

## Swanzey Open Space Committee

11/13/07 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 5:00 p.m.

**Attendance:** Victoria Barlow, Deb Crowder (arrived at 5:30), Theresa DiLuzio, Katherine Feist, Jeanne Thieme, Bud Winsor, Town Planner Sara Carbonneau.

### **Guests/members of the public -**

Suzanne Whittemore, Monadnock Conservancy (MC) board member and Swanzey resident: The MC is advertising to fill the vacancy that will be created when Dick Ober begins working for the NH Charitable Foundation. The March 14 MC Board of Trustees monthly meeting will take place at Keene State College camp on Wilson Pond.

### **Status of current land protection projects (project manager)**

Pendleton easement - no activity

#### Johnson easement (Thieme)

On Saturday, November 17, a Johnson Farm clean-up day will include a tail-gate potluck lunch. Everyone is invited.

Ryan Owens from the Monadnock Conservancy must resolve some issues pertaining to the Johnson Family Trust before the project can move forward. Dick Drew has submitted a \$6,000 estimate of the cost of his survey.

#### Kibler and Gill (DiLuzio)

Swanзей Selectmen have scheduled for November 14 and November 28 (Town Hall, 6:30 p.m.) the two public hearings pursuant to RSA 41:14-a to receive public comment regarding release of up to \$12,000 from the Conservation Land Acquisition capital reserve fund to help finance transaction costs associated with the Kibler and Gill easements.

Dee Robbins is finalizing the easement language; the survey, environmental assessment, and title search are all nearly complete.

At its regular meeting on October 18, 2007, the Swanзей Planning Board voted to endorse the release of capital reserve funds (Thieme and Barlow in attendance). The Conservation Commission will consider a recommendation at its November 13, 2007 meeting (DiLuzio, Crowder, and Barlow in attendance). [Later in the evening, the ConCom did vote to recommend the release of funds.]

Pullen ~ No activity.

#### Dunn (DiLuzio)

Recently Mrs. Irma Dunn led DiLuzio and Robbins (MC) on an initial tour of the property. While strongly interested, the MC can't begin work on the project until 2008. Mrs. Dunn is willing to be patient.

## **Liasion reports**

### OS Advisory

Thieme prepared and distributed by e-mail on 11/13/07 the July-September quarterly report to Advisory members, OSC members, Suzanne Whittemore, and the chair of the ConCom.

## **Status of assignments + projects**

### Web page - no activity

Project management worksheet, communications log - As she tracks the Kibler/Gill easement, DiLuzio continues to amend the project management worksheet to reflect the OSC process. Her current version separates MC and OSC steps.

### Protection of 3 town-owned parcels - Carlson and Winsor

Barlow presented a draft letter written to the Conservation Commission requesting its assistance in unraveling the status of the Mill K parcel, a top contender for town protection.

### Town land purchase/easement management - Crowder and Barlow

The Conservation Subdivision workgroup has nearly finalized its draft of a Conservation Subdivision Design ordinance for incorporation into town subdivision regulations, to replace the provisions for cluster development (and remove the requirement for a special exception) currently included in the zoning bylaw.

### Oxen initiative - Barlow and Thieme

Buck and Ike are taking a well-earned rest, eating heartily in response to the shortening days.

On November 11, high school student Sara Dick helped with grooming and exercise. Buck and Ike stand ready to welcome personal assistance from other interested young people.

On November 9, two week-old red Milking Shorthorn calves moved to their new home at Mike Johnson's farm. Star and Bright have already begun their training, and have pinned their hopes on becoming Buck and Ike's understudies.

Wildlife Action Plan maps - Carbonneau and Fox will meet with the mapping firm on November 16 to take the next step towards combining assessing information with other data layers.

### Resource Directory - no activity.

## **Budget report**

To date, the available balance in the Open Space Acquisition Fund is \$104,464.14

[\$40,877.26 (balance from 2005) + \$50,000 (balance from 2006) + \$2,137.68 interest less expenses \$4,925 (paid out in 2006) = \$88,089.14 + \$50,000 (allocated for 2007) less \$33,625 allocation for purchase of Johnson easement. Projected pending expenses: Johnson transaction costs, Kibler transaction costs ~ on the order of \$20,000 ~ \$25,000 for the combination.

The OSC "office" account has a balance of \$7,543.65, after \$3,220.35 in 2007 expenditures, including \$150 for Blood legal fees, \$375 for the Johnson assessment, and \$928.91 for postcard production and mailing. The balance represents photocopying, and expenses related to public events.

## **New business**

Training – DiLuzio, Carbonneau, and Barlow attended a workshop, “Conservation Strategies for the Monadnock Region,” on Friday, October 12 at Keene Public Library.

### OSC in the news

The Fall 2007 Monadnock Conservancy newsletter cover article, “Act Locally,” begins: “Equipped with a simple open space plan and modest funding, the Town of Swanzey is helping the Conservancy protect some 400 acres of high-priority land this fall.” Page 2, photo caption: Jeanne Thieme, center, is a member of the Swanzey Open Space Committee. The group’s outreach and funding efforts are making Swanzey one of the Conservancy’s most active towns. From left: Ryan Owens, trustee Tom Dustin, Thieme, Dee Robbins, and landowner Mike Johnson.”

### Collaborating with the Conservation Commission

Members reviewed drafts of two letters (appended). The first asks the ConCom for help in clarifying the status of the Mill K/Riley parcel on Matthews Road. The second asks the ConCom to consider applying Conservation Fund money towards paying easement transaction costs.

MOTION by Feist to endorse presentation of both letters to the November 13 ConCom meeting. Second by Thieme; all in favor.

### Explaining the financial costs and benefits of open space protection

DiLuzio initiated a discussion of the merits of quantifying the financial benefits of open space protection, thereby helping to justify expenditure of town funds on transaction costs and bargain purchases of conservation easements. She has compiled several studies (including “Does Open Space Pay?” by the Cooperative Extension Service) that recommend preparing a financial analysis of open space protection via a fiscal impact study.

Members concluded that such numbers can be both compelling and misleading. While insignificant compared to the expense of public education, the short-term tax effects of open space preservation could appear onerous to some voters. Over the long term, however, studies conclude that open space is the least expensive category of land, despite the fact that open space produces relatively little tax revenue – the greater the amount of protected land, the lower the overall tax burden in a community. Furthermore, conservation land promotes “smarter” growth, by concentrating development in areas already served by municipal infrastructure.

Crowder recommended contacting Steve Walker at OEP for further information and help, as well as the Trust for Public Lands. Members discussed and dismissed, at this time, the option of hiring a consultant to prepare a Cost of Community Services study.

Feist encouraged members – who concurred – to maintain the Committee’s warmth, friendliness, and role as keepers of Swanzey stories, and to remember the OSC’s ultimate goal – to protect Swanzey’s rural character for future generations.

Members discussed preparing a generalized, simple fact sheet that addresses, among other things, the financial implications of open space protection. Some questions such a fact sheet could address:

How much is open space protection going to cost ME?

How much is a bargain purchase paid to someone else going to cost me in my tax bill?

If protected property is removed from the commercial base, what is going to be the difference in my taxes if the land is not used for commercial purposes?

#### Current Use change tax

In addition to her desire to help the public understand the tax benefits of open space protection, DiLuzio also recommends that the OSC ask the Town to revisit the allocation of Current Use change tax. (Currently, in Swanze, 50% - up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year - goes to the Conservation Commission, and the balance goes to the General Fund.)

Researching how other communities handle this tax, DiLuzio learned that many have reallocated the revenue in recent years. As of 1999, Rindge now directs 100% of the tax to its Conservation Fund, with no cap. As of 2003, Jaffrey directs 75% to its Conservation Fund, with no cap. As of 2001, Belmond directs 100% to its Conservation Fund, with no cap. Towns accomplish the re-allocation by official ballot vote. Swanze's allocation has been unchanged since 1995.

DiLuzio suggested that, with the assurance that an increased allocation of the change tax would go towards open space protection, a study might show that the resulting loss of money in the general fund would be compensated for by the reduction in town expense for servicing protected land.

Before discussing a potential reallocation with the ConCom and Selectmen, members recommended finding out how much the change tax has contributed to the general fund over the past 10 years, to determine the potential effect on the tax rate.

[At their November 13, 2007 meeting, the Conservation Commission took the following action, quoted here from the ConCom minutes:

*Treasury Report: \$10,000 transferred from Current Use Transfer.*

*Motion by Steve to resolve that the Current Use change tax going to conservation to be left at 50%, but current cap of \$10,000 be removed. Seconded by Tiffany, Vote: 7-0-0-1]*

#### **Directions for the future**

Members discussed potential new OSC initiatives, including:

Quantifying financial effects, as expanded above.

Strengthening regional connections - Like the Kibler/Gill easement, many projects spill over town lines. The OSC could increase its effectiveness with better collaboration with adjoining towns.

Involving the children - How to engage young people with a topic as theoretical as open space protection? At least once a year we need to make the idea of open space protection concrete, accessible, and fun.

Outreach - Tell the OSC story to service groups, schools, and other organizations.

Art - Invite artists to depict their favorite open spaces in Swanze, and display the work at Old Hoe Day. Involve Mary Ryan at Chrysalis Gallery.

"Welcome to Swanze" sign - re-create, with Crowder's new portrait of Buck and Ike.

**New assignments**

For the December meeting, brainstorm new directions. E-mail suggestions to Barlow for inclusion in the agenda.

Feist will ask Dave Krisch if he would be so kind as to take down and store for the winter the Buck and Ike sign at the Potash Bowl.

**Minutes of 11/4 retreat**

Motion by Winsor to approve the minutes. Second by Feist. All in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Victoria Barlow

Swanzy Open Space Committee  
Town Hall  
Swanzy, NH 03446

November 13, 2007

Swanzy Conservation Commission  
Town Hall  
Swanzy, NH 03446

Dear members of the Conservation Commission,

We write to formally ask for your help.

Over the past year, a subgroup of the Open Space Committee has been working to determine which Town-owned parcels are most worthy of permanent protection. The Mill K/Riley parcel on Matthews Road is a top contender.

However, OSC members lack a cohesive understanding of the parcel's boundaries, history, and status of any deed restrictions or protection possibly already in place. We seem to ask the same questions every time we discuss the parcel, and still lack any clear resolution.

We understand that members of the ConCom already know or have compiled much of the information we feel we need to make a responsible decision. Our hope is that you would be willing to pull together all the pieces, in writing, so that the Town has a permanent record on which to base future discussions. With this record in hand, we hope the ConCom will make a recommendation to the OSC regarding the parcel's worthiness of protection.

Deb Crowder offers to take the lead in compiling such a report, and OSC member Theresa DiLuzio offers to assist.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Victoria Barlow, chair  
Swanzy Open Space Committee

Swanzy Open Space Committee  
Town Hall  
Swanzy, NH 03446

November 13, 2007

Swanzy Conservation Commission  
Town Hall  
Swanzy, NH 03446

Dear members of the Conservation Commission,

We write to ask the Conservation Commission to consider financially supporting open space protection with the expenditure of funds from the Conservation Fund. Specifically, would the ConCom be willing to cover conservation easement transaction costs, on an as-needed basis? These transaction costs include such items as legal fees, surveys, environmental assessments, and perpetual stewardship. They can range from \$4,000 to \$12,000 and upwards, mostly depending on the size of the parcel and the cost of the survey.

As you know, the Conservation Land Acquisition capital reserve fund is the OSC's sole source of funding for transaction costs and for bargain purchase easements. In recent years the voters have supported annual allocations of \$50,000.

Our challenge is twofold. First, any release of funds from the Conservation Land Acquisition fund require the Selectmen to hold two public hearings – a process that can consume three months. This delay, coupled with the time-consuming steps required by the Monadnock Conservancy, keeps a landowner in limbo. Second, because our region has a limited window of affordability for bargain purchase easements, we would prefer to direct Conservation Land Acquisition capital reserve funds towards these easements.

We believe that the ConCom and OSC share a strong common interest in protecting important open space in Swanzy. We hope you will be willing to explore this potential collaboration in meeting that shared mission.

Sincerely,

Victoria Barlow, chair  
Swanzy Open Space Committee