

West Newbury Open Space Committee
Minutes of the meeting
Wednesday, December 9, 2014

The Open Space Committee began to gather at 7:40 p.m. in the second floor hearing room of the 1910 building with Chairman Steve Greason, members Jennifer Germain, Dawne Fusco, Jean Lambert, Don Bourquard, Alice O'Leary, and Patricia Reeser and associate members Elisa Grammer and Mike Sabulis in attendance.

Town Residents Brian Richard, Deb Hamilton, Ellen Alden, Tom Horgan, and Mary Martin were present, along with Greenbelt's Vanessa Johnson.

Sullivan North Property Development

Mr. Richard (along with Mr. Horgan), one of the abutters to the proposed Sullivan North Development, noted that a group of abutters has hired an environmental consultant. They would like to see any houses located on Sullivan Court, maybe a parking lot of 6-10 spaces, and public access to river bluff with views. The abutters may not oppose a trail on Sullivan North, and it was pointed out that the Town owns connecting land for a trail and that the nearby Cottage development will be building a trail. The abutters do oppose a road.

Mr. Richard expects that the Sullivan North property sales price will go down. The abutters were concerned about the right of first refusal process being bypassed. Ms. Germain and Ms. Hamilton noted that there are regulations concerning right of first refusal processes.

Ms. Germain sought to clarify that the property in question offers river views, not river access. Mr. Bourquard noted that in fact you can walk there and access river. There is an old coal barge landing at the end of Whetstone.

Chairman Greason generally explained process for using Community Preservation Act funds, including the need for an appraisal and a two-thirds vote at Town Meeting. He further noted that there is competition for CPA monies among other potential properties and purposes, such as historic buildings like Page School.

A discussion of the Sullivan North Property as a potential water resource ensued. It was reported that the Water Department has been assigned to provide written review of the water potential of Sullivan North. It was observed that the Selectmen and Water Board have the authority to order tests, so this is a question for them.

Chairman Greason said that we have discussed the Sullivan North Property for a long time. The problem is that currently it has a very costly asking price. The Planning Board, ConCom, and Parks & Recreation have not expressed interest at this price. And West Newbury does not have a land trust.

Ms. Reeser explained that under state law, the Town is supposed to notify the seller of a deficient proffer Right of First Refusal (ROFR) for Chapter 61 land (as occurred here when the purchase & sale contract was not unconditional), but such notice apparently did not occur on a timely basis. But the process is far from complete. Development proposals for Sullivan North are still pending before ConCom and the Planning Board. It is still unclear whether all of the proposed lots are buildable, which will impact the sales price. A revised sales price will restart the ROFR.

It was generally agreed to let the process go forward before OCS can make many recommendations. Nonetheless, OCS would like the Sullivan North property to provide open space by the river and connections for trails.

The Committee voted unanimously, 7-0-0, to send a letter to the Planning Board with the Sullivan North plan marked up to show as much waterfront as possible preserved and with connecting trails to Sullivan Court and River meadow. This will also ask to allow the OSC to make a presentation at the next Planning Board meeting with Sullivan North developer Mr. Neve.

Beaucher Property Development

The Committee discussed the appraisal the Town and Greenbelt arranged for this property, which is currently under contract with a developer who is conducting 90-day due diligence. Ms. Johnson of Greenbelt explained that the appraisal concluded that a conservative approach involving the least engineering and least risk would produce 8 estate equestrian lots—making the all-in value of the undeveloped property \$1M.

Another higher density option with 16 lots could involve a through road from Cortland to Coffin, requiring two costly and complicated wetland crossings. As to the turn at Cortland, it may be possible to install stop sign and then a right angle turn, without the requirement for a wide turning radius. It is not clear what West Newbury would do, but other towns allow this. This second option is far more risky and once development costs and profits are accounted for, values out at \$980K. So the second option was primarily an intellectual exercise.

With the wetlands and topography of the property, the appraiser did not feel that a cluster would work. This property involves many development constraints.

Ms. Johnson further noted that this property would score highly for a land grant in terms of public trails and environmental value. Greenbelt would be willing to help out—maybe with \$50-\$100K. It was suggested that a more compelling case might be made if the adjacent Grew and Beaucher properties were considered together.

Ms. Reeser noted that Town may be willing to give up the Town-owned Mullen property (developable and suitable for some 24 houses) for the Beaucher and/or Grew properties. It may be that a like kind exchange could be arranged.

The Committee agreed informally that it will give the appraisal to the Beaucher realtor. The property will need Planning Board and ConCom review and waivers to develop it. At this point, the Committee is prepared to let the process unfold and see what a developer/buyer will be proposing.

Grew Property Development

Mr. Bourquard and Ms. Grammer reported on their site visit with Joe Grew at his property on River Road, for which he has drawn up several development plans. It appears that Mr. Grew would like two things from OSC: things: political support for his 6-lot plan, which accommodates the topography, and Town purchase of all or a segment of the property with the ravine and beaver pond backing onto the Beaucher property. Mr. Grew seemed amenable to trail easements.

It was further noted Mike Gootee of the Town's Water Department is interested in looking at the Grew property for water resources reasons and will have field person look at it.

It was informally decided that Ms. Lambert would contact Mr. Grew (who wanted a report back from OSC) and thank him for the site visits and convey appreciation for all the thought he has put into his planning for the land. She will report that the Committee favors whatever outcome preserves the most open space. She could also inform him of the Beaucher 6-lot appraisal outcome and the appraiser's view that a stop sign and right angle turn may be possible, eliminating the need for a strip of Grew land in order to connect the Beaucher property to Cortland.

Interaction with the Planning Board

Chairman Greason made a final observation that OSC should have better communication with the Planning Board. OCS members should attend their meetings when Open Space issues come into play with key properties.

The Committee adjourned at 10:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer