

**Minutes of New Hartford Open Space Preservation Commission (OSPC) Regular Meeting
Monday, May 24, 2021 6:30 p.m., 3rd Floor Senior Center, Town Hall**

Members present: Jean Cronauer, Karen Griswold-Nelson, Doug Roth, Madeline McClave, Bill Michaud, Jean Darlington (secretary), Rusty Warner. Jean C. called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

1. Welcome back from Covid-19 hiatus: Members greeted each other and thanked Jean Cronauer for her many years of expert and dedicated service and leadership as Chairperson of the OSPC. Her work has been informed by many decades of conservation work with the Northwest Conservation District

2. Election of OSPC officers: Chairperson: Jean C. asked for a motion to elect a new chairperson. Karen nominated Doug Roth as chairperson, Madeline seconded the nomination, and Doug was approved unanimously.

Secretary: Doug nominated Jean D. to continue serving as secretary. Jean C. seconded and Jean D. was approved unanimously. Jean C. announced that she would like to continue on as a member of OSPC for the time being and pointed out that we need to look for volunteers to fill our two vacancies for alternates. Members volunteered to bring ideas for alternates to our next meeting.

3. Approval of Minutes from 2/24/2020 Regular Meeting: Bill moved to approve the minutes. Karen seconded the motion and the motion passed with six approvals and one abstention.

4. Trails and projects – updates and plans:

Since our last meeting fifteen months ago, members of OSPC have worked with volunteers from the New Hartford Land Trust and others to maintain and improve the hiking trails in town. During the Covid-19 pandemic, trails and other passive recreational opportunities have become even more popular than they were before, so New Hartford's trails have been very well used lately. Trail maps are posted on the town website:

<https://www.newhartfordct.gov/recreation-department/pages/hikingwalking-trail-maps>.

Jean D. is preparing a summary chart of all the town-owned protected open space in New Hartford; Madeline has sent her several edits. Once the draft is ready for the commission to review, Jean D. will email it out to members. Jean D. asked how many total acres of land in New Hartford are now protected from development, not only by the town, but also by the NHLT, the MDC, the state of CT, etc. Bill volunteered to update a chart that was last updated in 2018 and bring it to the next meeting.

Antolini - Goula Traverse: Doug reported that in the past year, volunteers cut the rest of the trail through from Phillips Farm to the Goula preserve, painted trail markers on that section, and started working to remove invasive plants at Goula. The town crew created an opening in the stone wall across East Cotton Hill from Phillips Farm and there is a new kiosk on East Cotton Hill Road with a trail map at the parking area. We need a solution to the problem of dirt bikes and ATVs at the Goula preserve and on other conservation lands. Doug and Madeline volunteered to coordinate plans for future work on sections of this 3-mile trail.

Helen Butler Memorial Riverfront Trail: Jean D. said that the Town posted signage at the kiosk recently and that volunteers organized by NHLT with the Town have been working on removing invasive plants from the parcel and keeping the Trail clear since 2018. Madeline said that when the Town of New Hartford purchased the 8.1 acres in 2018, the deed with the seller provided for several commitments from the Town. The deed preceded the conservation easement that the New Hartford Land Trust (NHLT) holds. While the NHLT has the authority to enforce the conservation easement, the Town is responsible for ensuring that deed provisions are met. The NHLT cannot do this. The OSPC, First Selectman, possibly someone from Conservation Commission and NHLT will meet on the parcel to discuss management issues and begin updating the Town's management plan (which was signed in 2019, and which Jean D. distributed during this discussion) that governs use of the Trail. It can be determined if more expert advice is needed about certain issues. Jean D. and Bill expressed an interest in attending this meeting.

Jones Mountain: Bill reported that the hiking trail has become extremely popular during the past year. He has worked to keep the trail clearly marked so that people do not stray off it and widen or reroute the path. He reported the need for an expert to recommend methods of fixing erosion in certain spots.

Franklin P. Kearney Memorial Nature Trail: Jean D. reminded the commission that New Hartford's 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development recommends a conservation easement for Brodie Park South. A conservation easement would require a considerable amount of work and coordination with other commissions, as well as approval by the voters. We discussed raising public awareness by organizing public walking tours, which were not possible last year because of the pandemic. Madeline said the NHLT can help to promote such tours. We also discussed contacting the NHLT volunteers who run a nature session at Camp Brodie about using the hiking trail in their program.

Rail Trail between New Hartford and Canton: Members asked about the status of this project, which was spearheaded by the Economic Development Commission (EDC). We can put this topic on next month's agenda.

Stewardship of trails and town-owned land: A stewardship policy for town-owned land, including open space land, was completed by a task force in 2006-2007 but was never formally approved by the Board of Selectmen. We discussed the need to finalize a stewardship policy. We planned to have a working session on this topic at our next meeting. We plan to coordinate with the Conservation Commission and the NHLT. Jean C. advocated for promoting open space and stewardship among high school students.

5. Natural Resource Inventory: Jean D. volunteered to call Conservation Commission chairperson Alison Murdock for an update. The NRI is supposed to be filed along with the Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

6. Tax Abatement Program: Bill reviewed where we left off at our last meeting. The Board of Selectmen (BOS) had approved the public information we had prepared and posted it on the town website. They changed the formal application deadline to September. The open space tax abatement program is another tool for implementing the goals of the Open Space Plan. Public access to private land is not a requirement. Jean D. reported that as of last week, the Selectman's Office had not received any applications for the open space tax abatement program, nor had it received any other inquiries from landowners wishing to preserve their land as open space. Rusty volunteered to talk to First Selectman Dan Jerram about raising public awareness of the importance of preserving open space land.

7. Executive Session to Discuss Real Estate: At 8:04 p.m., Jean D. moved we enter executive session to discuss real estate. Doug seconded and the motion passed unanimously. At 8:10 p.m., Jean D. moved we leave executive session. Bill seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

8. Vote on schedule of OSPC meeting for the remainder of 2021: Jean D. moved that for the remainder of 2021, we hold meetings at 6:30 p.m. on the 4th Monday of every month except December, when we would meet on the third Monday. Jean C. seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The dates of these meetings are as follows: June 28, July 26, August 23, September 27, October 25, November 22, December 20.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Darlington, Secretary