

West Newbury Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes

--EXECUTIVE SESSION--

Meeting date & place: 7:00 pm, December 5, 2022, Second Floor Town Offices.

Members Present: Chair Judy Mizner, Molly Hawkins, David Parrott, Jack Haley, George Preble, and Conservation Agent Michelle Greene. Also present Vanessa Johnson Hall and Maggie Brown of Essex County Greenbelt.

The Commission determined to go into Executive Session, citing M.G.L. Ch 30A sec. 21(a)6. Proceedings were conducted in closed session because an open meeting might have a detrimental effect upon the negotiation of a potential real estate acquisition.

Executive Session--- MGL Ch. 30A §21(a) 6: To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body.

Greenbelt potential property acquisition

Vanessa Johnson Hall and her coworker Maggie Brown appeared on behalf of Essex County Greenbelt. Ms. Johnson Hall provided maps and explained a potential acquisition of what has been named the Sawmill Brook property. This land is adjacent to Mill Pond and has access via Poorhouse Lane. Ms. Johnson Hall said that the land could be acquired for \$705K and has been appraised at \$725K for two estate homes which, she said, would have large lawns on land that slopes toward wetlands which flow to the Indian River and the Merrimack River. She said that in the new state BioMap, the whole property is now mapped for rare species and important wetlands. This property is, said Ms. Johnson Hall, a significant addition of green corridor as habitat area and for water quality.

Ms. Johnson Hall stated that she believes that if offered for sale the property would go very quickly. Houses in this area would likely eliminate the existing nonpublic trails. She represented that the Town had granted access via Poorhouse Lane to the owners in 1985.

Ms. Johnson Hall said that the Town would have to be a significant partner in this. It would make sense if the Town were the owner, since it already owns the Mill Pond area. Greenbelt would hold the conservation restriction. Greenbelt identified three budget scenarios, in which the Town would authorize \$350K in Community Preservation funds for this project and Greenbelt would raise \$100K:

- Greenbelt would apply for a LAND grant to cover 56% (which is on a reimbursement basis, so the Town would vote the \$350K, but ultimately pay \$210K)
- Greenbelt would apply for a Conservation Partnership grant (and both grants can be sought at the same time) for \$175K
- No grants are obtained and \$500K would be needed from Community Preservation funds—which seems unlikely in view of the cost

When asked, Ms. Johnson Hall said that initial feedback from the Select Board and the Open Space

Committee was that they would prefer to spend less than \$350K. Ms. Johnson Hall said that the Town would need to vote to authorize the \$350K at spring Town Meeting and that the purchase and sale agreement for the land between Greenbelt and the owners has been extended through December of 2023.

Mr. Parrott observed that it would be quite costly to develop this land in view of all of the wetlands. Ms. Johnson Hall said that this was factored into the appraisal. The wetlands were discussed with engineers to get a sense of the additional costs and this was subtracted from the appraised value of the property.

Ms. Johnson Hall will check whether this land is listed on the Open Space Committee's priority parcels and what flora or fauna make this a priority habitat and Ms. Greene will check whether a perennial stream crosses Poorhouse Lane.

Ms. Johnson Hall said she will be returning to the Open Space Committee next week for its vote on this, and after that would come back to this Commission for a vote.

Mr. Haley noted that the project's protection of water quality and enhancement of a connected trail system is a great benefit and Mr. Preble agreed.

The Commission offered positive feedback at the \$350K level.

The Commission determined to go out of Executive Session at 7:33 p.m.

Meeting Documents

Presentations and records associated with each matter identified, as included in the Conservation Agent's files.

Respectfully submitted