



OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes
January 6, 2023
7:30 am
VIRTUAL

Present: Terry Maitland (chairing meeting), Karen O'Neill, Michaela Moran, Alissa Nicol, Matthew Mostoller, David Marshall

Absent: Andrew Magee

Non-Committee Members Present: Susan Mitchell-Hardt, President Acton Conservation Trust; Joe Cooney and Jodi Harris, Board Members, Acton Conservation Trust; Patrick Hearn, Acton Agricultural Commission; Meredith Houghton and Samantha Corbin, Sudbury Valley Trustees; Bettina Abe and Mike Gendron, Town of Acton Conservation Division Staff.

1. Opening

Mr. Maitland opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m.

2. Regular Business

- A. Review – Triangle Farm. Jamie Eldridge and Susan Mitchell-Hardt have been working on this for 3 years. Susan reports her disappointment in situation despite Jamie's friendship with owner. Real estate agent has not been willing to give a price as of yet. Susan checked out site activity and one can see preparation for sale: 3 lots, completely surrounded by Acton conservation land. Though the current owners would love Town to make an offer, but town cannot do so without knowing price. It was originally an 80 acre parcel that neighbors acquired and restricted to only 5 lots. Two were sold. Now 3 will be sold end of January and this has been status since 1995. This is important land to acquire. Susan says without their cooperation it is way more challenging than it should be. One Community Preservation Committee member had even come up with a plan to spread out the funds to enable a purchase. Alissa asked if one of the neighbors is interested in purchasing the property. Susan reports unfortunately, now is not ideal time for them. Long ago a developer had stripped topsoil off and today those depressions have turned into vernal pools. Susan says we will know the price soon by reading real estate listings and she'll stay on top of it.
- B. Review – Wetherbee. Discussion deferred.
- C. Review - 549 Main Street. Matt Mostoller reported that the Acton Water District (AWD) has signed a purchase and sale agreement with the owners to acquire the property. AWD



is drafting the conservation restriction for the property with the assistance of Andy Magee and Karen O'Neil. This weekend ACT, AWD and Conant family are conducting a walk of the property to build public support. AWD vote is scheduled for March 15, 2023, which will come up quickly. There will be a couple more public walks closer to town meeting. Karen O'Neil asks if Select Board (SB) and Town Manager have asked for more time to review the CR and when they will make a decision about next steps? Matt says the SB is meeting Monday 1/9/2023 and he has told them AWD needs feedback quickly to incorporate any proposed edits to the CR draft. Matt reports the closing will be later in the summer. Approval is complex because of multiple votes to be taken.

3. New/Special Business

- A. Acton Agricultural Commission. Karen states that the Acton Agricultural Commission sent out email to all committees except Open Space Committee (OSC) regarding the process for prioritizing farmland and she is concerned that OSC was not on the distribution list. Bettina stated that very topic is on the agenda today.
- B. Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Mike Gendron gave update: the liaisons of relevant committees will be meeting on January 19 in person to hash out the goals spoken about at last meeting. Karen O'Neill was nominated as OSC liaison. Karen did receive invite. That's the only update for now. Susan Mitchell Hardt requests to OSRP working group to please appoint her as a liaison as she would like to continue to participate in that role. Mike says absolutely, yes that makes perfect sense, and Susan should have been in that original invite. Alissa requests Karen to give summary of her understanding of feedback from OSC members. Alissa states that Kim Kastens and Carolyn Keily sent in feedback and they requested that the Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC) be invited. Melissa Settipani invited them immediately. Bettina stated that the OSRP working group will need a method for ranking remaining open space parcels in town to purchase and protect; and the OSC is an important participant in the ranking process, which will be transparent and inclusive of Green Acton and ACT members as well. Representatives from the community will be able participate and we will need to put together a group to work on that important process.
- C. Acton Agricultural Commission Presentation. Pat Hearn of the Acton Agricultural Commission (AgCom) shared his first slide about the AgCom's attempts to put a conservation restriction (CR) on Morrison Farm. The Morrison Farm CR will be held by ACT as the grantee. Pat reviewed the intention of the CR and his slides are attached to these minutes. CR will not interfere with DPW use of the barn and will synthesize with Acton Historical Commission's preservation of artifacts (Morrison house, barn, garage,



chicken coop). This CR is about protecting the land's conservation and soil values. The AgCom has letters of support from DPW and Historical Commission thus far. Pete Westover of Conservation Works, LLC is writing the CR and we should have a draft by middle of next week. It will be circulated to OSC, Land Stewardship Committee, Cemetery Commission, Recreation Commission and other relevant groups. The AgCom will take the CR draft to Select Board on January 23, 2023. If approved, the SB will submit draft to Town Manager's office by February 1, 2023 for inclusion in the May Town Meeting Warrant. Susan Mitchell-Hardt will share the Wright Hill CR with Peter Westover as it gives guidance on dealing with historic buildings on site. Bettina explained that ACT will pay for the fixed costs of survey, bounds and baseline documentation report. The Select Board will hopefully approve to allocate \$8,400 as a line item in budget (accruing 5% annual interest) for monitoring and legal defense. Alissa suggests garnering stronger support. Pat Hearn explained there is activity out there ("wolf at the door step") from time to time to develop Morrison Farm, and AgCom really wants full protection. Community gardeners and land stewards are hugely in support. Those who are growing food are the next generation of farmers, who are passionate about protecting Morrison Farm. Pat will send out the letters to everyone. Joe Cooney has a clarification comment on cost of CR. The cost to the taxpayer is essentially zero because the Town already owns the land. The Town is gifting development rights to ACT via the CR. Town meeting vote is to give up the development rights and if there were to be opposition, it would come from those who ask, "What if the Town wanted to do something else with that land?" Pat then reviewed the schedule in taking the CR to town meeting. The AgCom is still in discussion with Historic Commission and Historic District Commission and will meet with them next week and get letters of support from them. The AgCom has talked to Dean Charter who is in favor. Dean's advice was don't box yourself in for future use. Pat asks if OSC is in support, can they please draft a letter and attend the 1/23/2023 Select Board meeting and voice support!

Motion: Alissa moves to have the chair of the OSC to write a letter of support for adding a CR to Morrison Farm property. Second by Matt Mostoller. Roll call vote: Karen aye, Alissa aye, Dave aye, Matt aye, Terry aye. Motion passes unanimously.

D. Farmland Prioritization. Pat states he has not quite completed his process of reviewing info he has obtained on prioritization of farmland. The AgCom will want a collaborative process between ACT, OSC, AgCom, Con Com and Land Stewards. The AgCom has begun prioritizing farmland as part of their comprehensive agricultural plan. Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT) published a very nice piece of work with Story map. There are 36 communities in SuAsCo watershed and they have been evaluated and ranked. The



ranking system can be downloaded. Pat explained that the AgCom is working to get an overlay on the Town's GIS showing where prime soils are. The Massachusetts Department of Agriculture (MDAR) has provided info that there are two new State documents: ***Resilient Lands Initiative and Healthy Soils Action Plan***. These include information on carbon sequestration, which is valuable for future discussion. The AgCom has a proposal from a person who can guide us for farmland preservation funding. With such a large number of tools should the OSC and AgCom form a collaboration to mutually explore these tools and services?

This can go into OSRP planning and can go into community feedback. Terry says we are interested in end product. Meredith Houghton of SVT says the tool mentioned, "Story Map" is fantastic new tool. SVT wants feedback on questions in using the tool. So please set up a time with Meredith to review the tool.

4. **Motion to Adjourn.** Alissa moves to adjourn; Matt seconds. Roll call vote was unanimous to adjourn at 8:30 AM.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- PowerPoint Presentation by Pat Hern, Acton Agricultural Commission

Respectfully submitted by Bettina D. Abe, Conservation Division

Voted in the Affirmative March 3, 2023