

Lenox Community Preservation Committee
August 12, 2015
Minutes

Members in Attendance: Frederick Keator (Chair), Gene Chague (At Large), Tom Delasco (Planning), Channing Gibson (Selectmen), Joe Strauch (Conservation), Olga Weiss (Historical Society)

Members Absent: Catherine May (Housing Authority), Tony Patella (Community Center), Al Harper (At Large)

Staff in Attendance: Christopher Ketchen (Town Manager)

The Community Preservation Committee met on Wednesday, August 12 to hear an application from the Board of Selectmen for \$250,000 to purchase 63 acres and 2 easements at Undermountain Farm. The meeting began at 7:03PM. Mr. Keator notified the committee that Mr. Patella and Ms. May were absent due to travel and Mr. Harper had recused himself from participating in deliberations regarding Undermountain Farm due to a direct personal interest.

The Town Manager described the land and easement acquisitions. Since the Community Preservation Committee deadlocked 4-4 on a previous proposal, the Selectmen, Berkshire Natural Resources Commission (BNRC), and the Sprague Family Nominee Trust have been working together to modify the proposal. The Board of Selectmen is seeking an appropriation of \$250,000 for the purchase of 63 acres and two trails easements along Undermountain Road. Through their partnership with the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC), the Selectmen have agreed to buy the parcel for \$250,000 provided that BNRC hold a conservation restriction on the land and a second 83 acre parcel to the north. In addition, public access to the northern parcel will be provided via two trail easements designed to connect Parson's Marsh to other public lands.

The Town Manager reported that the Selectmen have called a Special Town Meeting for September 21. Prior to Special Town Meeting, the Community Preservation Committee has posted a public hearing on August 31.

Ms. Weiss spoke in favor of the proposal. In addition, she pointed out that the proposal also protects wildlife corridors and that there is no need for funds outside of those already set aside for open space in the Community Preservation Fund.

Mr. Chague and Mr. Keator asked about provisions for parking. The Town Manager stated that BNRC and the Town had agreed on locating spaces in the southwest corner of the property. Mr. Narain Schroeder, representing BNRC, stated that 10-12 car spaces would be included in the Conservation Restriction.

Mr. Chague, Mr. Keator, Mr. Delasco, and Mr. Gibson asked about provisions for trail construction. The Town Manager stated that funding for trail construction would be an additional expense. Mr. Schroeder

could not provide an estimated cost or methodology for construction. Private fundraising, State grants, Community Preservation, and General Fund capital appropriations were all mentioned as potential funding sources.

Mr. Strauch and Mr. Gibson voiced support for the proposal. Mr. Strauch asked if the proposed trail along Undermountain Road would cross the road. The Town Manager responded in the affirmative, and pointed out that the Town owns a right-of-way at that point all the way to Kennedy Park and Yokun Ridge. Mr. Gibson pointed out that the trail would be inside the tree line.

Mr. Gibson expressed his view that public access to the northern portion of the property was a compelling point that convinced the Board of Selectmen to make its application.

Mr. Delasco stated that the new proposal, while better, lacked assurances that the 10 acre farm would be protected – a point that was conceded by the Town Manager. Mr. Schroeder was able to confirm that BNRC would retain rights under the conservation restriction to maintain the meadow areas outside the 10 acre farm. It was also pointed-out that agricultural uses, such as a community farm, are allowed under the conservation restrictions.

Mr. Keator pointed out that the current or future owner of the northern parcels could not be compelled to maintain the land and that such maintenance responsibilities may come at the expense of BNRC or the Town.

Mr. Keator stated that, while he felt the new proposal was an improvement, he was not convinced that it could not be further improved. He expressed concern about the cost in the context of other properties and trails improvements contemplated in the new Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Several members pointed out that the entire farm is currently categorized as chapter land (Chapter 61A) for assessment purposes.

Several procedural topics were discussed regarding the technical elements of the draft warrant article.

Mr. Strauch moved, Mr. Delasco seconded, and the Committee voted unanimously to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 7:49PM.