
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES**Monday, August 02, 2021**

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting will be conducted via remote means. Members of the public who wish to access the meeting may do so via ZOOM. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted and public participation in any public hearing conducted during this meeting shall be remote means only.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Roll-Call Attendance

Recognizing the presence of a quorum Glenn King, Chair called meeting to order (via ZOOM) at 6:30 PM; Rainer Forst, Barbara McNamee, Harry Berkowitz, Michael Proto, and Erin Donahue were in attendance, with John O'Brien and Lenny Smith absent. R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner/CPC Admin was also present, with Christine Johnson (resident), Christopher Allen (resident) and Lisa Mosczynski (Metacomet Land Trust) in attendance.

II. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

July 12, 2021

Upon motion duly made (H. Berkowitz) and seconded (B. McNamee) the Community Preservation Committee voted to accept meeting minutes of July 12, 2021; vote was unanimous as corrected.

III. COMMITTEE REORGANIZATION

Clerk

G. King, Chair informed the Committee that John O'Brien (member) may not be able to attend remote meetings, noting J. O'Brien had been the Clerk and was preparing the draft meeting minutes. G. King sought nominations for CPC Clerk; having none, the Committee tabled appointment of Clerk.

IV. CASTLE HILL FARM PROPERTY

Land Appraisal & Next Steps

G. Bechtholdt shared with the Committee the appraisal completed by Avery Associates dated July 12, 202, for the subject property known as Castle Hill Farm. G. Bechtholdt stated based upon the appraisal/evaluation conducted by Avery Associates, the market value is calculated at \$1,300,000.00 (One Million Three Hundred Thousand Dollars). Mr. Bechtholdt noted this appraised value by no means restricts the property owner to a potential sale/purchase price; the appraisal was done in coordination with the Owner to assist in establishing a starting point for discussion of potential land acquisition via the use of CPA funds. The Owner is free to identify any potential sale price he/she decides or determines.

G. King explained, we were not sure where this property would come in, in terms of an appraisal point of view. Avery Associates did a good job with a relatively quick turnaround; they did a thorough job and came up with an appraisal value of \$1.3mil. G. King explained initially when he and Mr. Bechtholdt talked with the property owner (Paul Bernon) he was willing to consider selling the land to the town and was very open and agreeable during our discussions; recalling he said the advantage of selling vs. developing is risk-free money.

G. King noted, it was mutually agreed to prepare an appraisal for the property, so the Committee hired Avery Associates. When we shared the appraisal with the Mr. Bernon, he responded very briefly to us saying he

was not interested in selling the property and wanted to proceed with developing it. Committee members were surprised and disappointed to learn.

G. King suggested he would meet with the property owner and have a discussion to see if his decision was deeply thought out or part of a negotiation. G. King would like to reach out to Mr. Bernon to have further discussion about his willingness to sell the property and what price. *Upon motion duly made (M. Proto) & seconded (E. Donahue) Committee voted to have G. King reach out to the property owner (Paul Bernon); vote was unanimous.*

G. King noted he was initially excited from the point of view of the property owner seemed to be interested and willing to sell the property and then his brief response...simply stating he is not interested. G. King would like to follow-up to see what he can find out. G. King mentioned the property is not under any restrictions or programs where the town would have right-of-first refusal; if the owner chooses to develop the land he could but would like to see if he is interested in selling it and for what price. G. King will follow-up with the Committee at its next scheduled meeting.

V. PROJECT PRE-APPLICATION

Linwood Playground Basketball Courts

Committee acknowledged receipt of Project Pre-Application from Playground & Recreation Committee seeking CPA funds in the amount of \$150,000.00 for improvements to the Linwood Playground Basketball Courts. M. Proto, Chair of Playground & Recreation Committee (CPC representative) provided a brief overview of the project proposal, noting with commitments of town-funds and local donations the sum of \$270,000.00 has been secured. The project would replace the existing basketball courts which are no longer in use as a result of their poor and unsafe conditions. M. Proto noted the Playground & Recreation Committee has not bid the project out, however, anticipates a total project cost of \$400,000.00; the Playground & Recreation Committee is seeking \$150,000.00 in CPA funds.

G. Bechtholdt explained the purpose of the Project Pre-Application is for the Committee to review potential application to determine CPA funding eligibility. G. King and other Committee members suggested the project appears to satisfy the Yes/No Chart for Determining Project Eligibility prepared by the Community Preservation Coalition (see page 10 -Northbridge Community Preservation Plan). G. Bechtholdt suggested the Committee have the Coalition review to confirm.

G. Bechtholdt recommended Mr. Proto report back to the Playground & Recreation Committee advising them that the project is likely eligible for CPA funding, suggesting they start preparing the Project Application, which is due October 01, to be included for consideration at the next Spring Annual Town Meeting.

VI. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Correspondence & Communications

Committee noted receipt of Appraisal Report prepared by Avery Associates for Castle Hill Farm; communication dated July 31, 2021, from Northbridge Historical Commission in support of a Watson Farm project pre-application; and Project Pre-Application from Playground & Recreation Committee re: Linwood Playground Basketball Courts (improvements).

2021 Fall Annual Town Meeting (Tuesday, October 26, 2021)

Point of information -no discussion.

Community Preservation Committee -Vote to Sponsor Article(s)

G. Bechtholdt noted that he understands the Committee does not have any articles for the Fall Session of the 2021 Annual Town Meeting, however wanted to include on the agenda so the Committee understands the process to sponsor articles when the time comes. G. Bechtholdt explained if the Committee had an article for the 2021 Fall Annual Town Meeting they would need to vote to sponsor and submit the article to the Town Manager/BOS and Town Clerk before the closure of the warrant (see below).

2021 FATM Warrant Closes (Friday, August 27, 2021)

Point of information -no discussion.

Watson Farm Property

G. Bechtholdt noted receipt of letter from Northbridge Historical Commission in support of submission of a Project Pre-Application for potential land acquisition of Watson Farm (10 Watson Farm Road). G. Bechtholdt reminded members that Christine Johnson (resident) met with the Committee previously about this historically significant property being put on the market for sale. Where at the time the Committee expressed an interest in learning more about the status of the property and the need to seek potential partners if the town was to acquire the property via CPA funds.

G. Bechtholdt introduced Lisa Moczynski, President of Metacomet Land Trust, noting Barbara McNamee, (CPC member) is a member of the Metacomet Land Trust.

L. Moczynski provided a general overview of the land trust's mission and what role Metacomet has played in assisting its 15 partnered communities in preserving open space lands, etc. for the past 30-years. Indicating the Commonwealth typically requires a Conservation Restriction be placed on properties, held by a qualified conservation organization, Metacomet Land Trust satisfies this role as a second-party holder. Metacomet also assists communities and private seller/donators with due diligence and facilitating clear Title, document necessary for recording, etc.

L. Moczynski was happy to hear the Committee authorized the Chair to continue a dialogue with the property owner to see if there may be some middle ground where perhaps not all the land is developed, and some portions of the property are preserved that may speak of family legacy; suggesting there may be some options to pursue if the owner is not willing to sell outright. L. Moczynski noted Metacomet Land Trust had assisted the Town with an outreach & educational campaign some 10-years ago for the preservation of the Castle Hill Farm property, however that was initiative at the time there was no discussions about selling or developing the land. As a non-profit, they could create a Friends of Castle Hill Farms nested through the Land Trust to assist a grass-roots effort.

G. King thanked Lisa Moczynski for attending and offering her expertise, noting he has been in contact with others in Grafton, Mendon & Upton trying to get up to speed on how this all works. G. King noted the Committee has also been made aware of Watson Farm property, which may also present similar opportunities and possibilities. G. King would like to talk with L. Moczynski on how to engage with owners. L. Moczynski stated she was more than happy to assist and talk with anyone. Committee members thanked her for her attendance.

G. King updated the Committee regarding the Watson Farm property, a 100-acre (plus) property owned by the descendants of the Whitin family located behind Foppama's Farm which includes a couple of older historic buildings. G. King noted that he, along with Christine Johnson, Christopher Allen, and Ken Warchol from the Historical Commission were to meet with the realtor onsite, however the realtor did not show up and later indicated they were told not to show the property to anyone else as there a two (2) offers above listing price. G. King explained that C. Johnson has been trying to contact the property owner to discuss options of selling the property to the town rather than a developer.

Christine Johnson noted through historical research the property dates back to the 1700's when the land was part of Sutton; Ken Warchol (Northbridge Historical Commission) believes the home is circa late 1700's. C. Johnston was disappointed to learn of the two cash-offers received above listing, however noted the property was up for sale a few years back (some 5 to 10-years ago) and the owner at the time backed out. C. Johnson indicated that it has been very difficult to contact the property owner, however, will continue to pursue with hopes of discussing an option that includes potential town acquisition, noting the property is a very important piece to the town's history.

C. Johnson suggested there may also be an opportunity to talk about preserving some of the land if the town is successful in purchasing the property. C. Johnson thanked the Committee for their guidance, informing them that she and Christopher Allen (resident) met with the Conservation Commission, Playground & Recreation, as well as the Historical Commission about the Watson Farm property. B. McNamee explained that the Conservation Agent reviewed the state's ranking system for conservation value, noting the Watson Farm property ranked higher than the Castle Hill Farm property. M. Pronto noted the Playground & Recreation Commission voted unanimously in support of pursuing land acquisition (via CPA funds), as did the Historic Commission and Conservation Commission.

C. Johnson explained that a Project Pre-Application will be submitted for their continued pursuit of preserving this beautiful piece of property. G. Bechtholdt noted in order for the Committee to consider a Project Application they will need to see a sign-off/consent from the property owner as part of the Project Application. G. King indicated that he would talk with C. Johnson to get her (& Christopher Allen) in contact with Lisa Mosczynski, Metacomet Land Trust to discuss campaigning and grass-root efforts to inform and educate the public on the property.

Vacancy -Member at-Large

G. King once again noted the Committee still has a vacancy for one of its Member at-large. G. King also mentioned the town is looking to update is Open Space & Recreation Plan, suggesting if anyone was interested to serve on the update committee they contact the Town Manager/Board of Selectmen's office.

Future Agenda Items

Christine Johnson informed the Committee that the Fire Department may submit a Project Pre-Application for CPA funding for the preservation of historical fire apparatus. G. Bechtholdt explained as part of the Committee review they would determine project eligibility. Glen King & G. Bechtholdt encouraged the Fire Department to submit a pre-application and the Committee would seek input from the Coalition on CPA funding eligibility.

Scheduling of Next Meeting

G. King noted Monday, September 06, 2021, is Labor Day and therefor suggested the Committee schedule its next meeting for Monday, September 13, 2021 (6:30 PM -via ZOOM).

VI. ADJOURN MEETING

Having no additional business, the Community Preservation Committee adjourned its meeting at or about 7:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

R. Gary Bechtholdt II, Town Planner

Date approved: _____

Cc: Town Clerk