



OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

April 7, 2023

7:30 am

VIRTUAL

Members Present: Andy Magee (Chair), Matthew Mostoller, Alissa Nicol, Karen O'Neill, David Marshall, Terry Maitland, Michela Moran.

Members Absent: None.

Town of Acton Staff Present: Mike Gendron, Bettina Abe, David Martin (Select Board Liaison)

Non-Committee Members Present: Susan Mitchel-Hardt (ACT), Joe Cooney (ACT), Jody Harris (ACT), Joe Will, Alexandra Wahlstrom (Acton Water District), Jane Moosbruker, Brandon Comstock, Paulina Knibbe.

I. Opening

- A. Chair Andy Magee opened the meeting at 7:35 a.m. and noted that the meeting was being held remotely in accordance with guidance from the Aton Board of Health, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and in accordance with public law extending certain COVID 19 related measures. Introductions were made to all in attendance.

II. Minutes

- A. Minutes of March 3, 2023. Motion was made to approve the minutes of March 3, 2023. Roll call vote – minutes accepted unanimously.

III. Regular Business

- A. Wetherbee Parcel. No updates.
- B. Triangle Farm Lane Parcel. Susan heard from an abutter who might be interested in buying the property. Price is high. It has been on the market for two weeks. There are serious wetlands issues. Andy asked Susan to please circulate the MLS listing to the Open Space Committee (OSC). Susan has been networking with people to see if anyone might know someone interested in conservation who might buy and protect the property.
- C. 549 Main Street Parcel. The application to purchase a Conservation Restriction (CR) on 549 Main Street was submitted and presented to the CPC (Community Preservation Committee), who voted unanimously to support the application. It will be a separate warrant article from the other Community Preservation Projects and will be up for vote at the spring town meeting. Members and guests were encouraged to attend and to support the article. During the CPC presentation, CPC members asked if there would be a draft



of the CR before Town Meeting. There is not typically one in place prior to the purchase due to the extended state review. Andy will be out of town during Town Meeting. Select Board Chair Dean Charter has offered to make the presentation. David Martin suggested that someone from the OSC should make a statement supporting the warrant article at Town Meeting as a representative of the OSC. Alissa Nichol has volunteered to do so. **Motion** was made for the OSC to recommend the article and to make a statement at Town Meeting. Roll call vote was unanimous, with one abstention by Terry Maitland, whose company is involved in the purchase.

Susan noted that the Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) Board voted to make a \$10,000 contribution in support of the purchase and will make that comment at Town Meeting. Susan wants to get the check submitted so it will go on consent agenda by Select Board. David Martin noted that the next Select Board meeting is April 25, 2023, so the check will need to be received by April 18 or April 19. ACT and Sudbury Valley Trusties (SVT) are working on a postcard to ACT's membership to get out the vote for town meeting.

Brandon Comstock asked if he could obtain information on the parcel discussed above. Andy will send him maps of these and other parcels.

D. Open Space and Recreation Plan. Mike Gendron reported that staff are moving towards one final public demonstration to talk about the process for parcel prioritization using the SVT **Story Map** model and will also present the sub-goals and action items developed since the previous public forum. Mike Gendron said that he is coordinating a presentation by Dan Stimpson of SVT to walk through the **Story Map** process step by step. Alissa asks if there is an expected time frame for this final public meeting. Mike says town staff met yesterday to hash out an outline, but it would probably be several months from now.

Susan said she will ask her board to have SVT train ACT on how to use the **Story Book** model. Karen, Paulina and Brandon all expressed interest in learning the model. It was suggested that the entire OSC receive training.

E. Agricultural land prioritization. Bettina will send out Pat Hearn's presentation on prioritization.

F. Chair Succession. Andy will be away for the next meeting (May 5) and the following meeting (June 2) will be the last of his term. Andy notes that the OSC needs to resolve who will take over as Chair. One idea is to have co-Chairs. Andy notes that being Chair is not a heavy lift, with the biggest responsibility being the preparation of the annual CPC application, for which there is a template. Andy suggested he would be available to support the Chair in this process. Associate members can't be officers, so the Chair should be a full member. The OSC has never had a Clerk or Vice Chair, but Andy recommends doing so. Matt offered to serve as Clerk. Karen O'Neill is happy to be a co-Chair or Vice Chair but does not feel ready to be a full Chair. Susan noted that ACT



will continue to be in full support of whoever the Chair is and is very familiar with the OSC's function and can help fill gaps and supply materials. David Martin says that co-Chair works well for another committee he is on. Andy asked Terry Maitland if he would consider co-chairing with Karen. Terry noted he will be doing a bit of traveling and is looking forward to tailing off his involvement on Town committees. Mike and Bettina will support the OSC with minutes and agenda as well. In the short-term Andy would ask Karen, Matt and Terry if they would accept these roles.

Motion: Karen and Terry to co-Chair the July 1 meeting and Matt Mostoller to become Clerk at the July 1 meeting. Alissa noted that committees can't elect officers before Town Meeting, but David Martin noted that the Select Board allows advisory boards to be self-organizing, so it's ok to vote Karen and Terry to be co-chairs of the July meeting at this time. Alissa offered to be co-Chair, contingent upon the Select Board election outcome. It was generally agreed to wait until the next meeting (after Town Meeting) to vote on this motion. In the meantime, Terry will sub for Andy on May 5th.

G. Acton Conservation Trust (ACT) Presentation. Joe Cooney, Vice President of ACT shared his screen to explain the role of ACT as a non-profit that adheres to land trust standards. ACT is not accredited by the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) like SVT, but the organization makes every effort to operate as a professional land trust and partner in this preservation ecosystem. By custom and policy, ACT trustees and board members cannot serve on the OSC, however Susan attends as guest and advisor. Joe's presentation explained what a conservation land trust is and noted that most towns around Acton have a land trust, the notable exception being Maynard.

A CR is required when buying land with CPA funds. Someone besides the landowner must hold the CR. ACT holds eight CRs, with two pending. As the CR holder, ACT must annually monitor the parcels. ACT monitors four of these CRs in spring and four in the fall. ACT Board members walk the land to confirm that the conditions of the CR are adhered to. ACT works with landowners to bring the property to the OSC, who brings it to CPC, who brings it to Town meeting, thus resulting in the expansion of open space in Acton. ACT also does fund-raising to support Town purchases. Joe noted there is a lot of opportunity ahead for future properties to purchase and protect. ACT also provides educational forums for landowners and makes referrals for appraisals - and even funds appraisals if a property owner cannot afford them. ACT is working to expand its membership base, which is now around 300 members. ACT has been expanding its programming and activities on the land, which are very well attended. ACT even arranged an oxen pull on the Wetherbee land. Andy noted that ACT has been behind every one of the Town's CPA land purchases. Matt says the "ecosystem" is not visible to the public, but ACT is an excellent partner and has connected with families and property owners. ACT is community supported.

Bettina asked that Joe send her his slides for inclusion with the minutes in Docushare.



IV. New/Special Business

- A. Susan Mitchell-Hardt says speaking of shaking the bushes, 70 acres on Strawberry Hill Road may become available. It's behind Bellows Farm. On the right is the Isaac Davis Trail, a big field, and three existing homes in there. Plus 30 or 40 other acres. The property is fronted by a large stone wall. The family is known to some members.
- B. As regards 549 Main Street, Alissa asked if there might be a second walk before Town Meeting. Joe Cooney says ACT is not planning one. Matt noted that the Water District will have an open house on April 22 with a couple of walk opportunities between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm, which coincides with earth day and will have another walk with AB PIP STEM on April 26.
- C. Joe Will asked if a developer could purchase open space and if we could do a surplus land transfer. Bettina will look into this.
- D. Bettina explained the conditions for the MA Department of Fish and Wildlife to fund the purchase of Wildlife Management Areas.
- E. Alissa attended Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (MLTC) conservation workshop and attended a NRPZ zoning presentation, which is the default zoning for communities who adopt it. Alissa will email the name of the company who did the presentation.

V. Motion to conclude regular meeting unanimous.

Next meeting May 5, 2023, at 7:30 am.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Draft meeting minutes of March 3, 2023.
- ACT Presentation Slide Deck

Respectfully submitted, Bettina D. Abe, Conservation Assistant

Voted in the Affirmative May 5, 2023