

West Newbury Open Space Committee

Meeting Minutes

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Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019
Second-floor Meeting Room, Town Office Building

Present: Jessica Azenaro, Brad Buschur, Dan Carlat, John Dodge, Jean Lambert, Wendy Reed, Patricia Reeser, Marley Switzer, scribe

Absent: Don Bourquard

Guests: Rob Phillips, River Access Committee

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m.

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River Access Committee Chairman Rob Phillips joined in a discussion of the potential purchase of what is referred to as the "River Road Conservation Project." He emphasized that the parking component of river access is dependent on ConCom approval, but was optimistic that some public use would be possible. Greenbelt is considering a permanent name for the 30-acre tract of land that will offer trails as well as potential river access. Suggestions are welcome. Jean Lambert shared details from her Jan. 22 discussion with Cathy Coffin Lanois, the Greenbelt Director of Development and Community Engagement. The group's fundraising efforts include determining which local groups to target. Two phases of publicity are anticipated, beginning with the advance to the April Town Meeting vote and followed by an information campaign by September.

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The committee discussed brainstorming a stance for the OSC regarding the Town Meeting warrant article to reduce the CPA tax from 3% to .5%. Dan Carlat offered to write the outline for a position paper and circulate it to members. There is a question of whether the OSC, as CPA stakeholders, should/can take a stance. A letter to the editor could be published if signed by the writer(s) as resident(s), not in their official capacity as OSC members.

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It is expected that Vanessa Johnson-Hall, Greenbelt Assistant Director of Land Conservation, will attend the March meeting to discuss her final presentation on the proposed Greenbelt purchase of land along River Road. She will speak in support of a warrant article seeking Town Meeting approval of a CPC grant to assist Greenbelt in the purchase of a large tract of River Road property.

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Patricia updated the committee on the final approval process for the OSRP. Suggested changes by stakeholders have been redlined. Approval letters are anticipated from the BOS and PB. Print window will be mid- to late February.

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TRAIL DISCUSSIONS

Wendy Reed updated the committee about the status of the proposed trails at the Estate Homes at River's Edge. Developer Tom Neve appeared before the PB to extend the terms of its approval for his project on Sullivans Court. There was discussion of lot releases and escrowed amounts. Questions about progress in designing, siting and constructing the trails Neve promised revealed that nothing has been done. The PB reiterated the importance of Neve following through with building these public trails. Patricia said the OSC should attend PB meetings to monitor progress and to advocate for the trails.

The committee discussed prioritized trail projects to be submitted as budget requests or for CPC grants. There was general agreement that current trail markings are inadequate, which revived the debate about purchasing plastic markers or painting directly on trees. A larger undertaking was suggested – to investigate a bridge or some other device (boulders) on the lower green trail in Riverbend where high tide makes it impassable. Brad Buschur also spoke about the convergence of the orange and green trails around Mill Pond that would benefit from an estimated 100' bridge.

There was much discussion about the poor condition of the Riverbend red trail where it begins behind Page School. Brad presented photos showing that thorn bushes and invasives encroach on the steep, muddy trail that water has deeply rutted. He estimated it would be less costly to relocate the trail to open land outside of its current forested area. Being exposed, it would be easier to maintain and would offer a more gradual descent that also could prevent heavy water damage. The proximity of such a trail to the school and outdoor amenities for children must be considered. An open field at the edge of the new trail is being taken over by invasives, but regular mowing could manage that. John Dodge said Carol Lloyd, Essex County Trails Association Director of Trail Maintenance, previously was consulted about the red trail plans. He will send committee members a document detailing this. Patricia will speak with Carol Lloyd about current concerns.

In keeping with the OSC Action Plan in the OSRP, town open space and trails will be examined for possible accessibility improvement. Members agreed there can be multiple projects to achieve this goal, some more complicated than others, such as:

- A waterside trail around Mill Pond (the OSC to collaborate with Mill Pond Committee). Brad and Patricia will meet with Mill Pond Committee Chairman Ryan Goodwin to discuss this and other trail concerns.
- A path to the river at two locations off River Road -- at the end of Coffin Street in Riverbend and at the river side of the proposed "River Road Conservation Project" (the OSC to collaborate with Greenbelt).

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On a motion by Patricia Reeser, seconded by Jessica Azenaro, minutes of the Dec. 12, 2018 meeting were approved (with changes) by Jessica Azenaro, John Dodge, Jean Lambert, Patricia Reeser and Marley Switzer. Brad Buschur did not vote because he was absent from the 12/12/18 meeting.

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With Patricia's travel plans in mind, dates were set for the February, March and April OSC meetings. Patricia will lead the Feb. 20 and March 20 meetings, and John Dodge will chair the April 17 meeting in her absence. All meetings will begin at 7 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m. on a motion by Jessica, seconded by Patricia.

Respectfully submitted,
Marlene Switzer

cc: Town Clerk
John Dodge, website