

Open Space Committee / Minutes of November 11, 2010 Meeting

7 p.m. Peterborough Town House

Present: Alan Bannister, Ed Henault, Debby Kaiser, Francie Von Mertens, Eric Thum, Alex Walker; Heritage Commission members Dick Estes, Sheila Kirkpatrick, Duffy Monahan, Michael Simpson, David Weir; Antioch graduate student Tyler Maikath

October's minutes were approved.

Agricultural resources / Antioch graduate school project

Francie Von Mertens gave background of the Open Space Committee's past efforts to find an existing model for a town agricultural resources inventory that goes beyond a soils and existing farm survey. Many inquiries sent and workshops attended by Von Mertens and Debby Kaiser were to no avail. Upon hearing of an Antioch New England graduate school project that focuses on local agriculture, a joint Heritage Commission and Open Space Committee meeting seemed logical.

In answer to a list of questions sent prior to the meeting, it was agreed that ag resources are a priority both of the Heritage Commission and OSC. The OSC's ranking of parcels for their conservation value includes agricultural soils and open fields, and historic farmsteads as a notable feature.

Graduate student Tyler Maikath described the project he is working on under Professor Charles Curtin at Antioch. He referenced a "Greenerborough" article and concept by Charlie Daloz of Daloz Farm in Hancock that set a goal of 80% regional food production by the year 2030 – as compared to the state's current 6% food self-sufficiency.

In response to Mr. Maikath's question whether meeting attendees were aware of the article and concept, few were.

His project focus area is the upper Contoocook watershed, encompassing parts of Rindge north through Peterborough into Hillsborough.

Preliminary steps are mapping existing conservation lands, farms and relevant soils, and contacting relevant groups. For the latter, he is working with the Peterborough Grange, and will present his findings at a December 19, 6:30 p.m. gathering at the Unitarian Church.

He referenced a similar project in Maine. His work is time-limited by his graduation, but the project is designed for other students to continue.

A wide-ranging conversation among Heritage Commission and Open Space Committee members suggested that home gardening would have to increase to meet the ambitious 80% goal; that aquaculture be a part of the pie chart of potential resources given the region's plentiful water supply; that population projections be secured from Southwest Region Planning Commission; that the region might specialize and excel at one crop (the region's many former apple orchards were given as an example).

Alan Bannister referenced an agricultural atlas he assisted under UMass and MA Department of Agriculture. He also recommended that hunting be part of the food resources equation. Alan then departed to rejoin the celebration of his 60th birthday with

well wishes expressed by all as well as appreciation for his attendance at the meeting despite that major conflict.

Infrastructure requirements include the need for a local slaughterhouse, currently a limiting factor.

In response to Mr. Maikath's question about environmental concerns, Von Mertens expressed concern that such an emphasis on agriculture could mean converting important wildlife habitat to the monoculture of cropland, with attendant run-off problems affecting local waterways.

It was suggested that forest resources be included in agriculture to avoid the catch-22 of cutting down productive forest in order to create productive farmland.

Attendees wished Tyler success with his ambitious project, and made note of the December 19 meeting where the results will be presented.

Other

Von Mertens will draft the annual letter to landowners that will be sent out soon along with complimentary Year in the Wild nature calendars.

The next meeting of the Open Space Committee will be December 9, 7 p.m. at the Town House.

/fvm