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TOWN CLERK
ACTON

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

PUBLIC FORUM

MINUTES

February 27, 2014

7:30 PM

TOWN HALL - 472 MAIN STREET
ROOM 204

Attendees: Matthew Mostoller, Andrew Magee, Roswithe Retzlaff-Pinto, James Colman, Mary Donald, Edward Ellis, Adria Osborne, Susan Whitcomb; Jack Culhane, John Sonner, Terra Friedrichs, John Watlington, Phyllis Novick, Bill Froberg, Joan Yatteau, Chris Culhane, M.W. Schuler, Theresa Portante-Lyle, Andrew Brockway, Catherine Hatfield

Facilitators and recorders: Terry Maitland, Tom Tidman, Jim Snyder-Grant, Cathy Fochtman, Bettina Abe, Melissa Rier, Fran Portante

Presentation: The meeting was convened promptly at 7:30 by Terry Maitland, Conservation Commission Chairperson. He presented a slide show, included as an attachment to this document, which provided explanation of the reason for having an Open Space and Recreation Plan, the background of the development of the current OSRP to date, a synopsis of progress made since the last OSRP was approved by the Commonwealth, and the purpose of the public forum. The breakout session followed immediately at 8:00 PM.

Goals and Objectives:

The proposed goals and objectives in the draft OSRP were the focus of the breakout sections. The handouts outlining these were given to each attendee as they signed in. After review and discussion of the proposed G&O, participants were asked for their opinions, agreements, and additional concerns. Output was to be compiled, posted on the Town's website and, where possible, sent directly to participants.

Process: Three discussion stations were set up conforming to the three high level goals: 1. Preserving Acton's Rural Character, facilitated by Tom Tidman, 2. Protecting the Environment, facilitated by Jim Snyder-Grant, and 3. Improving Recreational Opportunities, facilitated by Catherine Fochtman. Attendees were divided into three groups, and each was assigned to one of the three goal stations for a 20 minute discussion. At the end of the 20 minute discussion session, groups were asked to move to another goal station for the second discussion and so on to the third for the final 20 minute breakout period. This ensured each participant was able to contribute to each of the three high level goals. During each session, output was recorded on charts. Melissa Rier, Bettina Abe and Fran Portante recorded output for each of the stations.

Breakout Session Output: Recorded output was digitally scanned and stored on the Town's website. The consolidated and compiled version follows:

8.A. GOAL #1: PRESERVE THE EXISTING ELEMENTS OF ACTON'S RURAL CHARACTER

Community Gardens: General consensus on desirability of expanding number of gardens

Need to find suitable locations in South Acton and West Acton

Parking and general access issues must be considered in selecting appropriate sites.

Caouette land as potential S. Acton site needs to consider impact of Assabet River Rail Trail.

Forest Management:

- Pro: Promotes floral diversity, healthy and more prolific understory growth, quality of habitat; promotes diverse wildlife habitat, would include Invasives Management!
- Con: Objection to possible financial motivation to harvest timber
- Approach in past may not have been politically or objectively handled. Suggestion to look at the issue as "land" management or "parcel" management, or other generic term that would not focus just on forestry.
- Is it time to reach out to re-involve Land Stewards and others in the community and start a new dialogue?

Wildlife Management, particularly DEER management:

- General consensus was a concern over lack of some control of deer population in particular, but also concern for the welfare of the animals, not wanting to harm or destroy them. An area requiring further discussion and consideration.

Agriculture and support for local farms and farmers:

- Explore possibility of the town purchasing Agricultural Restrictions on some of the existing farm properties to ease burden of owners.
- Farmers' Market popular. desire for longer hours but lack volunteers to support expansion

Restoration Projects:

- Barkers Pond area mentioned as a potential inviting open space but encroachment by abutters and lack of management of the area inhibits its use.

Accessibility for people with disabilities or limited physical capacity

- Need to consider making changes to accommodate their need for accessibility
- Micro parks and/or trail systems close to access points, pocket parks in or near the villages
- Raised garden beds/tables at NARA

8.B.GOAL #2: PROTECT CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Forest Management Plans for Conservation Parcels

- Expand the term "Forest Management" to encompass more than just "forest" management
- Use terms such as "Parcel Management" or "Land Mangement" to include the entire ecosystem.

Stream restoration,

- Include dam removal, which allows for the free flow of water for fish, and for recreational boaters. Might also help with cleaning up invasive aquatic species that require still water.
- Revive Acton Stream Teams
- Revive water quality monitoring, especially on streams.
- Revive cleanup of streams

Open Space Protection:

- Place Conservation Restrictions (CRs) on all of our unprotected conservation lands.

- Change zoning to protect parcels not directly under the control of ConsCom, and/or aren't zoned ARC
- Change some access corridor parcels from "municipal" to "conservation" (some parcels are general municipal that are treated as if they are conservation parcels. The changes could be formally done via deed updates or other mechanisms
- Establish Industrial truck exclusions to protect environmental resources and dense residential neighborhoods.
- Survey for tax lien properties for acquisition, especially properties that meet the OSRP prioritized parcel goals, such as next to water resources, special habitats, adjacent to conservation land, etc.
- Identify, prioritize, and resolve conservation land encroachments.
- Establish hammerhead lot ratios as in other towns (our zoning allows crazy-shaped lots that other towns would not allow).

Wildlife Management and Protection:

- Consider where NOT to put trails on conservation lands, for wildlife protection.
- Focus Open Space protection on wildlife corridor protection and creation
- Overpopulation of deer
 - Bow hunting by permit [
 - *Discussion: how to keep walkers safe? Limit hunt to certain times & days & post really well. Why Bow hunting & not other ways? Bow hunters typically shoot down at an angle, and thus it's safer. Has this worked in other towns? Yes, but we have challenges here because our parcels are small and isolated: deer can just go elsewhere.*
 - Concern about Lyme Disease:
 - *Other action plans for Lyme disease prevention: removal of selected Japanese Barberry stands; research has shown reduced infected Lyme tick populations in areas where J barberry has been removed*

Open Space Connections:

- Protect 46 Wood Lane access corridor to Arboretum.
- Prioritize the selection of sidewalk segments to build that connect conservation land entrances. Example: 180 Newtown Road to Grassy Pond.
- Develop "micro trails" for connectivity of neighborhoods. This could depend on donations of private land to make these corridors available
- Develop trails, sidewalks and safe road crossings between schools and conservation parcels In conjunction with "school programs that get kids into the woods." This has become more difficult because the need and the expense to use school buses now that mid-day parent/kid carpooling for field trips is no longer practical for both logistical and legal reasons)

Education and outreach:

- More public education and signage on invasive plant identification.
- More ongoing educational outreach on ALL these topics.
- Newspaper local weekly column "conservation idea of the week."
- Technical assistance for private land owners on developing management plans.
 - Example: how to increase the biodiversity on your property
 - (1) butterfly gardens.

- (2) Audubon has info on how to attract a mix of birds to your backyard.
- Educate public about private land donations: how easy and welcome it is for particular types of land.
- Communicate to and educate public on open space land purchases, i.e. parcels potentially available, and their reason for importance.
- Encourage school programs that get kids in the woods
- Provide irrigation via a well or wells at the Arboretum.

8.C GOAL #3: IMPROVE AND EXPAND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

NARA Park:

- Expand Parking facilities
- Add more vegetation around the pond to intercept storm runoff

Morrison Farm

- Leave as is
- Introduce signage to indicate its location on Concord Rd.

Playgrounds and parks

- Publicize the playgrounds more
- Create maps diagramming where the playgrounds are located
- Separate “dog park” areas from Recreational Fields
- Kelly's Corner: Old McDonald's parking lot could be turned into a small park/green area

General Accessibility

- Plow NARA and Arboretum trails in the winter!
- Create a walkway from Tables to Teapots to the Acton Pharmacy
- Work with the Commission on Disabilities to advertise universal access and demonstrate where it exists
- Work with Emerson Hospital, Acton Nursing Services, and other service providers to promote use of NARA for rehabilitation

**ACTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN PUBLIC MEETING**

AGENDA

FEBRUARY 27, 2014

7:30 PM

TOWN HALL - 472 MAIN STREET

ROOM 204

7:30 Introduction and Presentation

Terry Maitland, chairperson of the Acton Conservation Commission, will provide an overview of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, its significance to the town, and the process leading up to this meeting.

8:00 Breakout Session

Participants will be asked to provide feedback and give input to three high level goals, 1) preserving Acton's rural character, 2) protecting the environment, 3) improving recreational opportunities.

9:15 Reconvene and Summary

There will be a brief summary of output from the breakout session. A detailed summation will be compiled and sent to participants as well as posted on the town website.