

TOWN OF ACTON
Open Space Committee
Minutes
Date: Thursday, September 9, 2016
Time: 7:30 AM
Place: Acton Town Hall Room 9

Committee Members Present: Andy Magee, Dick Hatfield, Matt Mostoller, Jeff Clymer, Tom Tidman

Clerk: Fran Portante

Visitors: Patrick Brennan, Will Hill, David Marshall, Carolyn Kiely, Frank Reis, David Hann, Eric Weiss, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Joe Will, Donald MacIver, James Engell, Ainslie Brennan, Robert Sekuler

Meeting opened at 7:48 PM.

Issue #1: Minutes

July 8, 2016 & August 12, 2016: Dick moved to accept the minutes, Jeff seconded, and the vote was unanimous for both sets of minutes.

Minutes of the Executive Session of March 30 will be distributed to members to review prior to acceptance at the next meeting.

Issue #2: Discussion of River Street Proposal

Tom Tidman provided a map of the site and Andy updated the visitors on the project. This has been a parcel of interest for many years. The prior appraisal, in excess of \$1M, had exceeded the Town's ability to purchase the property. The most recent appraisal is more attractive and a P&S is in the works. There is some urgency, since the Lazarros want to have the sale completed by late fall. There are still some outstanding questions around the funding. The property is the site of the oldest mill in town, which burned down in the 1950s, so has historic value; an approximately 0.62 acres portion of upland is suitable for affordable senior rentals; and the remainder is valuable open space which can be used as a "Pocket Park." The purchase of the property will be presented at the special Town Meeting to be held October 5. Because of the tight time-frame, in order to develop the article before Town Meeting and manage to close on the property by late fall, CPC expressed concern about the ability to adequately prepare. Selby presented this project at the CPC meeting held the night before, with Andy and Tom were present to answer questions.

There is a partially breached dam on the site which must be removed. There is possible grant money available to help with the funding for that effort. The footprint of the historic buildings should be preserved. OSC has proposed using \$375 to \$400K from the set aside fund. The last appraisal had come in at \$1.3M, which the Town rejected. The Town undertook its own appraisal which came in at \$600K, but that was rejected by the sellers. The latest appraisal, the result of expanding the potential housing, came in at \$875K. To develop housing there will require some time, since they will need to apply for some state grants. CPC funds will have to be used and the Town could use free cash to make up the difference with the possibility that ACHC would reimburse the town in the future. Any housing built as apartments would go entirely toward the Town's affordable housing quota.

An environmental assessment had been conducted as part of the P&S agreement. A Phase II assessment is next. The purchase and sale is contingent on the site being clean. Most of the 7.6 acre site is wetland, with less than 1 acre suitable for housing. A long time vision for the area is as a Riverfront park, using the concrete platform of a former building perhaps as a gazebo or kiosk. Reclaiming costs may require additional grants and CPC funding.

Fort Pond River is clean and stocked with trout by Mass Fish and Wildlife.

The Town Meeting presentation would propose that \$400K be allocated from the CPA Open Space Set Aside fund with the balance of the required funds allocated from free cash. This leaves the proposal for purchasing a portion for housing at risk. Discussion followed about the time table. There was agreement that it was important to move on the purchase now and not let this opportunity pass.

Motion: Jeff moved that the OSC recommends CPC allocate up to \$400K for the purchase based on the Town funding the balance of the purchase price. Matt seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Issue #2: Stonefield Farm Update

The most recent appraisal came in at \$2.4M. This is determined to be too high a price for the town to consider. Other creative ways to protect the land are being sought. A possible use is as headquarters for a non-profit agricultural company. The town could buy up the development rights and have the company purchase the business. This could be an ideal fit. An appraisal of the property's development value is needed. Ashley Davies (SVT) has obtained a bid for the appraisal of the development rights. And there is an effort to seek grant monies. A vote is needed to approve moving forward with an appraisal for its development value.

Motion: Jeff moved to approve moving forward with the new appraisal. Dick seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Issue #3: Discussion of Concord Water District Project

The deadline for submitting comments to the EIR is September 29. Carolyn Kiely gave an update to the committee on the status. The latest plan has replaced the original solar field proposal with propane generators. The generators are noisy and seen as a detriment to the neighborhood. CWD also proposes fencing the entire length of the property. This has raised issues with abutters. Generator noise is viewed as the primary issue. They are loud and intrusive. They can be heard right up to the property lines of abutters. They also generate a great deal of heat, with no proposed mitigation up to this point. The noise level was tested after Concord brought temporary generators to the site. How the baseline sound was determined is therefore questionable. Another question arose about the generation of excess electricity beyond the needs of the plant leading to speculation that they could be selling the excess.

The fence was proposed on Aug. 29, after the Environment Impact Report was released, which could necessitate review by MEPA. It was suggested that MEPA may be more concerned about the noise issue. An abutter reported that eagles were sighted in the area over the last two years.

Matt had crafted a letter from the OSC to be sent to CWD. He was asked if any of these latest developments would change the content of the letter. There is concern that the fence proposal will have detrimental impact on wildlife. He was asked to point out that MEPA didn't address either the noise issue or the fence issue. There was also a concern that the fence would interfere with handling brush fires. Matt agreed to add comments to the letter addressing these issues.

Motion: Jeff moved that Matt edit the letter as discussed above. Dick seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously. Matt agreed to insert the edits into the letter by Sunday.

Issue #4: Discussion of Morrison Farm CR

Andy had crafted a letter to Peter Berry, BoS Chair, regarding the Morrison property. He presented the position of the OSC that they do not support removing the house or breaking up the house lot in any way. The letter was circulated to members. See attachment 1.

Issue #5: Committee Charter Changes – Membership: no discussion

Issue #6: Brief Review as necessary:

- Piper Lane, no discussion

- Walker Property,
 Andy circulated a draft of a letter to the BoS outlining the Committee’s position on the Walker property. The letter was circulated to committee members. See attachment 2.
- 64 School Street, no discussion

- 161 Newtown Road,
 The appraisal is due in about 2 weeks.
- Quarry Road, No discussion

Next Meeting – Oct. 7, 7:30 AM (Acton Town Hall – Room 9)

Open Space Committee
TOWN OF ACTON
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Mr. Peter Berry, Chair
Town of Acton Board of Selectmen
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

RE: Morrison Farm House Lot

Dear Chairman Berry:

DRAFT -September 8, 2016 -DRAFT

Morrison Farm is truly one of the premier open space parcels in the Town of Acton. Although not of the areal extent of our larger conservation parcels, this property has an aura of peace and quiet that is the equal of even our largest holdings. In addition, the current use of the property as community gardens preserves the historic farming character of the property. Indeed, Morrison Farm has an uninterrupted history of farming dating to the days before Isaac Davis, possibly making it the oldest continuously farmed land in the town, if not the county.

The Open Space Committee understands that you, your fellow Selectmen, and many past Selectmen, have struggled with the issue as to the use of the Morrison Farm house and sheds. While the Open Space Committee reserves any opinion as to the disposition of the house and sheds, we do have very serious concerns with the concept of carving the house lot out of the property. Unfortunately, doing so would create a series of additional problems and cause irreparable detriment to the character of the Morrison Farm landscape. Principal among these is the fact that doing so would require the creation of a new entrance to the Morrison Farm property, with the associated loss of additional acreage to driveway and parking lot pavement. This new entrance would then be in addition to the existing house entrance and to the proposed 23-space Ice House Pond parking lot to be constructed immediately downhill from the property. Together the new and existing entrances would result in the now wooded frontage of Concord Road turning into a series of driveways and parking lots.

Ultimately, the house and sheds are new additions to the long history of the Morrison Farm property. Sacrificing additional Morrison Farm open space acreage for the sole purpose of carving off the house lot goes directly against the goals of opens space protection as identified in the Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan.

We would note that after many years of study, the Morrison Farm Committee voted unanimously to remove the house. While, as stated above, we reserve any opinion as to the disposition of the house, we would agree with the general consensus that the preservation of the Morrison Farm property should come well before the preservation of one of its more recent tenants.

We thank you for your consideration of the above, and for your fine work and dedication to the wellbeing of the Town of Acton.

Respectfully yours,

Andrew D. Magee

Andrew D. Magee
Chair, Town of Acton Open Space Committee

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Ms. Janet Adachi
Town of Acton Board of Selectmen
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

RE: Walker Property Planning Committee

Dear Selectwoman Adachi:

DRAFT - September 8, 2016 - DRAFT

Thank you for extending the invitation to the Open Space Committee to participate in the planning efforts for the recently acquired "Walker Property" on Main Street. It is our understanding that a committee is being formed to identify the best use of the property.

The Walker Property, which includes the adjacent "Kennedy Property" is approximately XX acres in area. The southern portion of the property was cleared in anticipation of an earlier development project, but has recently been re-graded and is entirely undeveloped. Meanwhile, the northern, Kennedy nursery side of the property includes both relatively undeveloped, nursery stock display areas and several interconnected retail buildings and greenhouses.

While the two properties do not abut any conservation lands or significant open space parcels, the Open Space Committee does note that the parcels offer a potential green space at a very visible location. However, at a location bounded by Route 27 and Route 2, the value of the property as a park or playground is seemingly diminished. To that point, the frontage of the parcels are located along a busy stretch of roadway that includes sidewalks that connect central Acton neighborhoods to the north to both the school campus and the retail shops of Kelly's Corner. We would therefore suggest that any use of these parcels include walkways located away from the roadway and set-back by a buffering green strip.

While at this time the Open Space Committee must forgo formal involvement with the Walker Property planning process, we would respectfully ask that the Open Space Committee be kept apprised of these efforts, and we thank you for work on this issue

Respectfully yours,

Andrew D. Magee

Andrew D. Magee
Chair, Town of Acton Open Space Committee