

Lebanon Conservation Commission
Special Meeting, 2/1/10
Minutes

Call to order, 4:32 p.m.

Members present: Keith Laporte, Marc Lang, Howard Wayland, Jan Fitter, Jon Slate, Emery Gluck, Alton Blodgett, Toni Willard (4:45)

Member absent: David Scata

Also present: Town Planner Phil Chester (5:02)

Jon Slate was appointed acting alternate (Toni had not arrived yet).

Motion to reorder agenda, to take up items in following order: 1(a), 2, 6, 4, 6, 5, 3, 1(b).

No audience present.

Motion to recommend to the Board of Selectmen that Marc, Toni, and David be reappointed to the Conservation Commission; seconded and passed unanimously. Jan will e-mail to Joyce Okonuk.

At the Board of Finance public hearing on the Capital Reserve budget (3/2/10), Jan submitted a list of reasons supporting the recommended and planned \$100,000 allocation to the open space fund (attached hereto). Phil, Jan, and Joyce discussed benefits of open space funding with the Board. A B of F member suggested that the Conservation Commission should do greater outreach to convince residents of the importance of the open space fund.

Keith expressed concern that in the current budgetary climate, asking for full funding of the planned \$100,000 allocation might cause resentment among other residents who must accept reduced funding for favored items.

Discussion of possible outreach efforts. Brochure? Letter from Landowners? For this budget, this partly depends on B of F action. Discussion to continue closer to annual budget Town Meeting.

March 27, 2:00-3:30, JT will hold a reception at the Historical Society for Dick Schleicher and Lance Magnuson to honor their donations of conservation easements. ConsCom members are invited.

Emery asked Phil to be in contact with a landowner who is interested in a PDR application.

Litter pick-up: Jan will forward the Lebanon Life ad used last year to Phil for submission to Lebanon Life. (Lebanon Quarterly will be too late.) Marc will get trash bags.

Phil distributed a plan for the 2010 Lebanon Agricultural Program to be funded by the Agriculture Viability Grant. For the ConsCom it includes, in particular, preparing and distributing the "first annual Conservation Commission town-wide mailer on Lebanon's agriculture and land preservation efforts"; creating an agriculture writing contest (partly to provide potential articles for local newspapers); continuing to assist property owners interested in land preservation and partnering with land preservation groups (this includes paying for 2 property appraisals and surveys and spending funds from the open space fund as approved by Town Meeting); and sponsoring a Land Preservation Forum to discuss preservation and other federal and state programs designed to expand agricultural operations.

Discussion of CSA and observation that this would be a fitting task for the POCD-recommended Agriculture Committee within the Economic Development Commission. However, volunteers for agriculture development activities are lacking on the ECD and in general.

Motion to approve minutes of 2/1/10 regular meeting; seconded and passed unanimously.

Motion to adjourn at 6:05pm, seconded and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Jan Fitter, Sec'y

attachment follows

March 1, 2010

To: Lebanon Board of Finance

From: Lebanon Conservation Commission

The Conservation Commission recommends that the Town make the full contribution of \$100,000 to the Town Open Space Account for fiscal 2010, per the established long-term Capital Plan and the 2000 Plan of Conservation and Development (to also be recommended in the pending Plan update). We make this recommendation for the following reasons:

- An allocation to this account is not an expenditure but an investment.
- Open space in Lebanon requires about \$.17 on the tax dollar for services; residential properties require about \$1.12 (CCS, 2007).
- Investment in the Open Space Fund will return benefits by helping to control the need for other capital and operating expenses.
- It will help control increases in property taxes.
- It will help preserve Lebanon's character as a good and unique place to live.
- 93% of Lebanon's residents believe that preserving open space and farmland in town is important; 77% believe that the Town should fund preservation efforts (Land Conservation Survey, 20008).
- The need for open space funds is subject to unpredictable conditions, and when need arises, it can't be put off until better times. If a parcel important to the Town goes for development it is gone forever, and the Town must absorb service costs.
- There are over 10,000 acres of unprotected land in Lebanon. Owners representing more than 1,000 acres have been in touch expressing interest in preserving their land.
- Outlays to assist in preservation have been steady. With projected commitments, the Open Space Fund could be under \$50,000 by the end of 2010.
- The only way an open space fund can effectively protect the Town is for it to be built up. The planned contribution to this account that began only three years ago has been reduced for two years in a row. The fund is shrinking.
- It took several years and much effort to establish the Town's commitment to maintaining an Open Space Fund. Another year of reduced funding will further undermine that commitment and handcuff the Town in future land protection efforts.

Realizing that the Board of Finance has requested flat budgets for this fiscal year, we do not make this request lightly. It reflects the special nature of an open space fund and the potentially high return on the open space dollar.