

Open Space Committee

March 17, 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 5:05 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 February 10, 2009 meeting. Second by Tatro. All in favor.

MEETING INFORMATION

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

- Copy of a personalized letter mailed to each of the six property owners of parcels that abut the recently conserved Pullen parcel
- Copy of a thank-you letter from Buck and Ike to the students of Mrs. Speckman's class at Cutler School
- Announcement of a new MRHS-community initiative, Growing Our Own, in which the Open Space Committee has been invited to participate
- Announcement of an April 7 visit to Buck and Ike from Commissioner of Agriculture Lorraine S. Merrill
- Copy of a letter to the Orton Family Foundation, requesting financial assistance with duplicating and mailing the Swanzey Rural Character DVD, as well as help with covering expenses of the premiere of the film on May 30
- Copy of a letter proposed to solicit businesses for support of the Swanzey Rural Character film premiere
- Copy of a letter proposed to thank Dee Robbins for her service to the Town as an associate at the Monadnock Conservancy.
- Three-page summary of OSC activities, dates, and progress during the month of February

Members each signed the letter to Robbins.

Members briefly discussed the Growing initiative; efforts to set up an account to receive donations for the film premiere and duplication; and preparations for the "Reading the Forested Landscape" walk with Tom Wessels, scheduled for April 6.

Thieme reported that Wessels will arrive at Town Hall at approximately 8:40; the walk will begin at 9:00. The group agreed to finalize details of carpooling and parking via e-mail. Thieme invited participants to a pot luck lunch at her home following the walk.

NEW BUSINESS

Stewards of Mt. Caesar Advisory Committee DiLuzio reported on the first meeting of a new Mt. Caesar Advisory Committee, appointed by the Board of Selectmen and charged with making recommendations about protecting Mt. Caesar (approximately 200 acres). She said that initial work will focus on protecting existing trails. The group has conducted its first site walk, and Zeh has begun to prepare maps of trails and areas of concern.

Conservation priorities The group devoted most of the meeting to assessing reasons to pursue, challenges and obstacles, and likely next steps to take regarding several major conservation opportunities in Swanzey.

Mt. Caesar: Group members agreed that the property held in the Carpenter trust has many qualities that recommend its permanent protection:

- Geographically central location
- Symbolic and emotional importance to townspeople
- Proximity to schools
- Historical cellarholes, stone walls
- Potential to be part of a cross-town wildlife corridor that might extend as far as the Yale-Toumey Forest, Pisgah, and Gap Mountain

Challenges include provisions of the trust, possibly issues of public access, and possibly a public perception that there is little risk of development.

The group agreed that the Mt. Caesar Advisory Committee (Mt. CAC) will be able to advise the OSC regarding conservation opportunities, and agreed to support the Mt. CAG wherever possible. Next steps will include mapping, and collaboration with Keene Municipal Airport personnel and Town groups (eg, Conservation Commission).

Troy Hill: Following a 2008 discussion with Troy Hill Holdings representative R. Fraser, group members agreed that protection of the large tract now for sale in east Swanzey might be possible if the OSC could prepare a sound business economic justification. Barlow reported that the Monadnock Conservancy has expressed willingness to assist with a proposal. Valuable qualities of the tract include

- Extensive unfragmented acreage
- A single owner
- Historical cellarholes
- Potential connection to other conserved parcels
- Connection to West Hill, Pac Monadnock, Little Monadnock
- Wetlands, with heron rookeries
- Existing trail network
- Possible partnership with the Town of Troy

Challenges will be funding, and finding the time to develop a plan for protecting the parcels.

Next steps will include mapping of important resources, discussing the possibility with representatives from Troy, and providing the Monadnock Conservancy with information about the portions of the holdings that are located in Troy.

Yale-Toumey Forest: Group members discussed public perception that the Forest already is protected, along with past attempts to interest Yale in conservation. Valuable attributes of the land include

- Extensive unfragmented acreage
- Emotional importance to townspeople, and likely public support
- Existing sense of Town ownership (perceived, although not in fact)
- Proximity to the heart of Town
- Buffer between Keene and Swanzey (the Route 10 “aahhhh” factor)
- Connections between California Brook watershed and Mt. Cresson

Challenges will include funding, and working with a distant landowner. Group members agreed that, for a variety of reasons, protecting this land with a conservation easement is unlikely in the short term. However, those present agreed that consideration of zoning in the vicinity might be an effective short-term measure to balance conservation with opportunities for development. To

initiate this work, group members recommended creation of a map of Yale holdings and area zoning, and approaching the Planning Board with a request to undertake the project.

Motion by Feist to authorize Barlow to write a letter to the Planning Board to express OSC interest in revising certain portions of the Town zoning map; the letter is to suggest soliciting the participation of a wide variety of Town groups (eg; Economic Development Advisory Committee, Conservation Commission, North Swanzey Water and Sewer Precinct, Sewer Commission, and others). Second by DiLuzio. All in favor.

Some portion of C. Richards property, west Swanzey: Group members discussed Richards's interest – initiated in 2008 – in protecting a parcel on Christian Hill Road. DiLuzio said that Richards has expressed interest in protecting additional acreage. DiLuzio received Richards's permission to contact representatives from the Nature Conservancy to assess acreage that abuts the Ashuelot River. The protected land might include river frontage, flood plain, and agricultural land. However, it is likely that such an easement would require the participation of multiple land trusts, and would be expensive. Group members will consider next steps after an upcoming assessment of the property by Nature Conservancy representatives.

Wish list The group compiled a “wish list” of parcels whose owners have expressed willingness to consider conserving their land. To help the group focus its efforts, Zeh will prepare a map depicting the “wish list” parcels. Group members expressed their hope that the map may reveal focus areas, potential wildlife corridors, or other qualities that will help to guide OSC recommendations.

OSC terms of appointment Carbonneau advised the group that the terms held by Crowder and DiLuzio expire in 2009, and encouraged submittal of names to the Board of Selectmen for consideration.

Easement celebration party planning Group members agreed to manage final details of the event via e-mail.

IMPORTANT DATES

- March 28 SWRPC Innovative Land Use workshop, 9:00 – 12:00, Bentley Commons, Keene.
(Free; register by March 24.)
- April 4 Sara + Victoria to present at **Saving Special Places** conference
- April 6 T. Wessels **“Reading the Forested Landscape”** walk, west Swanzey
- April 7 Kick-off of **Growing**; Commissioner Merrill to visit Buck and Ike
- April 21 Annual **easement celebration party** KSC Camp, 4:00 – 6:00
- May 30 **Premiere of “Swanzey Rural Character”** MRHS auditorium, 4:00 and 7:00.
- May 31 Buck and Ike's birthday party Potash Bowl, 1:00 to 3:00
- July 17, 18, 19 ***The Old Homestead***
- July 19 **Old Home Day**
- September 12 **Humane Society Walk for Animals**
- October 3 **MRHS homecoming**

BUDGET REPORT

Major expenses, totally \$1,766.65 to date, are as follows:

- \$150 Keene State College camp rental, easement celebration party
- \$485 Brochures/DVD inserts – Buck and Ike
- \$450 Pullen postcard bulk mailing
- \$605 Pullen postcard printing

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Tatro; second by Feist. The meeting adjourned at 7:00.

NEXT MEETING

Next regular meeting: April 14, 2009, 5:00 p.m., Town Hall.
Wessels walk, April 6, 2009.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow, Chair