

Minutes of New Hartford Open Space Preservation Commission (OSPC) Regular Meeting
Monday, April 25, 2022, 6:30 p.m., Sessions Conference Room, New Hartford Town Hall

Members Present: Chairperson Doug Roth, Karen Griswold-Nelson, Madeline McClave, Eva Barham (joining by phone), Bill Michaud, Rusty Warner, Jean Darlington (secretary).

Guest: Mary Hoag. Doug called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. and welcomed Mary, who might be interested in filling one of our two vacancies for alternates.

Approval of minutes: Jean moved to approve the minutes of the 3/28/2022 regular meeting. Madeline seconded and the motion passed 4-0 with one abstention (Bill and Rusty arrived after this vote).

Updates on Current Open Space Preserves and Trails:

Helen Butler Riverfront Trail open space preserve: The New Hartford Land Trust (NHLT) has reviewed and given feedback on the OSPC's most recent update to the Town's Butler Riverfront Management Plan. Bill moved that we approve the 2021 Update and forward it to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) for their consideration. Eva seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Jean volunteered to schedule a walk there with Land Use Administrator Mike Lucas and representatives of OSPC, the Conservation Commission (CC), and NHLT to discuss plans for moving forward on erosion mitigation. Madeline is working with Town Hall to schedule a presentation about invasive knotweed and bittersweet with expert Tom Zetterstrom. Representatives from the Town BOS and staff, related boards and commissions, Farmington River organizations and the NHLT are being invited. Doug reported that he had walked the trail recently and found it to be in very good condition for hikers.

Jones Mountain open space preserve: Bill volunteered to put together a plan for erosion control along the carriage road. Madeline e-mailed with CAES entomologist Carole Cheah (<https://portal.ct.gov/CAES/ABOUT-CAES/Staff-Biographies/Carole-A-Cheah>) about the hemlock woolly adelgid. She will forward Carole's response to OSPC. Madeline said NHLT's new, short trail on their property abutting the south side of Jones Mountain Preserve will officially open later this spring or summer.

Phillips Farm: Doug reported that he had walked the trail and found it to be well marked and passable, despite a few wet areas. Madeline expressed an interest in having the hiking trail mowed in certain places (one mowing width along the edge of the fields) to facilitate the NHLT bird walk on June 25th. Doug volunteered to contact the Phillips family to ask about that and also to discuss ideas for erosion control on the tractor road.

Goula open space preserve:

Doug reported that on a Saturday April 2nd walk of the Phillips and Goula properties he encountered active cutting of standing dead ash trees on the north west of Goula. He met Josh Carroll, who was coordinating the activity, who confirmed he had town approval. Doug confirmed this with First Selectman Dan Jerram. Josh stated the dead ash was being dropped to eliminate dead branches dropping on the field which had been adversely impacting mowing. This particular area is a field that is in the early stages of reforestation. Doug also observed an excavator in the field which had been used to work on "reclaiming" the field.

OSPC members expressed the desire to help town leaders make such decisions regarding stewardship as a matter of routine. In addition to the concern about process and OSPC's ability to provide input on decisions about managing the open space preserves, OSPC members were

very concerned, specifically, about heavy equipment being used during mud season, cutting down ‘snags’ and other trees that are important habitat for birds and do not overhang any trail, and the timing of the activity. Cutting of shrubby areas, if recommended, should occur after the first frost and prior to April 1 for birds and other wildlife. Doug and Bill volunteered to discuss the process for approving management activity on town-owned, preserved open space land with Dan. Doug recommended that we include a description of our proposed approval process in the update of the Open Space Plan.

Members agreed to draft a management plan for the Goula preserve that will include recommendations for rotational mowing schedules. Preservation of wildlife habitat is a major purpose of conservation easements, generally, and of the specific CE for the Goula preserve. Preserved open space is intentionally different from a manicured park. OSPC members agreed that we need to educate the public and town leaders about open space land stewardship, the importance to declining species of “early successional habitat” (for example, trees and shrubby plants growing into fields)

(https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1081109.pdf), and the wildlife value of leaving dead trees standing (<https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Cover/Trees-and-Snags>).

Summary of open space preserves for town website:

Jean handed out a printed copy of a suggested document to post on the town website. Madeline volunteered to review it and send recommended edits by early next week (the week of May 2nd). Eva volunteered to send Madeline her version of a PowerPoint they have been working on. Rusty volunteered to draw up a design for this section of the town website.

Work on updating open space plan: Jean said that she and Eva had spent two full afternoons working on the Plan. Members thanked them and responded to a list of questions Jean had asked. She volunteered to incorporate the answers into the draft of the Plan. Karen said she still has more writing to contribute.

Town budget and open space funding: We discussed the upcoming town budget referendum. Doug asked members to think about specific projects for the long term and come up with specific budgets for them.

New business: none

Executive session to discuss real estate: At 8:31 p.m., Bill moved we enter executive session to discuss real estate. Rusty seconded and the motion passed unanimously. At 9:05 p.m., Bill moved we leave executive session. Rusty seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m. Next meeting Monday, May 23rd, 2022.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Darlington, Secretary