

Rockland Open Space Committee Meeting 3/6/2023, Town Offices, Upper Meeting Room, 6:30 p.m.

Attending: Donald Cann, Chair, Mike Bromberg, Vice-Chair, George Anderson, Joanne Donnelly, Pam Titus, Kathy Kirby

Michael O'Loughlin, Chair, Select Board; Doug Lapp, Town Administrator

Motion to approve minutes of the 1/30/2023 meeting was made by Ms. Titus, seconded by Ms. Donnelly, approved by all who were in attendance at that meeting.

Mr. Cann read a letter from Mr. Joubert indicating that he was not considering relinquishing title to his land bordering Rockland open space, but would advise should he change his mind.

Mr. Lapp will check the expiration date of the current Open Space Plan.

In a discussion of the state of development at the former SWNAS, Mr. Lapp indicated that Mr. Twohig(?sp.), the developer, had not yet briefed the Select Board about its plans and that the Board has no maps or plans to indicate what the developer may propose. He and Mr. O'Loughlin indicated that the committee should refrain from direct contact with the developer about the committee's input for plans at the base and that the Select Board will take committee recommendations into account in dealings with the developer, noting the excellent cooperation between the Board, the committee, and other Town departments on other projects. Mr. Bromberg stated that he thought it advisable to meet with the developers to let the committee's open space positions known before plans are drawn and that the developer told him they want the communities involved. He noted that the original base survey of the towns showed that citizens want open space and recreation areas and that 1072 acres of open space were to be maintained at the base. Mr. Lapp indicated that just because it was that way doesn't mean that it should stay that way. Ms. Kirby noted that there are vacant parcels currently available in Town for development. Mr. O'Loughlin said that they are too small to be of interest to developers and Mr. Lapp indicated that there is a moratorium on water and sewer connections. The lack of water and sewer availability at the base was discussed. Ms. Parsons advised that she has the plan, part of which called for development in a rare species habitat, that was presented by Brookfield Properties at a public meeting in Weymouth on October 27, 2022. She reviewed some of the parcels currently protected open space and expressed concern about development and cleanup adversely affecting French's Stream. Mr. Anderson also expressed concern about water levels at the Town Forest and surrounding areas. Ms. Kirby inquired about the committee's communications with other entities, such as Natural Heritage and the Forest Service, particularly in confirming the permanent status of open spaces, and Mr. Lapp and Mr. O'Loughlin agreed that this is desirable. It was noted that a committee convened by a prior Select Board and Town Administrator, consisting of some who were not Rockland residents, with no one from Open Space permitted to be a member, developed a plan that ultimately resulted in a loss of open space inside the base and the failure to protect open space acquired on Union Street meant as an offset. Mr. Bromberg provided a plan of the base showing changes after the 2016 revamping. Mr. O'Loughlin discussed the Commonwealth's desire for 50 acres of residential zoning around the Commuter Rail station.

The discussion turned to communication with the Town of Whitman regarding a piece of open space within the Town of Rockland. Mr. Lapp has been in contact with the new Town Administrator there and Mr. O'Loughlin will contact the Whitman Select Board chair about this matter.

Ms. Titus raised the subject of communication among Town entities and their various roles in working toward their individual and mutual goals, particularly in trying to develop a set of regulations applicable to all conservation lands that do not currently have their own sets of regulations. It was suggested that the Town might need a Conservation Lands Committee. Mr. MacFaden of Wildlands Trust noted that other towns have land managers on staff and that his organization has just opened a land steward training program. Ms. Kirby noted that there needs to be an enforcement component to any regulatory plan in order for it to be effective. Ms. Pratt of the Conservation Commission will present the rewritten regulations to her committee on 3/14/2023.

Ms. Kirby gave an update on the Town Cleanup Project scheduled for 4/15/2023. Some materials have been obtained from Home Depot and the plan is to survey usual spots about a week before the cleanup. Ms. Flaherty of Reimagine Rockland has launched a social media campaign and everyone is encouraged to participate.

Mr. Cann discussed the Mass Walking Tour scheduled for 6/24/2023 with musicians performing in Holbrook, Abington, Whitman and Rockland, ending at the Channing Unitarian Church.

Mr. MacFaden has been notified that the finalized Conservation Restriction for the McCarthy Farm has been received at his office.