

The regular meeting of the Open Space Advisory Committee was called to order at 7:07 p.m. Present for this meeting were the following Committee members: John Cronce, George Fisher (Township Committee Liaison), Jamie Kamph, Dan Malek, Judy O'Brien, Rich Schaible, Hal Shute and Cathy Urbanski. Board Secretary, Christine Rosikiewicz, was absent. Ms. Urbanski will be recording the meeting tonight.

**OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

There were no comments from any public present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 10, 2015**

**Ms. Urbanski made a motion to approve the February 10, 2015 minutes with spelling corrections (Ziegenfuss) and to insert the sentence “The Committee decided to go no further with this.” on page 2 under “List of Preserved Properties” after sentence #3. Mr. Shute seconded the motion. All were in favor; the motion passed.**

**OLD BUSINESS**

Green Acres Projects

Hewitt Park Expansion Mr. Cronce reported that the property has been paid for. Expenses were greater than anticipated. Ms. Kamph said the Committee has not received the reimbursement form yet; she will follow up on this.

Farmland Preservation

Toll North: Mr. Cronce said there has been activity on this item. The offer letter has been signed and forwarded to the County. All three agencies have to pass a resolution of approval. This is on the Township agenda for March 18<sup>th</sup>; the Township attorney is reviewing it. Once the Township passes a resolution the County can pass one. After the County passes a resolution the State can pass one. The price is \$8700 an acre. Mr. Fisher asked about the price compared to another recent property; Mr. Shute explained the discrepancy which was due to factors including frontage, condition of the farmland, and the condition of the structures.

Lambert: Mr. Shute said the CMV has been received; it is \$11,300. The offer letter has not been signed; The Lambert's would like the right to build a second house. The Township Committee is in agreement with this request. Mr. Shute will speak to the Township attorney regarding this and Township Committee can pass a resolution at the March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Mr. Cronce thanked Mr. Shute for the hard work he has done on these two main projects, Toll and Lambert.

Holcombe III: Mr. Cronce provided the Committee members with a map of the property and went over it. This farm will connect with other preserved properties in the area. It is separated by the main Holcombe farm by the highway. Mr. Cronce met with the Holcombe family to determine where the exception area should go. He pointed out this two acre area, which includes the farmhouse and remnants of a barn, to the Committee on the map. The Township Committee has given the Open Space Advisory Committee the green light to go forward on this property. The paper street was

removed from the map. There was a discussion on whether the exception is on one or two lots. Mr. Shute and Mr. Cronce will work on the application process.

Fulper: Mr. Shute spoke to Mr. Fulper and he is ready to move forward. Mr. Shute discussed the cost of the project, funding it, and Green Acres possible involvement in it. Mr. Shute would like to discuss the open space budget before going further on this project.

Ziegenfuss: Mr. Cronce reported that there is a Green Acres easement on the Ziegenfuss property. The Township attorney is researching this. The Committee needs to wait until this is cleaned up before this can move forward. Mr. Cronce said he advised Ms. Ziegenfuss that there is no guarantee the Township will approve preservation of this property and commented on the terrain on the property to the Committee. This property will be put on hold until more information is received by the Committee.

Mr. Shute reported that he received the CADB agenda today for next Thursday's meeting and both Toll and Lambert are on it. Mr. Cronce will attend this meeting. It was noted that Ziegenfuss may also be on the agenda.

Other:

Hunting Program: Mr. Cronce reported that letters were sent out regarding the survey. Mr. Fisher reported that he received a phone call regarding bear hunting on State property from the DEP. Mr. Fisher advised the DEP that the Township also leases Township owned property to hunters. Mr. Malek provided a written recap of major changes proposed at the Fish and Game Council meeting. Mr. Malek recalled the process for approval of the proposed changes which include a public comment period. The changes will effect Hunterdon County. A six day season is proposed for October. Additional days in December could be added if there is bad weather. Each hunter can take two bears; one per each season with a permit. There is a desire to increase public education. Mr. Malek said these changes are for the next bear management period as the five year period just ended. The addition of the season and increased zones would be in effect this year. Mr. Cronce thanked Mr. Malek for his report and for keeping the Committee up to date.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

List of Preserved Properties: Mr. Cronce referenced a list Mr. Shute compiled in 2007. The Committee agreed to keep an inventory of preserved properties at last month's meeting; the Clerk has the information needed for this. Ms. Kamph will work on this; Mr. Cronce offered his assistance to her. Ms. Urbanski provided an updated map of open space. The cost of updating the large map in the meeting room was discussed.

Open Space Tax: Mr. Shute went over the Township debt service information he put together for the Finance Committee. There were two refinances last year and a new bond to cover the school deferral issue. Mr. Fisher noted that the CFO has different numbers than Mr. Shute provided. For 2014 the CFO has \$628,000 and Mr. Shute has \$578,000. For 2015 the CFO has \$603,000 and Mr. Shute has \$557,000. The number from the CFO could include both principal and interest for the debt service; Mr. Fisher is following up with the CFO on this.

Mr. Shute said total debt service for open space is \$428,000. There will be two more years (2016 and 2017) of paying off the large bond from 2003. After 2017 the open space debt will drop down to around \$227,880. At that time a determination can be made if the open space tax should be

lowered. Mr. Shute calculated the debt service out to 2026. It was noted that payment from the debt is coming from both township open space funds and the regular township budget.

Mr. Cronce asked what the total amount would be if the Committee was to pay off this debt today. Mr. Shute referred to the draft budget. There is \$300,000 for Open Space debt service; this is roughly what is collected for Open Space tax. There is \$200,000 under "support current fund". Mr. Fisher said this is for the Township Committee to decide; they have not discussed this yet. He said the budget could be balanced with the \$200,000 and five points on the tax rate. The amount of surplus was briefly discussed.

Mr. Shute referred to page 2 where he removed properties that were preserved and added properties proposed to close this year. He explained how some of the funds last year were used to pay down debt. There is \$990,000 in the trust fund. Mr. Shute estimated what the cost will be for preservation of Toll North, Lambert, Fulper, and Holcolme. There will be enough funding for an additional project if \$300,000 if paid into the debt service rather than \$450,000.

Ms. Kamph asked about where the \$150,000 would come from. Mr. Fisher said that would come from the Township funds from the regular municipal tax.

Mr. Cronce asked what the total Open Space debt is. Mr. Shute said \$850,000 was refinanced in 2013; some of this has been paid off. In 2014 there was 1.5 million. Currently the total debt is at least two million dollars. Mr. Fisher noted that most of the debt in a municipality is open space.

Ms. Kamph asked if there was a plan of things that need to be done. Mr. Shute referred to the list. Mr. Cronce said preserving the properties on the list would bring the Committee close to their goal. Comments were made about the amount of open space needed and how expensive it is to live here, this is also because of the schools. Tax rates in West Amwell compared to neighboring townships were discussed. It was noted that the Township is not able to control most of the tax money, especially compared with the schools.

On a question on how much the Fulper preservation has cost Mr. Shute replied three million dollars; it was mostly farmland. Possible future preservation of this property was briefly discussed.

Mr. Fisher commented favorably on the work the Open Space Advisory Committee has done over the past few years.

The Committee discussed funding future projects and if funds should be borrowed. Comments were made about the likelihood of future development in the Township and the future of the Open Space program.

Ms. Urbanski asked when the Township Committee is meeting about the budget. Mr. Fisher explained the process this year. Township Committee has been working on the budget. Mr. Shute expressed that Toll and Lambert will close this year.

Mr. Cronce expressed appreciation to the Committee for their work.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms. Kamph made a motion, seconded by Ms. O'Brien, to adjourn the meeting at 8:42p.m. All were in favor; the motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Christine A. Rosikewicz  
Open Space Secretary