

OPEN SPACE MEETING – January 13 2025

Members Present: Mayor Rubenstein, Messrs. Sabatini, Duch, Bogardus, Dlugos, Esposito

Members Absent: Mr. Morytko

Also present: Secretary Caitlin Phillips

Mayor Rubenstein called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICECHAIR OF OS COMMITTEE

Mr. Sabatini motioned to nominate Mr. Morytko as the Chair, seconded by Mr. Dlugos. No other nominations were made. All were in favor.

Mr. Sabatini motioned to nominate Mayor Rubenstein as the Vice-Chair, seconded by Mr. Dlugos. No other nominations were made. All were in favor.

OS Financial Status Report:

Reserve for OS- \$397,252.63 / Reserve for Debt Service- \$18,068.14

Mr. Sabatini said the reserve is a negative balance because it's a deficit coming out of Open Space.

Approval of Minutes – December 9 2024 Minutes

Mr. Sabatini said they need to change the first paragraph for the financial report, where it says engineering costs are coming out of the Open Space funds. Mayor Rubenstein noted they are coming from ARP funds and grants; the playground funds are from a Jake's Law grant and ARP funds. With those changes, Mr. Dlugos motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Duch. All in favor.

OLD BUSINESS

Forest Stand Improvements

Mr. Sabatini said there is a draft resolution in the packet. He spoke with the Township attorney to make sure this is not a concession. They will award this project to Jose Calderone at no cost, and Ms. Gracie will oversee the work. Mr. Sabatini plans to have this on the Council meeting next week so that Ms. Gracie and Mr. Calderone can do the work on Johnson parcel. Mr. Duch asked why the cutout on the provided map is not shown as part of Open Space land. It was acquired from a lot line adjustment. Mr. Esposito joined the meeting at this time. Mayor Rubenstein confirmed they don't own the larger cutout parcel. Mr. Sabatini said they never did an FSI on this property before, so he's not sure where Ms. Gracie got the map or how she did outline. Mayor Rubenstein confirmed the lower parcel not shown in the boundary is owned by town, so the map needs to be updated. Mr. Duch noted that should be considered during the stand improvement. Mr. Sabatini said the green hatched area is the space for the FSI this year. Ms. Gracie wants to do work in February. He noted they never did work in the red area. Mr. Duch said Ms. Gracie did a thinning there. Mr. Sabatini asked Ms. Phillips to tell Ms. Gracie about the mapping issue, and that the town owns the lower parcel above right-hand green-shaded area on map.

Mr. Sabatini said they received quotes from Mr. Calderone, Green Jeans for \$2,000, and another vendor chose not to provide a quote. He noted usually if a vendor is offering to do something for the town for no money, that's a concession. This involves attorney review and other paperwork. He spoke to the Town attorney and was told it's below the quote threshold, so it's okay to proceed with Mr. Calderone's offer, as long as he meets the conditions of insurance; then the work can be done in February or March. The Committee supported this.

Invasive Species and Controlled Burn Discussion

Mr. Sabatini said the application for controlled burns is due in October for a project in 2026. There's a fee for the application, and they need to make sure the Council is okay with doing a controlled burn. They need a timeline and to fill out the application with Ms. Gracie's help. Mr. Duch asked about visiting the site before submitting the application. Mr. Sabatini said he will leave that to Ms. Gracie to manage; their priority is getting the application submitted. Mr. Duch said he and Mr. Dlugos offered to assist Ms. Gracie during the process, so they could help clarify the project to the group. Mr. Sabatini said Ms. Gracie should come to more of the Open Space meetings, but not all of them. She should come to next one, and as they get closer to the FSI work, they can have her join again to give an update. The group can talk to her at the next meeting and work on when to visit the site.

Project Funding Priorities (Open Space Tax)

Mayor Rubenstein noted Mr. Morytko's memo. Mr. Sabatini updated the capital budget today. They plan to use Open Space funds to help with CO Johnson Park improvements. They are also pursuing a Recreation grant, and recommend supplementing the project with Open Space funds. The other project is Mohawk View fencing. These have been put in the capital budget program for this year. Mr. Duch asked where they stand with the Highlands grant. Mayor Rubenstein said project costs went up and the Council decided they can't afford that, so they worked with French and Parrello to modify the scope. They discussed this with Highlands and Mayor Rubenstein spoke with Ben Spinelli and explained the situation. Highlands will pay for the engineering work. Mr. Duch asked about the parking for the dog park. Mayor Rubenstein said they should have the new scope in the next week and then will send it to Highlands, and then the Council will need to review the new scope. Mr. Sabatini said the Council will need a resolution after the Highlands approval. Mayor Rubenstein said they did the boundary survey and a lot of field work, so it shouldn't be hard to get the design done. Mr. Duch asked for a realistic timeframe. The dog park was something residents really wanted. Mayor Rubenstein noted the Council wants the dog park done. They'll be able to have more information in the next month, when the work with French and Parrello is done. Mr. Sabatini said French and Parrello need to finish the design after the pre-meeting with the DEP. Then French and Parrello will submit the design and permitting. Permitting is another funding source that's needed, and that would be an estimated \$0-20,000 in permit fees. These are paid to the DEP and Highlands. Mr. Sabatini said they need to make sure everyone is still involved, and need a pre-meeting. Once the application is submitted, it will be about 60 days before they receive a final response. This may be a phased project approach.

Mr. Duch noted the goal of trails projects. Mr. Sabatini said that's not part of the capital budget. The budget can be changed by resolution of the Council, as they identify things down the road that they want to do. The trails work would be more like funding coming out of the Open Space trust directly. Mr. Dlugos talked with Mr. Sabatini and to Peter Dolan last week about Trail Conference support for the trail system. One recommendation is having the Trail Committee work with EC members to access trails to make a recommendation document and getting GIS information for an Avenza trail map. Since their maps are digital, they can be revised as things change. They need a baseline of where things are, and need to get a basemap. They would also run a series of workshops to train and recruit people, with a goal of being adopted by the Trail Conference, who would oversee the trail maintenance and do check-ins and activities. Mr. Dlugos will ask Mr. Dolan for more detail on the scope of work. They want the EC to be the municipal host of this program, and have it be an independent thing where there is EC and Open Space input with the Conference. Mr. Duch said the benefit to Byram with the Conference would be that they publish the maps. They sell maps of different areas on their site. Mr. Sabatini said they need to talk to them about how they have the Highlands trail mapped. They also talked about having it on the Avenza app; some are free while others you need to pay for. Mr. Duch asked about QR codes at

trailheads so people can have a free copy. Mr. Sabatini noted they asked about that. Mr. Dlugos said they have trailhead markers in the shed. Mayor Rubenstein said this should be a priority since they have talked about this for awhile. Maybe they can get a Highlands grant for mapping? Mr. Sabatini said they need a scope of work, the cost, and a breakdown into priorities. They should get volunteer training and a map. Mr. Dlugos said the conference is coming out with a new program where they would collaborate with Byram as a "Trail Town" to help bring in recreational business. He will speak with Mr. Dolan about the steps of the project, and using grant money for mapping. Mr. Sabatini said Avenza is their tool; maybe they can use a grant to support having people signed up for the app.

2025 Goals

Mayor Rubenstein said the goals are tied to the previous discussion. Mr. Dlugos said invasive work is in progress. Mr. Dlugos asked about the community forestry plan. Ms. Gracie was working on it. Mr. Sabatini said the Superintendent of DPW was working on it with her to update the forestry plan. He asked Ms. Phillips to speak with Mr. Orgera and update the committee. They can apply for the grant to update the forestry plan. Year one is redefining the plan for the next 5 years. They may get paid back for it at the end. Mr. Duch noted they can keep an eye out for opportunities throughout the year for new goals.

MEMBER REPORTS

Mr. Sabatini said there is a budget workshop on the 21st, where they will discuss operational and capital budgets. They're required to put together a 3-year plan. They are doing a police department remodeling project with congressional funding. They anticipate the Council will approve the Open Space Trust funding. Mr. Bogardus said the next Recreation meeting is on the 28th. Mr. Dlugos said the EC talked about their goals. There was a presentation on harmful algae blooms (HABs) with 4 years of data. Affected areas included Cranberry and Jefferson Lake in Byram. They also discussed groundwater recharge levels; if HABs are in water with higher recharge, it could impact aquifers and wells. Cranberry Lake has private wells, but the recharge isn't much. HABs are more prevalent in higher water temperatures and when fertilizers are used. There was a discussion about septic work in the town, and how it's mainly in lake communities. They discussed the possible benefits or resistance from the town in expanding the septic program to the whole town. They discussed the cost of connecting the properties to the sewer system and the gallonage of the town. Mr. Sabatini noted currently they have people provide receipts to show that the septic was pumped. He noted there should be some kind of tool to manage and monitor this. If they're considering this on a bigger scale for the town, then they need to look at the goal and what's being collected, as well as how this would be managed.

OPEN TO PUBLIC

No public was present.

ADJOURN – Mayor Rubenstein reminded the group they are on a monthly schedule now. Mr. Sabatini noted the Avenza app provides access to the maps, but there's only one map for Byram, which is Tamarack Trail. This map came from the Land Conservancy of New Jersey. He is not sure if Avenza lets you plot where you are on the trail. They should explore if this is the best tool to use. Mayor Rubenstein said he uses Trail Forks, and that lets you report conditions.

Motion by Mr. Dlugos, second by Mr. Duch, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35p.m. All members in favor. Motioned carried.