

CALL TO ORDER/ATTENDANCE

The reorganization meeting of the Open Space Advisory Committee was called to order at 7:08 p.m. Present for this meeting were the following Committee members: John Cronce, Dan Malek, Rich Schaible, Hal Shute, and Cathy Urbanski. Christine Rosikiewicz, Committee Secretary, was also present. George Fisher and Chris Kamnitsis were absent. Stephen Bergenfield, Township Committee Liaison, was also absent.

REORGANIZATION

Ms. Rosikiewicz opened the floor for nominations of Committee Chair. **Ms. Urbanski nominated John Cronce for Open Space Advisory Committee Chair. Mr. Schaible seconded the motion. All were in favor; the motion passed.**

Mr. Cronce nominated Hal Shute for Vice Chair. Ms. Urbanski seconded the nomination. All were in favor; the motion passed.

Mr. Cronce announced that the Open Space Advisory Committee will meet on the second Tuesday of each month.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

It was determined that the public portion of the meeting will be held later in the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DECEMBER 13, 2016

Ms. Urbanski made a motion to approve the minutes with two typographical corrections and three edits as follows:

Page 1 under “Old Business” first paragraph, second line: replace the word “comprehensive” with “complicated”. In the fourth paragraph replace “begin work” with “continue working on”.

Under “New Business” delete the third line.

Mr. Shute seconded the motion. All were in favor; the motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

Farmland Preservation Projects:

Holcombe III: Mr. Shute reported that this application is with the County attorney. The survey has been approved. Mr. Shute will follow up regarding the closing date noting that this property should close by the end of the month.

Runkle: Mr. Shute reported that both applications have the green light from the SADC and appraisals can begin.

Hunting Program: Mr. Malek reported that everything is going okay.

Website: Ms. Urbanski confirmed that the website is okay.

OPEN TO PUBLIC

Judy Giordano, 19 Barry Rd., introduced herself. She has concerns after speaking to the new owner of Lowell Hunter’s property. This property borders hers and is 17 acres. The new owner told Ms. Giordano that he intended to cut down trees if they appeared to be going to fall. Obtaining a brush permit was mentioned along with a path to

ride ATV's. Ms. Giordano is concerned about noise. She asked if these things could be done on a property with a Green Acres easement.

Mr. Cronce expressed concern about this being discussed without the owner of the property present. Mr. Shute believed it is okay and added that there have not been any complaints filed.

Ms. Giordano referred to the deed which said public hunting is not allowed. Ms. Urbanski said the owner reserves the right to close the public portion of the land for two weeks a year to control deer. This would need to be posted two weeks prior. Ms. Giordano asked how there is hunting if people are walking on [the public portion of] the property. Mr. Cronce said the only public portion of the property is 17 acres that borders Ms. Giordano's property. Ms. Giordano asked how the owner hunts on the other piece. Comments were exchanged about the deed with regard to hunting.

Ms. Giordano asked how someone on [the public part of] the property would know there was hunting taking place. Ms. Urbanski said they should wear orange. Ms. Giordano expressed that people do not know to do this. Mr. Cronce explained that the public portion is not a public park and can only be walked through.

Ms. Giordano spoke of target shooting on the property. Mr. Shute said that target shooting is allowed.

Ms. Giordano inquired about ATV use. Mr. Shute said the property owner may create a trail while noting the public cannot use motorized vehicles on the property. Mr. Shute said the Township's long term goal is to put walking trails on [preserved] properties [with public access].

Mr. Shute explained that the owner retains rights. West Amwell Township bought the rights to subdivide and develop along with public access on 17 acres.

Ms. Giordano asked if the property owner can cut down trees and expressed that no one would know if he did. Mr. Cronce said the property owner is allowed to do what he wants within the law. Ms. Giordano referred to the deed which says nature cannot be disturbed. Mr. Urbanski suggested Ms. Giordano refer to the Township Woodlands Ordinance.

Mr. Shute said the Open Space Advisory Committee does not have any legal authority in this situation. Ms. Giordano inquired about who does. Mr. Shute commented about trusting property owners not to destroy their own property. Ms. Giordano inquired why the deed says nature can't be destroyed. Further comments were exchanged. Mr. Shute said Ms. Giordano's complaints were valid and perhaps the DEP has jurisdiction. Mr. Shute said there is a woodlot management plan on the property requiring a set number of trees to be cut down per year. Mrs. Urbanski noted that the property is farmland assessed. Ms. Giordano inquired about wetlands and woods being destroyed. Mr. Shute suggested she file an OPRA request for the woodlands management plan. Ms. Urbanski said the DEP did a wetlands study and determined where the house and driveway will go.

Further comments were exchanged. Mr. Schaible explained that the Open Space Advisory Committee does not enforce; their role is to advise the Township on which properties should be preserved.

Ms. Giordano asked about who does enforce. Mr. Cronce suggested she go to Township Committee. Mr. Cronce advised she see the Clerk for more information then go to Township Committee. She can also go to the Zoning Officer when something happens.

David Pasquale, 13 Barry Road, introduced himself. He said he came tonight to see what is going on and express some concern about what might happen "down the road". He said he enjoys the quiet, has never met the new owner, is not familiar with the documents, and is hoping for the best. He spoke of valuing his property as a refuge and would like to keep it that way. He would be willing to work with his neighbor. He spoke of stepping it up and

doing something when it becomes a nuisance with noise and danger. He commented about regulations being one thing and life being another thing.

CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Urbanski opened a conversation on whether the Open Space tax will be reduced and whether a referendum is needed to do this. Mr. Shute said it was determined a referendum is not needed to reduce the tax as it was approved up to 6%. Ms. Urbanski said the current Open Space tax has been used for paying down debt and the fund balance was used for maintenance on the Township's open space for the past five years or so. If the Open Space tax is lowered these items would have to be paid for with the municipal tax. Mr. Schaible spoke of ongoing maintenance being necessary on the open space which the Open Space tax can be used for rather than raising the Municipal tax for an unknown reason. Further comments were exchanged; Ms. Urbanski will compile a rough list of items which the Open Space tax is used for the next meeting. Ms. Urbanski offered to draft an Open Space Maintenance Plan outlining all the maintenance expenses to present to Township Committee for their approval; Mr. Shute commented favorably on this. Once the Open Space debt is paid down the Open Space tax can be used to fund the maintenance expenses.

Mr. Cronce noted additional correspondence included information about the Conservation Rally on March 17th and the CADB agenda.

Mr. Shute said that he and Ms. Rosikiewicz update the PIG application annually. He will submit a letter for this year as nothing has changed since last year.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

There were no comments from any public.

NEXT MEETING

The February meeting will be canceled. The next meeting will be March 14th.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Urbanski made a motion, seconded by Mr. Schaible, to adjourn the meeting at 8:07 p.m. All were in favor; the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine A. Rosikiewicz, Open Space Secretary