



TOWN OF OLD SAYBROOK
Economic Development Commission

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SPECIAL MEETING

Minutes

April 23, 2014

Economic Development Office, Old Saybrook Town Hall
7:30pm

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Swenson called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Attendant Members

Liz Swenson, Chairman
Jim Keating, Secretary
Dave Cole, Regular Member
Carol Conklin, Regular Member
John DeCristoforo, Regular Member
David Shearer, Regular Member

Attendant Staff

Susan W. Beckman, Economic Development Director

Guests

Kate Brown, The Trust for Public Land (TPL)
Fred Carstensen, Old Saybrook Resident and Director of the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis at UCONN

III. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC and CORRESPONDENCE – None

IV. OLD BUSINESS – The Lyons Property

Kate Brown answered questions that had been posed by the Economic Development Commission (EDC).

What is TPL proposing?

TPL has a mission to preserve open space and acts as an interim buyer of land between organizations/communities and land owners to negotiate the purchase of land for preservation purposes. As a buyer, TPL puts money down and negotiates a contract for land purchases on behalf of

organizations/communities. TPL also pays for land surveys, appraisals and other due diligence to negotiate a contract between all parties with an interest in the transaction.

What is the timing of the proposed land purchase?

TPL began discussions with the First Selectman 1.5 years ago. Direction has been taken from the First Selectman on how to proceed regarding timing and which commissions to engage. TPL was asked not to move forward with their program regarding the land purchase until after the Police Station Bond referendum in the fall of 2014.

TPL has negotiated a contract with Lehman Brother's. The contract expires toward the end of June (around the 22nd) but Kate didn't have the specific date. She could not share the amount that TPL has put down because the contract agreement requires that information remains confidential but it is six figures.

How difficult would it be to get an extension?

TPL can get an extension on the agreement but not without forfeiting their down payment and they are not willing to forfeit the money to provide the town more time to consider the purchase. If there is not a referendum by the end of June in which Old Saybrook residents approve the bonding, TPL will walk away from the project.

What has been the Political input to date?

Kate did not want to misrepresent anyone's position and provided information from her perspective and understanding.

The Old Saybrook BOS is not advocating for or against the purchase and wants to let voters make the decision through the referendum to approve the bonding.

Statewide, the Department of Energy and Environment Protection (DEEP) and all environmental organizations in the state feel the purchase of the property for preservation is a priority. They are all aware of the property due to its value as conservation land.

The state plans to put \$4 million toward the land purchase through DEEP and other sources. It is very political at the state level at this point with the Governor and DEEP still undecided as to how much money they will commit to the purchase. Contacts at DEEP are Graham Stevens, Open Space Acquisition, and Commissioner Klee.

There is support for the purchase from the State Legislature as a whole as well as from US Representatives.

How much money is each party committing to the purchase?

The appraisals valued the land at \$8.09 million. Even though the appraisals are lower than originally thought, all parties are still being asked to contribute the same amount as before. The amounts originally considered are still not enough to cover the entire cost. TPL's private fundraising will bridge the difference.

The State is being asked for \$4 million.

TPL is raising \$2-3 million and will contribute the money toward the purchase and any additional that is raised will be given to the town to help cover the cost of stewardship.

Essex will contribute money from its open space fund (\$150,000-\$200,000) in addition to a matching grant from the state to cover Essex's portion of the property.

Westbrook has less than 3 acres of the property within its borders and will provide an access point to the property. Westbrook is not expected to contribute money to the property purchase.

Old Saybrook is being asked to contribute \$3 million. The bond referendum is only asking for authorization to bond for the money. If the deal falls through, Old Saybrook will never act on the authorization to bond.

The cost of the \$3 million bond at 3% interest would be \$24/year for 20 years for the median assessed home of \$370,000. The loss of tax revenue, without development on the property, is \$119,000/year.

What are the details of the agreement being negotiated?

There are only discussions at this point and a lot of decisions are pending the outcome of the bond referendum. If Old Saybrook does not approve the bond authorization, the deal will not move forward.

Is there a management or site plan for the property?

There is no management or site plan at this point. Discussions with the town planner, Planning Commission, Park & Rec, Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works (DPW) and Old Saybrook Land Trust have focused on planning access points and requesting exceptions to allow for roads to allow emergency vehicle access.

The joint ownership option under discussion with the town and state has indicated the town will be responsible for managing the property and can do so with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Planning Commission, Park & Rec, Conservation Commission, DPW and Old Saybrook Land Trust similar to what is in place for Great Cedars.

An easement may be granted to the Old Saybrook Land Trust. Easement language and agreement will be finalized if the bond authorization is approved.

L. Swenson noted concern about the lack of plans and not being able to make adjustments after the referendum.

What keeps consideration of active recreation off the table?

The state retains some sort of ownership and restricts the use of the property to passive recreation because some of the funding sources that may be used require that restriction to qualify for funding/grants. The state retains some sort of ownership and restricts the use of the property to passive recreation because some of the funding sources that may be used require that restriction to qualify for funding/grants.

A \$200,000 private contribution to TPL for the property comes from a Fish & Wildlife organization with restrictions that the money be used for the preservation of open, passive recreation space.

Commission members expressed concern about not having any options for building structures for bathrooms or for a nature center/shelter/meeting/programming space.

The answer is that the town could consider carving out a portion of the property (purchased with additional funding) and have the rights to use the land for active recreation.

Commission members expressed concern about not having any options for building structures for bathrooms or for a nature center/shelter/meeting/programming space.

Discussions about the 30 acres already owned by the town would allow for an access road (not paved). Or a potential swap of comparable space could be considered.

F. Carstensen said sustainable forestry is allowed.

The town will have to hire a Forester, certified by the state, to develop a sustainable forestry plan.

D. Cole noted that any decisions to carve-out sections of the property for town use would need to be made within the next month.

How did TPL get involved?

The environmental community has been fighting development on this property since 2008. Other organizations had tried to negotiate with the land owners. TPL made an effort with an offer of \$10 million in 2010 that led to a year of negotiations and the current agreement that expires at the end of June 2014.

F. Carstensen asked how much recreational open space Old Saybrook has, if there is a plan for those spaces, and if the town has done an assessment of its recreational space needs or projected needs. The Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis has recently contracted with the River Council of Governments (RiverCOG) to do a non-market value study of such things as open space and cultural amenities in the region as these amenities have economic value but it is hard to measure. It is important to know how these amenities impact the decisions people make about how and where to spend their leisure time.

D. Shearer asked if there was any grey area between active and passive recreation. Kate responded that there is a clear delineation between active and passive recreation. Passive recreation excludes motorized vehicles, poles with electric lines, structures with water and septic or changing the landscape to clear for game fields.

C. Conklin said we need to educate the voter on how much space the town does have as open space (both active and passive) and how much the town spends on management of these spaces. We also need a nature-based tourism marketing plan.

F. Carstensen said the RiverCOG is collecting information on nature-based tourism opportunities.

D. Shearer asked if the town put in \$3million toward the property purchase and an individual put in \$1 million, could the town purchase an additional amount of land for its own uses. Kate responded that the town would be able to carve out more land for its own uses if such funds were used. Kate said there is a possibility of swapping the town's 30 acre parcel land-locked by the Preserve Property for another, more accessible 30 acre parcel but it would have to be negotiated before the December closing date.

F. Carstensen expressed concern about the downside of not purchasing the property and the potential for a developer to build on the land.

I. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Swenson adjourned the meeting at 9:20 p.m

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan W. Beckman, Economic Development Director
Acting Clerk