

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Open Space Committee (OSC)
Site Visit and Meeting Minutes – December 15, 2016

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

Site visit, Map 24 Lot 45 (280 South Road) Chair Ames called the site visit to order at 1:00 p.m. Present were OSC members Victoria Reck Ames, Jeanne Thieme, Sharon Greatbatch, Theresa DiLuzio. Richard Scaramelli also was present. Those present reviewed the boundaries of the property, determined the location of the boundaries of the adjacent Town-owned lot (Map 24 Lot 47), explored topography and, to the extent possible given snow cover, located features related to historical use of the site.

The meeting continued to Town Hall.

Present at Meeting: Chair Ames called the regular meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Present were Victoria Reck Ames, Jeanne Thieme, Sharon Greatbatch, and Theresa DiLuzio. Richard Scaramelli also was present until 2:25. Town Administrator Michael Branley was present from approximately 3:20 to approximately 3:40.

Minutes of December 7, 2016 meeting: **Motion** to approve by DiLuzio. Second by Thieme. All in favor. **Motion carries.**

Ames said that, after the December 7, 2016 meeting, Director of Planning and Community Development Sara Carbonneau forwarded a link (<http://cheshirecounty.us/maplewood/assisted-living/>) to information about the assisted living facilities at the Maplewood campus: twenty “efficiency apartments occupied by individuals needing light assistance with daily living.”

Agenda items

280 South Road – request for feedback

Town Administrator Mike Branley’s 6 December 2016 memo requests OSC feedback regarding possible Town purchase of land pursuant to RSA 41:14-a. The memo states: “possible Town uses of the property include a pocket park, providing parking close to and giving access to the river [South Branch], and passive recreation.”

Members discussed the parcel with Richard Scaramelli. Scaramelli said that he was not advocating purchase of the parcel. Scaramelli said that the justification for the purchase is recreation; however, historical and archaeological features of the property are of interest. Scaramelli said that the industrial heart of settlement in eastern Swanzey developed in response to year-round hydropower generated by the South Branch, and the greatest fall along the South Branch occurs in the vicinity of the parcel. The Whitcomb Mill – the first mill built on the South Branch, in 1778 – was located in the vicinity.

Based on his research of locations, owners, types and quantities of products, and volumes of raw materials consumed by Swanzey mills, Scaramelli outlined the compelling history of uses of the South Branch as a power source. Observing that other citizens also would find this history of interest, OSC members expressed hope that Scaramelli would share his findings in a future public presentation.

OSC members asked Scaramelli for recommendations. Scaramelli said that the parcel has rich potential. Because the site is not suited to development, Scaramelli said, he hopes that interpretive work could be managed with a public interest in mind. Scaramelli said he envisions mapping conducted by a surveyor, and research conducted by an archaeologist.

Organizations such as the NH Division of Historical Resources, LCHIP, or Franklin Pierce University (staff archaeologist and students) might be able to support investigation and preservation of the site, Scaramelli said.

As a long-time resident of the neighborhood who walks it regularly, OSC members asked Scaramelli about what he has observed of recreational use of the South Branch at this location. Scaramelli said that the vicinity has not been a magnet for recreation, due to private ownership, potential dangers of swift current and lack of parking. Swimming was discouraged after wastewater pollution linked to the Town of Troy became public knowledge, Scaramelli said. Scaramelli said that he had no doubt that the parcel would be a desirable access point, especially for people who are not afraid of fast water. In response to questions about the potential for Town liability, Scaramelli said that hazards of the site are very real.

OSC members thanked Scaramelli for his time and expertise. Scaramelli left the meeting at 2:25.

OSC members considered definitions of “pocket park” and “passive recreation.” Beginning by acknowledging that the OSC strives to consider the needs of all Town citizens, members discussed the site. Members discussed and executed a Conservation Land Protection Project Rating form. Members conferred with Town Administrator Branley, who said that rendering a decision is not urgent. Needing to bring the meeting to a close, members agreed to vote on the project at a later date.

KSC geography student presentation: *Not Your Village, Nor My Village, but Our Town: A Community Resource Inventory of Swanzey, NH.* Thieme and Greatbatch reported on the content and findings of the 45-minute presentation to the Board of Selectmen on December 7, 2016. OSC members noted that, with the encouragement of Director of Planning and Community Development Carbonneau, the students had met with the OSC for help in designing and refining their project approach. Thieme said that the students interviewed citizens about use of Swanzey locations (Whitcomb Hall, Mt. Caesar, the Swanzey Historical Museum, East Swanzey Community House, Mt. Caesar Union Library and Stratton Free Library, and the Town’s ballfields), and made recommendations about preserving these Town facilities and increasing access to them. A key finding of the students’ work, Thieme said, is that the values of citizens of Swanzey exemplify the “new ruralism;” the OSC’s work to celebrate “Swanzey rural character” has been core to this approach.

Members and Branley discussed the abbreviated treatment of the presentation in the minutes of the December 7, 2016 meeting of the Board of Selectmen.

SCC policy regarding funding of conservation easements

Members briefly discussed a new policy adopted on December 5, 2016 by the Conservation Commission, as part of SCC discussion of the recently executed Ballou conservation easement: *“That all funding of conservation easements by the Conservation Commission in the future be contingent on Conservation Commission approval of the final draft of the proposed easement.”*

OSC members noted that the SCC voted to donate money from the SCC’s Conservation Fund to help finance The Nature Conservancy’s floodplain reforestation project on the Ballou property, but no Conservation Funds were used for purchasing the easement.

Next meeting: December 27, 2016, 1:00 p.m., Whitcomb Hall

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by DiLuzio to adjourn; Thieme seconded the motion and all were in favor. **Motion carries.** Adjournment occurred at 3:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Ames
Recording Secretary