

Minutes of the Holliston Open Space Committee September 22, 2014

Members Present: Ann Marie Pilch, Lixy Carey, George Johnson, John Vosburgh, Rachel Kane

Members Absent: James Keast, Michael O'Brien

Also Attending: Members of the Holliston Agricultural Commission

Serocki Property

Lixy gave an overview of the Serocki property and the Open Space Committee's interest in it. The Town has received notice of a bona fide offer for the property and has 120 days to exercise a right of first refusal (ROFR) due to the property's Chapter 61A tax status. Fall Town Meeting will take place on October 27 and a placeholder article has been placed on the Warrant. Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds would need to be used for the purchase. Proposals for CPA funds are due by October 1.

The Agricultural Commission (Ag Comm) members had several questions. Would a greenhouse or other structures for community farming be able to be built? Lixy did not think so based on her communication with the Department of Revenue. In fact, the existing house and barn might need to be demolished. Other questions included: Could the Town lease the land to a farmer? Could the Town cut and sell hay to benefit the agricultural use of the property? Is the price fair? To the last question, it was noted that the Town's only option is to match the offer price.

Additional questions discussed:

- Could the town sell off any of the land? If CPA funds were used, other uses would have to be allowable by the CPA and stipulated in the Town Meeting Warrant.
- Can the Conservation Commission and Ag Comm co-manage the land and/or co-sponsor the warrant article? Yes
- Who would hold the conservation restriction (CR)? Upper Charles Conservation Land Trust, Mass Audubon and Trustees of Reservations are all possible.
- How much would it cost to demolish the existing house?
- Could the ROFR be extended beyond 120 days?
- How is "agricultural use" defined? Could storage for tools and materials be built?

Questions to be resolved/tasks to be done:

- Cost of demolition
- Market analysis by a realtor for residential use vs. industrial use (to justify price)
- Clarify whether structures (permanent or temporary) for farming are allowed
- Contact organizations regarding interest in holding CR
- Build a budget
- Put together CPC application

Additional discussion included the fact that part of the land used to be cranberry bogs, and that there is no conservation land in this part of town. Adams Farm in Walpole was mentioned as a good model. The Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation was mentioned as another possible CR holder and an organization that could be helpful. Both Commissions are in favor of acquiring the property for mixed agricultural/conservation use.

Ann Marie made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Rachel. The motion passed unanimously.