

## Open Space Committee

July 14, 2009 meeting minutes

*Minutes are not final until reviewed and approved by the Open Space Committee. Review and approval of minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Committee.*

The meeting convened at 5:08 p.m.

**Attendance:** Victoria Barlow, Deb Crowder, Theresa DiLuzio, Katherine Feist, Bruce Tatro, Jeanne Thieme, Dan Zeh. Town Planner Sara Carbonneau also was present.

### CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

**Motion** by Thieme to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2009 meeting. Second by Tatro. All in favor.

### BUSINESS

*Discussion of pending, potential and wish list conservation projects*

Map for helping visualize conservation priorities Zeh provided a comprehensive and detailed draft working map of Swanzey indicating roads and tax parcels, natural features, conserved land (as included on State and Town lists), pending conservation projects, potential and wish list conservation projects, as well as other information. During the evening's discussions, group members used the map for reference; future work will involve a careful examination of the map relative to wildlife corridors and possibilities for creation of large contiguous tracts of protected land.

Yale-Toumey Forest Crowder led a discussion of OSC members' opinions regarding protection and development of Yale University holdings in the vicinity of Route 10, as related to ongoing discussions of a Planning Board workgroup charged with exploring new options for the Route 10 corridor. Crowder requested a mandate from the OSC to support her contributions to the Planning Board working group.

Those present agreed that development and open space protection must be balanced, and agreed that the Yale-Toumey Forest's vulnerability to development puts Swanzey's conservation interests in a precarious position. Crowder said that many Swanzey citizens believe the Forest already is protected, and observed that sections of flat, sandy land in the vicinity of Sawyers Crossing could be ideal for housing development.

Crowder noted that much of the workgroup's discussion has focused on deficits of infrastructure as a limitation to development; she said working group members have discussed creation of a new industrial park in the vicinity of the triangular area where public water and sewer service is available between Matthews Road and Route 10 near the Keene-Swanzey line. The group agreed that industrial development does not necessarily require visibility from the highway.

DiLuzio asked how much additional growth and industrial development ~ in addition to the industrial park off Route 32 ~ is in the best interests of Swanzey, given costs of such development to the Town. Those present agreed that providing for additional industry is a higher priority than providing for additional housing.

The group discussed the impression of development opportunity possibly created by existing Commercial/Industrial zoning of the area. Crowder recommended the creation of a detailed map to show the location of impediments to development on Yale Forest lands located within the Commercial/Industrial district's 1,500 feet on either side of Route 10.

Impediments include slopes of 25% or more, wetlands, limitations of public water and sewer service (without construction of costly pump stations); also, excluding such land with impediments to development, Crowder recommended estimating the total number of acres that would be suitable for development.

Those present considered options for protection, including purchase of an easement and zoning changes (for example, a multiple-acre forestry overlay district for areas less conducive to development). Carbonneau said that the cost of an easement on Yale's +/-1,700 acres likely would be prohibitive; even establishing the value of such an easement would be enormously complex. Additionally, Carbonneau said, "corporate" Yale and the School of Forestry have different objectives; as an educational corporation with a given portfolio of assets, Yale University has a different set of obligations and taxation structure than do private landowners. However, some members said, conservation organizations like the Nature Conservancy, Monadnock Conservancy, and Society for the Protection of NH Forests might be eager to be partners in a project to protect the land. Some members advocated for discussing feasibility of the easement option with Ryan Owens.

For possible economies of scale, Feist suggested that the OSC consider also approaching the owners of Troy Hill Holdings on a parallel track.

In the same way that the OSC has strived to get to know other landowners "through the kitchen door," the group discussed the merits of establishing a relationship with representatives from Yale University, beginning with a letter of introduction to describe the OSC's mission and objectives. Crowder volunteered to draft the letter, and to ask the Conservation Commission for concept approval and willingness to be co-signatories of the letter.

OSC members concurred in their support of continued exploration by Planning Board working group of the idea of zoning to enable creation of a new industrial park just south of the Keene-Swanzey line between Matthews Road and Route 10 where public water and sewer currently are available.

Gray project - California Brook watershed Barlow read a July 2, 2009 e-mail message addressed to friends from Keene, Swanzey and Chesterfield from Ryan Owens. The message states that the Monadnock Conservancy and landowners have concluded that irreconcilable differences prevent the project from moving forward. Owens writes that the landowners

"are unwilling to accept any conditions on an offer, especially conditions on appraised value. For them, it's either \$500,000 for the land (excepting the most valuable part, which they want to keep), or nothing at all. As they put it, there can be no "ifs." There is no way that what they want to sell is worth \$500,000.

"It is possible that a private buyer with more funding than us could take the risk of buying the property for an unjustified price and without conditions, but as non-profits, we cannot, nor would LCHIP or any of you town/city funding partners allow us to do so.

"Our LCHIP grant for this project expires on Saturday, and for that I apologize. That said, I don't think more time to negotiate would have made any difference.

"Thanks for your help and patience with my optimism, which may have been a bit naive, and thanks for your communities' commitments of support. For my part, I'm glad to be able to turn my attentions to more fruitful efforts, on which I hope we can all continue to work together. We'll keep an eye open for new opportunities."

Domina Members received notes and copies of e-mail messages related to the new project, formally initiated on June 14, 2009 with a meeting among the landowners, OSC

representatives and Ryan Owens. As the next step, Barlow said that a family member will contact the OSC with a selection of possible dates for a site walk.

Ashuelot River corridor DiLuzio reported that representatives of the Nature Conservancy reviewed several additional areas of floodplain during a visit last week. DiLuzio said that the Conservancy will prepare findings and make recommendations in the near future.

*Proposed release of Swanzey Rural Character "brand"*

Barlow requested authorization from Committee members to allow a new entity, the Swanzey Rural Character Project, to use the expression "Swanzey Rural Character" as its name and mission. The proposed entity would help to separate the OSC's conservation easement projects from community-enhancement efforts. As presently conceived, the project ultimately would be a not-for-profit that could manage Buck and Ike's hay fund, screenings and sales of the *Swanzey Rural Character* film, and possibly hold the deed to the proposed Elijah Barrett Lab Farm.

**Motion** by Crowder to release use of the expression "Swanzey Rural Character" to the Swanzey Rural Character Project, with the stipulation that such release is contingent upon the continued use of the expression by the OSC. Second by Feist. All in favor.

*OSC participation at Old Home Day - July 19, 2009*

For comment and approval, OSC members received a draft insert page for the *Old Homestead* program acknowledging and thanking people for their support of Buck and Ike, and a description of the *Swanzey Rural Character* film. Members also received a draft thank-you card addressed to Twinkletown for ice cream recipients to sign.

Barlow reported that set-up of the OSC booth will begin at 8:30; Old Home Day begins at 9:30. The OSC will be giving out free lemonade, courtesy of the Swanzey Rural Character project, and free ice cream, courtesy of Twinkletown Miniature Golf. Twinkletown also has supplied a 3-gallon tub of ice cream as the prize in a hay-fund raffle. Plush oxen and DVDs will be available for purchase.

*Other business as may be required*

Resignation of OSC member Barlow informed the group that, after a lengthy search for full-time work in local government, she has accepted a position with the Town of Swanzey as the Town's new assessing coordinator. Barlow said that she will be responsible for maintaining property, current use, exemption and other related assessment and property records, with related customer service. The position also supports the Town's public information efforts in a variety of ways, along with supporting general government functions, including the land use office.

To formalize the shift in her status from policy-setting volunteer to policy-supporting staff member, Barlow said that she serves the best interests of the Town by stepping down from volunteer committees. Effective July 17, she said she is resigning from the Planning Board, Capital Improvements Program Committee, and Open Space Committee.

As a volunteer, Barlow said that she will continue to help Buck and Ike serve as ambassadors of open space protection, and to ensure that *The Old Homestead* has its biggest stars. As a citizen, Barlow said that she expects to be able to continue to promote Swanzey rural character and support community in policy-neutral ways. She said she always will be available to help the OSC with ideas, suggestions, information and moral support.

Barlow said she regretted having to step away from the OSC, and apologized for the disruption. She expressed her confidence that members of the OSC will use the opportunity to develop greater

clarity about priorities and make use of all the strengths and aptitudes that have caused the OSC to be so effective.

#### **BUDGET REPORT**

Approximately \$3,100 remains in the year's budget. Major expenses to date are as follows:

\$400 Keene State College camp rental, easement celebration party gifts and supplies

\$485 Brochures/DVD inserts - Buck and Ike

\$450 Pullen postcard bulk mailing

\$605 Pullen postcard printing

\$459 Buck and Ike postcard printing

\$697 Buck and Ike events postcard bulk mailing

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

*Motion* to adjourn by Crowder; second by Zeh. The meeting adjourned at 6:47.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

Next regular meeting: August 11, 2009, 5:00 p.m., Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow, outgoing Chair