

**TOWN OF JAFFREY
Jaffrey, New Hampshire**

**Ad hoc Open Space Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 7, 2010**

Present: Chairman Kresge, Members Graf, Doane

Absent: Garretson

WORKING SESSION

Chairman Kresge called the meeting to order at 7:20 p.m.

The committee reviewed some of the discussion items from last meeting on hunting, noting in particular the issues of maintaining access to land parcels, and the notion of avoiding conflicts by staggering land uses over different seasons during the year.

NATURAL RESOURCES FOCUS GROUP 7:30 p.m.

Citizens interested in natural resource conservation and other open space related issues attended the meeting. Chairman Kresge provided a brief introduction on the objectives for the committee, described the process being used for the focus group sessions, and briefly summarized the results of the 2009 Natural Resource Inventory. This study collected and presented much of the information pertinent for natural resource conservation issues, however further input is being solicited in the focus group format in order to take advantage of the more detailed knowledge of local residents. In addition, it was hoped that if any important land values were missed in the NRI, input from this group could be used to fill the holes. The remainder of the meeting was devoted to conversation regarding the natural resource values important in Jaffrey.

One aspect of natural resources that was discussed revolved around the protection of surface water quality, especially given Jaffrey's position at the headwaters for several major watersheds. Surface water in most of the town flows into the Merrimack River basin northward via the Contoocook River. Water in the western portion of town flows into the Connecticut River basin. Our position at the headwaters means that any water quality degradation will affect downstream users, and not much flow is available for dilution.

Discussion of wetland area between Mt. Road and Great Road, "Priest Swamp" area – this area had been considered for designation as "prime wetland" at one time, but designation was never completed. This area is largely red spruce & alder, has high wildlife habitat values. Some of the land is already protected in this area.

Discussion of how you can quantify the ecosystem services provided by undeveloped land. Some functions such as water supply protection and stormwater absorption can be quantified to a degree, but others such as wildlife habitat do not lend themselves to direct valuation. Ultimately, has to be some

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kind of canvassing of public opinion as to what is “valuable” to them, and this may or may not be related to economic valuations.

“What is the cost of something when it’s gone? Now we have it, but with the tyranny of small decisions, twenty years from now it’s gone. That’s a cost, but it’s really hard to quantify.”

Discussion of whether the Master Plan process from 2006-2007 captured some of these values. The survey distributed as part the process found that maintaining “rural character” was important to most respondents. Difficult to define rural character, and it was also pointed out that although the survey response rate was “good” (30%), a majority opinion in the survey still amounts to a “majority of the minority” considering the total population of the town.

“The problem is there’s a lot of people that don’t see that there’s anything wrong and aren’t unhappy with anything, so they don’t take the time to turn out to vote locally or nationally. And that’s unfortunate, so that leaves it up to the elected officials to try to watch out for them as best as they can and make sure that the average person’s interests are being represented.”

One interest group that needs to be considered are the landowners, particularly large landowners. Landowners are a primary stakeholder in this whole process. Use of the land for hunting and other purposes can have a negative impact on landowners in the form of trash left behind, lack of respect.

Concern was voiced that if property ownership rights are changed by ordinance or regulation (as opposed to voluntarily or by purchase), then that’s a taking. Question was raised whether Jaffrey really needs more protected land than the 23.6% that is currently protected.

Current laws regarding ATV use have a default position that even if land is not specifically posted, ATVs are not permitted. ATVs are also not permitted on Class VI roads unless town officials have authorized that use of the roads. Of course, enforcement is a challenge.

There are different levels of current use. An additional 20% reduction in valuation is available if you make the land available for recreational use, in which case all uses such as hunting are permitted. If you don’t take the 20% recreational reduction, you can still post land in current use against hunting or other uses.

Discussion of whether the intended purpose of this open space planning process is to create some sort of ordinance or regulatory document. Response from the committee that this is not part of our charge – the open space plan will be a guidance document intended to identify possible priorities for the town, but not to implement these in any kind of regulatory structure. Concern was voiced that the process would “somehow have some influence on some land use policy or ordinance. I’m a little concerned that it’s going in that direction ... the landowners are the biggest stakeholders and should have the biggest amount of rights.”

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Discussion of the value of Class VI roads – “town should always keep them, don’t discontinue them, because 50 years from now they may be the avenue for people to hike and walk on. They’re public ways now and they should stay public ways.” Could the open space plan help instill some awareness of these issues, and encourage a sense of social responsibility by users for not abusing the roads in order to keep them in semi-passable condition? By law, town does not maintain Class VI roads, but under certain circumstances can expend some money to maintain them to the point of being usable as emergency lanes.

Discussion of the value of unfragmented lands – should degree of fragmentation be one of the criteria the town looks at if trying to decide how to allocate funds (grants, etc.) available for land preservation? Yes, that could be one criteria, but not the only one. Discussion of relative merits of land purchases versus conservation easements. Observation that with an easement, the land stays on the tax rolls. Observation that landowners’ willingness to put lands into conservation will sometimes depend on their stage of life – some are ready, some aren’t.

Question whether one role of the open space planning process should be public education. Agreement that this could be an important function provided by a permanent open space committee. Discussion of the importance of providing corridors and linkages to provide cover for wildlife moving between undeveloped areas. Suggestion that this is an important priority – increasing awareness, trying to provide some kind of coordination to ensure that patterns of development occur so that linkages remain between areas, and that some kind of regional approach also looks at linking undeveloped areas across the multi-town areas.

Following up on the observations that most people tend not to participate in the governance process,

“When I was young and having children and working, I didn’t have time to think too much about this. And now that I’m older, and I have time to think about it, I don’t want it to be too late for that next generation of people. It’s just a pattern – people don’t come to the meetings because they don’t have time and they’re not focusing on it. But then when they get to be old enough to really enjoy it, they say, gee we need to take care of this.”

Question raised of whether the future growth rate of Jaffrey is going to be fast enough to create major problems with resource consumption. Observation made that there were only two Jaffrey natives in the room, so clearly there has been population inflow over the years. It depends on what time scale you look at. Although growth has stopped for the last couple years due to the economy, the longer term trend is for continued growth.

Support voiced for the notion of concentrating population within the town core area that is served by water and sewer, thus easing development pressures on the outlying areas.

Description of an ongoing study by Fish and Game that is collaring bobcats to track their movements. So far, 12 bobcats have been collared in this general area. Results aren’t available yet, but should be instructive with regard to wildlife corridors. Cats have been collared in the vicinity of Thorndike Pond

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and north side of Mt. Monadnock. One of the more important corridors is probably between Mt. Monadnock and Gap Mt.

Discussion of distribution of current protected lands in Jaffrey. Although a significant percentage of land is permanently protected, most of that land is concentrated around Mt. Monadnock. There may be a need to protect resources in other parts of the town and pursue additional protection strategies of easements or acquisitions. "It's the quality, not the quantity".

Reiteration of the importance of education, installing awareness in people about the value of natural resources, fostering a cooperative community spirit. Positive feedback can be helpful, complimenting people that do an exceptional job with land stewardship. Encouraging the expectation of land preservation as a community ethic or social norm can help establish a climate supportive of conservation.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m. Next meeting will be on April 21.

Submitted:

Mark W. Kresge
Chairman, Ad hoc Open Space Committee