

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire
Open Space Committee (OSC)
Annual Planning Retreat Minutes – January 23, 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.*

Present at Meeting: Chair Ames called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. Present were Victoria Reck Ames, Jeanne Thieme, Karen Sielke, Theresa DiLuzio, Bob McElvey,

Also present: Jean Minnich, Tiffany Mannion, Michael Day, Swanzey Director of Planning and Community Development Sara Carbonneau

Absent: Sharon Greatbatch, alternate Deb Crowder

Members welcomed prospective OSC members Jean Minnich, Tiffany Mannion and Michael Day. Members acknowledged with regret the impending resignation of Bob McElvey, who plans to move out of town.

Ames reviewed the origins and history of the OSC.

- 2001: Results of a resident survey associated with Swanzey’s Community Profile project and the Master Plan update identified “protecting Swanzey’s rural character” as respondents’ most commonly shared value
- 2003 planning grant: Town of Swanzey was selected from seven applicants responding to a RFP from Southwest Community Services and the Monadnock Conservancy. The application, prepared and submitted by the Swanzey Conservation Commission, resulted in the creation of a working group, the *Plan for the Protection of Open Space* (which was duly adopted as a chapter in the Town’s master plan) and ultimately in the Board of Selectmen’s creation of the Open Space Committee.
- 2004: The newly formed OSC reviewed Town-owned properties to determine whether conservation was indicated, began work to establish community awareness of conservation easements as a tool for protecting rural character, and undertook celebrations to honor Swanzey’s rural character.
- Today: The OSC continues to shepherd easements, and to produce public events that strengthen the community and our connections to the land.
- Two major changes in the evolving conservation movement:
 1. The recognition that, through collaboration with other human service entities, conservation is a powerful tool to enhance the wellbeing of people and communities
 2. A growing trend toward purchased rather than donated conservation easements

Continuing a discussion begun at the November, 2015 OSC meeting, members considered whether the objectives of the OSC have been accomplished. Given today's public awareness of the benefits and practice of conservation, how can the OSC best continue to be of service?

Members discussed which aspects of conservation work they find most rewarding. Members agreed that, while successful by all other measures, recent public events generally have been reaching the same audience. Members agreed that landowners who are interested in conserving their property now tend to directly approach the regional land trust, the Monadnock Conservancy, for assistance.

Members agreed that the OSC is qualified and necessary for evaluating proposed projects for public benefit to the Town, and making recommendations to the Board of Selectmen regarding those public benefits and the appropriateness of using Town funds (specifically, the Conservation Land Acquisition capital reserve account) to support financing of conservation.

A lengthy discussion was inspired by 2016 Town Meeting Warrant Article 6, which seeks to fund a projected \$30,000 budget shortfall for operating the Carpenter Home. Carbonneau explained that Selectmen hope the warrant article also will raise public awareness of the Home, and generate community discussion about the continued existence of the Home.

Members considered implications of continued public access to the Home's (approximately) 230 acres of associated land, and Mt. Caesar. Members discussed benefits of access for schoolchildren (Mt Caesar Elementary, Monadnock Regional Middle and High School being within walking distance), historians (Swanzey's earliest settlement), neighbors and recreationists (citizens as well as visitors). Also discussed was the prominent location of the property – "the heart of Swanzey" – its scenic qualities, and its role in protecting water quality. Members reviewed the terms of the Lucy Carpenter will that governs Town management of the Carpenter Home and associated land.

DiLuzio advised members of past work of the Stewards of Mt Caesar Advisory Committee, established in 2009 by the Board of Selectmen to make recommendations about recreational benefits of the property and conditions of the trails. DiLuzio suggested that perhaps this group could re-activate and expand to help the Town consider options. Members endorsed DiLuzio's idea, and expressed the desire to support the work of the Stewards of Mt. Caesar Advisory Committee. Members agreed to continue the discussion at the February 10, 2016 OSC meeting.

Members expressed appreciation for the gracious hospitality and delicious food provided by retreat hosts, the Bridges Inn.

The meeting concluded at 12:00.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Ames
Recording Secretary