

**Town of New Hartford
Open Space Preservation Commission**

**Meeting Minutes
July 22, 2013**

Members and Alternate Members Present: Jean Cronauer, Madeline McClave, Bill Michaud and Karen Griswold Nelson.

Guest: Jeff Ollendorf, Town Planner, Town of Farmington

Chair Jean Cronauer called the meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. and seated Alternate Karen Griswold Nelson for Caren Ross. All members present talked about our wonderful and valued colleague, Bob LaGoy, former First Selectman and town leader in New Hartford who passed away yesterday. We will miss him and his presence among us very much.

I. Meeting Minutes: The June meeting minutes taken by Ross were not presented.

II. Policy Initiatives:

Cronauer introduced Jeff Ollendorf, Town Planner for Town of Farmington and resident of New Hartford. Jeff gave background on Farmington's open space program from early property purchased from the local water company in the early 1990's to present. He said that townspeople wanted 40% of the land preserved as open space and this was determined through a strategic planning process, charrettes and then master planning begun in 2003-04. He said that every year or two, referenda are passed for projects. This continued even after the economic downturn as people want balance in their town. They have 133 properties on the list as good candidates for acquisition and are currently working on five or six projects. They are now at 33% open space. The most recent bond was about two or three years ago. State participation has helped.

Jeff and the Commission members talked about the advantages of authorizing bonding and the pros and cons of surveys. Jeff said that in Farmington, the voters do not approve each project specifically except for the bigger ones. They approve the bonding and the projects are done via staff and boards and commissions.

Lots of Record: Bill Michaud distributed a preliminary draft of a proposal to revise tax assessments on 'lots of record' that are part of land preservation projects. Members discussed the Town of New Hartford's current 'lots of record' policy and the example of the Jones family who now pay three times the amount of taxes on a much smaller parcel than on the entire parcel before they sold it at a discount to the Town for open space. This is a disincentive for people who may want to preserve their land. Some possible language was discussed such as: 'any remnant parcel should be eligible for PA 490.' Other options discussed were possibly waiving acreage requirements for the different classifications of open space, farmland or forestland. Ollendorf said that he believes there is language in the state statutes (may be 8-25 Definition of a Subdivision) that if a person donates or sells land for open space, it is not a subdivision. Bill will work on the draft language to simplify.

Property Tax Abatement: Michaud gave background on 2006 state legislation allowing municipalities to abate taxes for open space. This legislation grew out of work done by former New Hartford Open Space Commissioner Bill Ducci and the OSPC. It works by determining the fair market value of development rights on a property and then abating taxes for the property owner into the future in a variety of possible ways. Danbury has adopted this policy and Bill is waiting for a call back from their planning director to see how it has actually been implemented. Bill has drafted a preliminary, proposed ordinance.

Key issues discussed by members: 1) various scenarios including Danbury's payable period of ten years with one-tenth per year of the abatement share. The ten-year period is not a requirement of the state law. A town could also allow landowner to abate to full extent each year until done and use 25 years as the maximum for rolling over. Or, another approach would be ten equal payments up to the maximum each year owed only. The abatement is transferable to any property tax liability in the same town. The members discussed process issues vis a vis the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Selectman.

Michaud will work on draft ordinance. Commission will find out if any other towns in CT have implemented this tax abatement policy and how it has worked.

III. Executive Session to Discuss Real Estate: Cronauer moved and McClave seconded to go into Executive Session at 8:10 p.m. Cronauer moved and Nelson seconded to come out of Executive Session at 8:35 p.m.

IV. Stewardship: Members discussed various stewardship issues. McClave said she met with Tim Phillips to walk easement boundaries in area of where cut-through to Goula will be and to discuss a possible Eagle Scout project to get hikers across seasonal watercourse on the trail. She is working with Conservation Commission on issues at Goula Open Space Preserve. Michaud and McClave to follow up on Jones Mountain issues with First Selectman (Michaud) and Jeanne Jones (McClave).

V. Other Business: None.

Motion to adjourn at 8:51 p.m. (McClave/Michaud) was approved. Next regularly scheduled meeting will be August 26, 2013.

Madeline McClave, Secretary
New Hartford Open Space Preservation Commission