

## Swanzey Open Space Committee

11/11/08 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 5:05 p.m.

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

SCC members Michael Day (arrived at 6:00), Steve Stepenuck (arrived at 6:30), and Mike Morrison (arrived at 6:35) also were present.

### CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

Motion by Feist to approve the minutes of October 14, 2008. Second by Thieme. All in favor.

### MEETING INFORMATION

Members received the following by e-mail, prior to the meeting:

- Reports on the status of land protection projects ~ Johnson, Moore Nanotechnology, Pullen (including project assessment totals), Richards (including project assessment totals), 4 potential projects
- Copy of thank-you note to D. Fraser
- Copies of e-mail messages to PB chair Page and SCC chair Stepenuck requesting agenda time for Zeh's presentations on conservation priority areas relative to the *NH Wildlife Action Plan* (no responses have been received to date)
- Reports on three fundraising developments, including proposed text for a Buck and Ike chocolate bar
- Copy of follow-up letter to Orton Family Foundation (no response has been received to date)
- Copy of letter from Swanzey Historical Committee in appreciation for "Swanзей Rural Character" interview DVDs
- Question regarding updating of project assessment forms
- Outline of a "land swap" idea proposed by DiLuzio
- Draft response to MC Land Summit questionnaire
- Report: "Making the Case for Conservation in Swanзей," prepared for presentation at the 10/22/08 MC Community Conservation Partnership Leadership Training program.

### RESPONSE TO INFORMATION

*Questionnaire* OSC members made additions to the draft response to the Monadnock Conservancy's Land Summit questionnaire. Barlow will incorporate the changes, distribute the draft to members by e-mail and, if no additional revisions are required, submit the completed questionnaire to the MC by the November 14 deadline. By e-mail, Barlow also will distribute the draft to SCC members to solicit their comments before the submission deadline.

*Funding for DVD duplication and distribution* Feist will approach a private funding source. Barlow will e-mail Feist with a figure for the needed amount. Carbonneau will follow up on the letter to the Orton Family Foundation.

*Pullen project* Thieme reported that Barbara Pullen has granted permission for the OSC to use one of Mrs. Pullen's paintings on a postcard to publicize the completed easement.

*Potential projects* Zeh said that personal familiarity with land under consideration for protection can help fuel excitement about potential projects. Members discussed inviting local "tour guides" on site walks to point out special features and places that OSC members might not be aware of.

#### REQUESTED FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Discussion of next steps regarding updating of project assessment forms
- More time to learn about data and maps - 1 hour
- Update from DiLuzio and Zeh on what they've learned so far in the Community Conservation Partnership conservation leadership training program - ½ hour

#### 5:20 – 5:50 OSC MEMBER DAN ZEH, MAPPING DATA

Zeh reported that he has collected from SWRPC all the data that went into creating maps in the 2004 *Plan for the Protection of Open Space*. Committee members expressed deep gratitude, and applauded the accomplishment of a long-standing OSC goal.

The information is in a form that Zeh can download from home, allowing him to re-create the *Plan* maps, update *Plan* maps, and create maps consisting of entirely new collections of data.

Zeh said that the State maintains a file of protected parcels (to which the Monadnock Conservancy contributes, at project completion) that Zeh can access. OSC maps of protected lands could show completed projects as well as projects in the works, and/or projects completed since the Committee's formation in 2004. Zeh can use color choices to amplify the data.

Zeh said that he will use the 2004 *Plan* maps as base maps – for example, he will re-create the map of land fragmentation, and then add subdivisions of parcels that have taken place since 2004.

Carbonneau said that the Town's vendor will prepare an accurate, up-to-date Zoning District map (including Shoreland Protection Districts, updated to show fourth order streams in addition to Swanze Lake and Wilson Pond) following the results of Town voting in March. When that information becomes available, Zeh will incorporate it into working maps.

For immediate display in Town Hall, Zeh presented a copy of the State map depicting drinking water resources and potential contamination sources. The data contained on this map also is available to Zeh, who explained how the information might be used to justify – or pass on – a project.

The group discussed adding cultural and historical data to maps in the *Plan for the Protection of Open Space*. For example, citizens value the Town's covered bridges, and likely would be in favor of protecting the land near the bridges, when possible. For that reason, the bridges should appear on *Plan* maps. Members agreed that unusual natural features – like the white swamp oak near the Keene Municipal Airport – also should be included on *Plan* maps.

#### 6:00 – 6:50 GUEST BOB BERNSTEIN, LAND FOR GOOD

As introduction, Barlow said that last summer she and Thieme (along with Ryan Owens and three other MC staff members) had met with the director of the southern office of the Vermont Land Trust, Joan Weir, to discuss easements on agricultural land. Weir encouraged the group to think beyond the immediate enactment of a conservation easement, to consider the most likely scenario following the death of a farmer and sale of the protected farmland. Weir encouraged the group to consider what citizens would want from the investment of tax dollars in a bargain easement purchase – the reserved land subdivided to provide several very expensive house lots that likely would use the land for non-productive purposes, or continued use of the land to produce food for the community. Based on her experience, Weir had speculated that Swanze citizens would prefer the land to remain a productive farm. Owens had suggested that the OSC make contact with Land For Good (LFG).

Bernstein presented information on how planning for future agricultural use of farmland can help to protect the Town's interest in conserved working land. (OSC members had issued an invitation to attend this part of the meeting to members of the Swanzey Conservation Commission.)

Bernstein said that more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the nation's farms will change hands in the next twenty years. It is estimated that about 5% of farmers have prepared plans for their succession, and only 15-25% of farmers even have wills. Bernstein said that non-farming landowners now own most farms. He said that there is an across-the-board lack of planning for keeping farms active.

Bernstein said that his background is in community economic development. LFG is an 8-year-old nonprofit dedicated to keeping working lands working. Farm transfer planning is for providing access to land for entering and experienced farmers. The organization works mostly in New England, with individuals, towns, institutions, and land trusts – they have worked on farm transfer planning with about 35 NE farms, and with approximately 12 institutional land owners. LFG currently is involved in a three-year national research project, involving five major universities across the country. Collaboration is key to their work.

Bernstein noted that a recent column by Commissioner of Agriculture Lorraine Merrill (distributed by e-mail to OSC and SCC members prior to the meeting) reports on growing interest among planners in keeping agricultural land in active use, and said that the Society for Protection of New England Forests is in strong support of the work. Citizen pressure to protect agricultural lands is increasing in New England.

Bernstein's response to questions:

- LFG does not maintain a pool of potential farmers. New England Land Link (run by the New England Small Farm Institute, [smallfarm.org](http://smallfarm.org)) is a resource. Another similar initiative is under development.
- A conservation easement is not a requirement of farm transfer planning, nor is there any minimum acreage. The dividing line is between a hobby farm and a commercial farm (defined by the *intention* to make money – not necessarily by success at making money).
- People *are* coming into farming, and it is possible to make money farming – often, farmers have part time jobs off the farm, and often specialize into niche farming. There is demand for opportunities to farm. Leasing is a major strategy for gaining access to farmland.
- A farm transfer plan does not carry forward to the next owner, or run with the land like a conservation easement.
- All clients are suitable, except for someone who seeks to develop agricultural land for non-agricultural uses to the maximum level possible.
- Funding comes from a fee for service, and from grants.
- Motivation to create a farm transfer plan can come from a desire to avoid probate, and a desire to minimize legal bills.

Bernstein talked about the process of creating a farm transfer plan. He said that overcoming inaction is the biggest challenge – just getting families to think about the future of the farm, and then helping the farmer clarify his or her desires. Bernstein said that the process usually begins at the suggestion of a trusted advisor who cares about the farmer's best interests. (LFG's outreach efforts also are aimed at finding those trusted advisors.)

The role of LFG is as small as possible, and strictly limited to coaching. Business planning is the biggest component of the process. LFG helps farmers determine which parts of the farm operation are critical for economic viability, and which are non-essential farm assets. For example, sometimes the best approach is to create a house lot for immediate income, perhaps in combination with a

bargain sale of the balance of the land to a new farmer; the farmer could arrange for a life estate to continue living in the farmhouse. Bernstein said that conversations focus on the transfer of labor, management, and assets of the farm, and noted that the transfer typically occurs in stages of these elements, over time. LFG helps clients find lawyers, accountants, and other professionals who understand the special issues of farmers. The Farm Transfer Network of NE maintains a list of lawyers who are qualified and work for a minimal fee.

Bernstein reviewed fees for LFG services, which range for \$150 to \$1,350 for four months of work. He provided handouts outlining these and other aspects of the organization's work.

SCC member Morrison suggested that Bernstein contact NH Fish and Game as a possible funding source (for example, if part of the succession plan included using the farmland for educational purposes or for stocking game species). Morrison said that the federal Pittman Robertson Fund is a source of matching grants.

#### **BUDGET REPORT**

To date, the balance in the Open Space Acquisition Capital Reserve Account is \$92,464.14  
[\$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 and \$12,000 for Perry Farm transaction  
costs. Projected pending expenses: Johnson transaction costs like will be on the order of  
\$15,000 ~ \$20,000.

*(NB: Please distinguish the Open Space Acquisition Capital Reserve Account – managed by the  
Selectmen – from the Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund, which is managed by the  
Conservation Commission, includes income from the Current Use change tax.)*

\$1,362.74 (20%) remains in the administrative account.

*Upcoming expenses, to be paid out from the administrative account:*

\$16 copies of maps

\$50 (approximately) to SWRPC for electronic data/mapping

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn by Feist. Second by Barlow. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

#### **NEXT MEETINGS**

OSC retreat: Saturday, November 22, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 60 Honey Hill Road.

Next regular meeting: December 9, 5:00 p.m., Town Hall

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow, Chair