, and all of these will make a compelling case to the State for the funding.

Renata read the e-mail submitted by Councilor Budrejo to Keith Chapman, "Newington has little open space and in particular interest to local residents is Cedar Mountain. When Cedar Mountain was threatened by a proposed residential development, residents turn out in significant numbers to oppose this development. That development was stopped. Risks to this valuable property still remain, and the preservation of Cedar Mountain was highlighted in the 2020 Plan

of Conservation and Development and again in the 2030 POCD. There are many reasons for Newington to pursue additional acquisitions of land on the mountain, including, but not limited to recreation value for trails and hiking, and an environmental barrier between the pollutants and traffic on the Berlin Turnpike and the town, one of seven trap rock ridge line in Connecticut providing habitat for unusual plants and animals, and identification of vernal pool areas there, located near a Hartford Newington highly developed corridor and it is important to our lives as one of few resting spots for birds during migration. The land is adjacent to the existing town owned property, and there are areas on the mountain attractive to developers and remain a risk for development. Ownership of land north of Route 175 is fragmented, including the State of Connecticut, Balf-Tilcon, private owners and the Town of Newington.”

There is documentation that can be used to indicate that people are interested in preserving Cedar Mountain as open space and is shown in the Plan of Conservation and Development. The town itself has to agree to certain conditions, preserve in perpetuity, and the land cannot be developed.

There will be several funding grants available and it will be necessary to continue to update and enhance all of the areas wishing to be preserved to be able to apply as these grants materialize. There is value in this exercise to have this property evaluated, and planning will then be available for future grants.

There are many unanswered questions on the present ownership of the land on Cedar Mountain, the State of Connecticut, Balf Quarry, and there is no clear idea on how much land, if any these owners would be willing to sell and for what price. After discussion it was determined that someone from the Town of Newington, who has the authority to negotiate would be the individual to contact the present owners. The Town Manager would be the person to negotiate for the town, but cannot do it without the due diligence done by this committee; the owners, the asking price, the willingness or not to sell, the reason for the acquisition, all of that information must be available to him if he is to advocate on the behalf of the committee for the grant.

Renata questioned if it was realistic to think that all of the work would be done by September 20th. The Town Manager should be notified right away that the Commission has reconvened, and is considering this opportunity and the proposed next steps.

One of the selling points for Cedar Mountain would be that it could be considered more of a regional area seeing that it borders Wethersfield and Hartford.

Gia Pescarelli questioned if maybe some of the other ranking areas should also be explored since the time line for the grant application is fairly soon, and the number of areas that need to be covered may be unable to be completed by the September deadline. By reviewing some of the other areas, that information will then be available should additional grants become available and the Commission would have information already available.

The amount of money available now is not enough to buy Cedar Mountain entirely, and maybe should be parceled out for various tracts if available, or the focus of the grant should change.

Two of the top ten parcels indicated for open space have already been developed, the Peckham Farm and Culver Street.

A special meeting can be scheduled, and Keith Chapman can be invited to attend that meeting in order to keep him informed of the Committee's intentions and the areas under discussion.

A special meeting can be scheduled for two weeks time and that will be the beginning of the prioritization of areas, and also will determine if the grant application for the September deadline

is doable, additionally that could be the basis for other grants that may be available in the coming months.

July 28th would be the next scheduled special meeting and met the approval of the committee members present. That meeting would be an in-person meeting to display the maps and information available now.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

VII. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

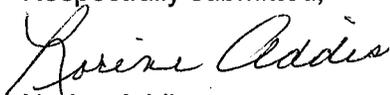
Bernadette Conway thanked Gail Budrejko for the spark with the e-mail that again started the Committee working. Having a grant writer now makes a difference hoping that the end results will establish more enthusiasm for the Commission and its members. The town is now funding open space acquisitions yearly and that will be valuable information to be included in the grant application. It is a line item that will be funded that previously did not appear in the past.

Sandra Austin Goldstein questioned the status of Cedarcrest Hospital, the remediation, the state thinking of donating that property to the town. The remediation was going to be so costly that the town was not particularly interested in taking that on at that time. Renata will question the status of the property and where the offer from the state stands. Renata will invite the Town Manager to the meeting on July 28th.

VIII. ADJOURN

Gail Budrejko moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Sandra Austin Goldstein. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with four voting YEA. The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Noline Addis,
Recording Secretary