

NORWALK CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

APRIL 15, 2003

ATTENDANCE: Matthew Caputo, Vice Chairman; Ed Holowinko, Marny Smith, Anne Cagnina, Jane Corcillo, Karen Destefanis, Andrew Kydes, Larry Losio (6:15 PM)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Caputo called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

DISCUSSION

a. Location and ownership of existing open space parcels

Mr. Caputo gave an update of the last meeting and said it was Ms. Cherichetti's idea to be specific and stick to the topic.

Ms. Destefanis noted that Cheryl Vallerie left a note of instructions regarding the maps.

Ms. Smith asked if this topic concerned separating playgrounds from parking lots in regard to open space. Mr. Caputo said it relates to open space and who owns it, but it also concerns open space that may at some point be on the market; he said it wasn't important at this time to get into cemeteries etc. but more to identify where open space is and who owns it.

The map was reviewed by everyone and Mr. Caputo recommended they look at the properties outlined in different colors to get an idea of where open space is so (*Ms. Smith posted the maps for better viewing*).

Ms. Destefanis asked to establish the goal. Mr. Caputo stated they were trying to identify larger tracks of open space that are not necessarily country clubs, schools etc., he noted the intention tonight was to get an idea of what's out there.

Ms. Destefanis suggested looking at the properties outlined in purple identified as the private track.

Mr. Caputo stated it might be asked of staff what are the state and federal identified areas.

Ms. Smith asked what differentiated a tax district from a municipality. Mr. Caputo said tax districts own certain areas.

Mr. Kydes noted there were nine (9) taxing districts but there was a question if there were really six (6).

Ms. Destefanis felt the private tracks identified in purple should be a possible targeted area as open space.

Mr. Losio stated a certain area he pointed out on the map might not be included in the private tract. He further questioned the definition of open space. Mr. Caputo replied that there was no definition.

Ms. Corcillo questioned if the Tax Assessor's office would have information on X number acreage with space to cut off lot size.

Ms. Smith commented that a piece of land off of New Canaan Avenue was discussed with Mike Greene; she suggested he be asked to attend a meeting to discuss this matter further. Mr. Caputo agreed and he stated its also a database question, indicating all the properties in the city with literally nothing on them and even if the properties have structures, perhaps anything with three acres or more could be narrowed down to a pattern in determining who owns the land i.e.,

- Identify the properties
- Find out who owns them
- Find out what is going to be done with it

He noted circumstances change wherein a person may be willing to sell.

Ms. Smith recalled a house near the river with a barn where the couple decided to give one of the lots to the land trust. She added that not all open space tracks are nice three acre pieces, but its important to protect streams, so if people could be persuaded to give these pieces of land to the town, it would create a protective strip along the waterway.

Mr. Caputo stated it also makes sense to determine what's in the inventory, but he agreed trying to acquire land near a brook or waterway would be a good thing.

Ms. Smith suggested publicity could help spread the word to those interested in donating their land as a land trust. Mr. Caputo suggested a presentation on this

might also be a good idea due to the complexities involved in the tax advantages of donating land.

Mr. Caputo reiterated they should ask staff to define a focus of open space.

Ms. Smith asked for an explanation on the wetlands map. Mr. Losio agreed this was needed and he expressed they previously asked for an explanation on both of the maps. Ms. Corcillo thought the wetlands map identified all the parcels where a permit has been issued or where a violation occurred.

Mr. Caputo repeated they should ask staff to focus and define open space and he said he would also like to know if there were *truly* open space parcels in Norwalk with nothing on them.

Mr. Caputo mentioned there were previous discussions on space that is set aside but not owned by Norwalk; for instance, a parcel that is 50 x 100 that is tiny but may have great value to the community to keep it as open space, so the focus of open space should be broad depending on the criteria, but again, other areas around town could also be identified as open space.

Ms. Smith stated it may be difficult to identify these parcels, she used her home's acreage as an example in that there is an open space area that is used as her backyard, so the question of how to distinguish this gets fuzzy.

Ms. Smith suggested perhaps contacting attorney's in town to assist in identifying potential open space areas that may become available through their client contacts.

Mr. Caputo repeated the tax advantage might be a draw for some people.

Mr. Kydes asked if he knew the last time someone donated land to the city. Mr. Caputo replied it was a while ago probably when the Taylor family did. Mr. Kydes clarified his point of asking was due to there now being a different generation of families living in the city, who may not have the financial resources to donate land; he suggested trying to find out steps taken in the past as it relates to donating land.

Ms. Smith commented that conservation easements may also be a viable option in acquiring land and that Gerard Sciabarrasi would be helpful in this.

Ms. Corcillo stated the key point was to identify potential open space properties. Ms. Smith agreed. Ms. Destefanis also agreed and she stated it would be key to also identify specific spots.

Ms. Smith commented that at a meeting she attended, it was said that an intersection of two streets, say where a bench may be could also be looked at as open space.

Ms. Corcillo asked if item b on the agenda concerning newspapers articles should be tied into the open space topic, wherein people could help identify certain parcels of land as open space. Ms. Smith stated they needed to be careful in doing this because people may end up identifying a neighbor's land as open space.

Mr. Caputo stated that people could also be asked to nominate parcels for consideration and then staff would follow up on this; the idea is to get the public involved and become part of the process but they're not at that point yet although the idea has some merit and people have expressed in doing so.

Ms. Smith asked how developers find tracts of land. Mr. Kydes explained that they go before the Planning & Zoning Commission and attend meetings to elicit information that may be helpful and some search the obituaries, they then approach the proper party to attempt to acquire a property.

Further open discussion ensued among the commissioner's recalling or surmising where open space in Norwalk may be.

Mr. Losio questioned what they were actually doing with the topic of open space and he strongly felt there should be a clear indication of what open space is first before going any further with the subject. He thought a starting point was an inventory, which is very important in that they should start with the premise that open space is a good thing, but also, they have to question where open space is and in his opinion, he felt talking around these issues was futile at this time.

Ms. Smith suggested hiring someone to approach this subject. Mr. Caputo disagreed with the suggestion and felt that it should be staff's position to do this; he did agree however there should be a list of where open space is and what it is, but overall, he felt they shouldn't reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Losio stated he wasn't sure how easy or not it would be to do, but he felt it would be the most prudent thing to do, reasoning there should be a focus on inventory and to identify people to answer questions on the maps and to also have someone from P&Z tell them what the current database holds, but again, he felt all questions and discussion right now was theoretical.

Mr. Caputo repeated once again he would like to see a list of what is available.

Ms. Smith commented that Mike Greene should be at the next meeting as well as Ms. Cherichetti. Mr. Losio agreed but he also felt there should be an informal meeting beforehand to discuss who else should be present at the next meeting.

Ms. Corcillo felt they should start with a list to figure out what needs to be done to enhance the list and start from there. Ms. Smith agreed this was a very good idea.

d. Update regarding article placement in newspapers

Ms. Smith stated she had brochures on buffers. She offered to put together an article about the benefits of stream and pond side buffers highlighting their importance.

Ms. Cagnina stated there was a special issue published in May in the Hour that would be appropriate for the article.

Ms. Smith stated that buffers are referred to by other names such as, Upland Review Area according to the DEP.

Ms. Destefanis suggested Alexis Cherichetti have a look at the article before publishing it and she also asked Ms. Smith to keep in mind who their audience would be so the article is not too technical. Ms. Smith replied that she was experienced writing in simple terms that would appeal to their target audience.

Ms. Cagnina said she spoke to the Advocate and they expressed interest in publishing a story.

Ms. Corcillo suggested the article could possibly be titled "Conservation Commission launches search for open space". Ms. Destefanis thought this was a great catchy title that would get people's attention.

Ms. Smith asked again if writing an article was a good idea. All agreed it was.

Ms. Corcillo said that based on Ms. Cherichetti's last suggestion, they should place a press release indicating that people need to get a permit from the Conservation Commission; her feeling was that a lot of people are doing things on their property that they shouldn't unwittingly.

Ms. Smith asked if they should submit a list of potential topics to find out if any of the newspapers would like an article on a particular topic. Mr. Caputo agreed a list should be devised on topics of interest where Ms. Cherichetti could review it first for possible publication.

Ms. Smith expressed that people like to read articles about other people and that perhaps Ms. Cherichetti could be featured in an article underlying the topic of interest.

e. Community Garden Initiative

Mr. Holowinko said he had a meeting with the Norwalk Garden Club and they expressed interest in running it; he said he might have a definitive answer next month. He noted the garden probably wouldn't be in place until next year.

He further stated they were trying to find the master plan for Fodor Farm but it's been difficult trying to obtain a copy, but once he has a commitment from the garden club, he would write Recreation & Parks to move forward.

Mr. Caputo said it sounded like it would be done next year, which was a good because it would allow time to put it together and do it right. Ms. Smith agreed and she also noted they need time to give it publicity.

Mr. Losio asked if there was still an issue of where they were putting the garden in relation to the question of possible contaminated pasture. Mr. Holowinko said he has done some research and determined it was a field in 1946. Ms. Destefanis commented this would be good to keep the consistency intact.

Mr. Kydes asked about testing for contaminants and if they were still planning on doing this. Mr. Holowinko said it cost \$85.00 per hole to check for contaminants that would be for $\frac{3}{4}$'s of an acre.

Ms. Smith asked if he ever walked Darien's plot where their garden is. Mr. Holowinko said no, but he did talk to the woman that runs it.

Other Discussion

Ms. Cagnina noted there would be a utilities meeting on Sunday, April 30 regarding the towers that are going to the sound that would be aboveground, the meeting will be held at Brien McMahon School. She asked if the commission had a concern about this matter.

Mr. Holowinko wondered if they should possibly issue a statement regarding the matter.

Ms. Smith said someone from the Silvermine area regarding the issue contacted her, but she let them know she couldn't speak on the record as a commissioner; however, she suggested a walk be organized. She also mentioned there was a meeting scheduled Wednesday night with Mayor on the issue.

Ms. Smith further stated there is a concern of the towers because they won't do the river any good and they could be done underground.

Ms. Cocillo questioned running towers down the river and wondered if they have already received all the permits due to the proposal to put them aboveground. Ms. Smith clarified the matter involves running towers from Bethel down to Norwalk through four other inland towns.

Mr. Caputo stated he wasn't sure if this matter was in their jurisdiction but he recommended if there was any interest on the part of the commissioner's, it could be addressed at their next meeting; he further stated that a commissioner had the right to speak up as a citizen, but they shouldn't; as a representative of the Conservation Commission.

Ms. Smith questioned the problem of speaking up as a private citizen and the possibility of an application coming before them, which may be perceived that a commissioner has already expressed their opinion. Mr. Losio stated that in this case, that commissioner would then have to rescue himself or herself.

Ms. Smith asked if any of the commissioner's would like to be called if a walk was organized. Mr. Losio, Mr. Kydes and Mr. Caputo replied no, due to the importance of remaining unbiased should a matter come before them.

Ms. Cagnina stated there was a statement of quid pro quo regarding above ground towers in Norwalk. Mr. Losio commented there was an article in the newspaper today.

Mr. Holowinko stated open space has been eliminated for funding by Governor Rowland and he urged all to write a letter requesting to continue funding.

**** MR. KYDES MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN**

**** MS. DESTEFANIS SECONDED**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Diane Graham

Telesco Secretarial Services

