

Westminster Master Plan August 21, 2013 joint meeting with Open Space Committee

Present: Gregg Buckman, Steve Robinson, Bill Goodwin, Dick Valette, ML Altobelli, Dean Johnson, Scott Ryder, Laila Michaud, Steve Wallace, Donna Brownell, Josh Schonberg, Linda Wiest, Joe Flanagan, Mike Fortin, Heather Billings, Mike Gallant, Richelle Brown

Meeting called to order at 7:05

June 19, 2013 Minutes approved Scott Ryder & Mike Gallant

Distributed Draft of first three sections of the Open Space and Recreation Plan

Donna B Read Janet Morrison's comments to add language to conserve existing agricultural farms and the towns support of agriculture.

Ag Comm. supports Janet's comments

Add into page 2 bullet points. And pick up again in Goals and Objectives section.

Don't exclude new farm opportunities.

Promote new and young farms and farmers

The group corrected typos & made comments throughout the document.

Comments: there are three different watersheds in Westminster, MRPC to provide a map

Acquisition: discuss issue. 30% of town land is protected- that's a lot. Protected most land around the water resources. Town is pursuing a grant to purchase land around Muddy Pond to complete the loop. Majority of critical resources, difficulty to make the case for new acquisitions unless they've got everything, biomap, trail links, vernal pools...

Bill G asked if 30% protected- does that tax exempt? No- tax list has chapter lands which get a reduced tax rate, only land that contains a deed restriction, Conservation land, state owned conservation land, Fitchburg/Gardner watershed protection, APR land (2 farms). Only the APR land is taxable. Do we get payment in kind for taxes for watershed? Don't know.

Policy level- continue to preserve land that could be taxed, cost of community services are not costing for open space where residential properties do.

Open Space committee reached goal of preserving the land needed. Now to preserve land involved in agricultural.

Donna B clarified Old Growth Forest (265) acres recognized. Change wording to administrative old growth forest. Wachusett Mtn. Associates distinct from Wachusett Mountain which has programs into the old growth forest. Leominster State Forest date of the forest included.

Westminster Business Park- change to two parcels with freight rail potential, not three.

Crocker Pond paragraph-tabled for now.

Is all the water and sewer information needed? Pulled from Town Government chapter. In old plan it was a minimal description, Scott suggested editing it down.

Next Open Space meeting, invite Master Plan Committee to it.

7 year action plan- item by item

What got done, what didn't, do we still want to do it? tweak the language, new items to address Unique features map, add/subtract?

Goals and Objectives:

Distributed draft from public forum with comments from Master Plan committee and Historical Commission.

Accepted comments on G/O

Forestry, Farming, Recreation

Discussed snowmobilers vs ATV potential use on trails. Snowmobile clubs provide resources to help maintain trails. In another town many volunteers came in and helped clear after the ice storm. Local snowmobile clubs as advocate.

ML added, would new athletic fields would include associated facilities (parking).

Where do we go from here?

SW hoping for more sections to be completed by September meeting

4-Environmental section- time consuming

5-Inventory of conservation lands- need to add descriptive text

Action Plan

Leaves 6 & 7 for October.

Date for Open Space Committee meeting: Monday 5pm October 7th working meeting

Discuss Board of Selectmen decision on Crocker Pond trails and consistency with Master Plan's eco-tourism strategy.

Could have been handled & settled before public meeting and being distorted in the press.

Joe F suggested to re-read the deed, the beach is residents only, and one easement along Whitman river.

Crocker Pond Resource Management Plan- never implemented. Included as action item for 2007, bring that up again.

Crocker pond is special case (not like Hager Park) and many residents feel that it is for town residents only.

OSC does not have unanimous opinion, wish to continue to have discussion with Master Plan. Intent of government is questioned to

Still valuable to have eco-tourism strategy for town. Be more cognizant that we have this going forward.

Review results of Master Plan outreach assignments:

Script:

Heather -BOS not done yet

Mike F- on Advisory Board agenda for next Monday night

Linda W- not yet

Scott R- Public Works dept has awareness of the process and commitment to be involved with the document moving forward.

Dean- give the Ag Comm. regular updates

Richelle-Con Com July 17 went well, not a lot of questions. Reminded them to read everything and participate, no specific action plan. Review OSR plans.

Troubled that some departments that are not on board and don't want to be. At the town department head meeting a month ago, Fire & Police chief indicated that they were not willing to support the master plan, and no edits could support it.

John Fairbanks is not in support, maybe just the town government chapter- hasn't finished review.

Master Plan that does not have unanimous support of selectmen will fail at Town Meeting. The Government Chapter is not an agenda against them. Dealing with just the facts- what can be done to bring them around.

Having an updated master plan is key to maintain bond rating and
Script: goes through benefits of the master plan to educate the residents.

Nobody brow beaten, any reasonable edits will be considered.

Discussed possible reasons why department heads are not supportive of Master Plan. Per capita spending table seemed to be the issue.

Procedure for approval of the final version: When the Plan is done: planning board statutorily needs to approve it. If it's accepted at town meeting, we get buy in from the larger community into the implementation process.

Where to go from here... Still continue on with the project? Which way to go. Need Selectmen to talk to department heads about what needs to be changed in order to have their support. Entertain reasonable edits at this point. Put it in writing, where did we go wrong?

Should committee write a letter to all departments, asking them to look at the four completed chapters and whether they agree with what is in there? Have incorporated all received comments. Keep record of comment attempts.

Think about how we want to handle this, discuss at our September meeting.

Ideas on the table: Letters to dept heads, meeting with BOS.

September 18, Wednesday

Please complete outreach assignments prior to that date.

Review our options for hosting a Main Street Design Charrette:

Not interested U Mass, Conway school of design – don't have time to fit in curriculum this year or spring.

State Downtown Technical Assistance Grants- SW will apply again.

Or make recommendation of Land use plan to do when it becomes available? About \$3000

ML has contacts for pro-bono work. SW will send the scope of work to her.

Briggs Building Committee did very similar thing

Motion to Ad: Dean, Scott AIF 8:10pm