

Meeting Notes from Open Space Program Turkey Hill Conservation Area Public Meeting Re: Land Management Plan and Public Trail Access-Tuesday September 13, 2011 7:00pm Room C

Attending: Town Staff & Committee Members- Beth O'Connor, Open Space Stewardship Coordinator; Kristen Grubbs, Open Space Program Manager; David Pancoast, Conservation Agent; Paul Nikas, Chief of Police; David Standley, Co-Chair Conservation Commission; Jennifer Hughes, Co-Chair Conservation Commission; Karl Kastorf, Conservation Commissioner; Ralph Williams, Open Space Committee; Larry Eliot, Chairman Ipswich Bay Circuit Committee; Barbara Ostberg, Ipswich Bay Circuit Committee Residents- Paul L'Herrou, Kimball Ave; Michael & Andrea Pappalimberis, Pineswamp Rd; Lou Vlahos, Pineswamp Rd; Todd Wilson, Pineswamp Rd; Penny Devoe, Pineswamp Rd; Katharine Evans, Lafayette Rd;

Beth O'Connor opened the meeting with introductions of Town staff and committee members present. She then gave an overview of the acquisition history and purposes for protecting the Turkey Hill Conservation Area property. Next she talked briefly about the Natural Resources Inventory Report prepared for the property and some of its highlights in the context of compiling baseline information to incorporate into the Land Management Plan (LMP) document.

The discussion then shifted to the public trail access intended as part of the acquisition and the upcoming Eagle Scout project of clearing and marking the existing trail where it is overgrown, as well as the trail easement from Pineswamp Road. The permitted and prohibited uses were discussed and residents expressed concern about the following uses: hunting; trailers and horseback riding; bicycles; parking.

It was stated that with the exception of Linebrook Woods Conservation Area, on other Town Conservation properties that have public access hunting is allowed within state legal limits, *however* the only Town properties where hunting permits are issued by the Police are lands at the end of Town Farm Road and the watershed lands around the Dow and Bull Brook Reservoirs. Generally speaking hunting would be an allowed use on Conservation Commission lands within legally allowed areas unless it was deemed unsafe for some other reason, and again only with a permit issued by the Police Department. If permits were to be issued for hunting on Conservation Commission land where there is public access, including THCA, likely a model similar to the Trustees of Reservations would be followed where a lottery is held for permits, and the property were temporarily closed for other recreational uses.

Because of the limited size of the parking area, trailer parking for horses was a concern for neighbors and the potential for overflow vehicular parking along the road would be problematic. It was asked if horse users would come to this property where there is only a single loop trail not connecting to a larger trail network, and Ralph Williams, a horse rider and ECTA (Essex County Trails Association) and BCTC (Bay Circuit Trail Committee) member stated that it would be used if there were connections to other trails in the future. Police Chief Nikas stated that a scenic road such as Pineswamp may limit the types of vehicles that can park in the right of way, and staff will follow up with the Planning Board to verify if that is the case. There was also discussion about prohibiting parking along the road in the vicinity of the THCA, which would be a decision of the Board of Selectman to enact a parking prohibition with recommendation from the Police Department. Speed limits on roadways in town are jurisdictional at the State, and not the local level.

It was stated that on other conservation properties with public access both horse and bicycle use are allowed unless they are deemed incompatible with other recreational uses and/or the resources being protected i.e. waterways, vegetation, soils, landscape are being adversely affected. The same determination would be made for Turkey Hill Conservation Area. Jennifer Hughes of the Conservation Commission mentioned that Land Management Plans were meant as guidance documents to manage and maintain the Town's conservation properties, and they are intended to be working documents that can be revised over time as needed. It was agreed that the creation of the parking area in the easement would be prioritized as the trail work project progresses.

Other property management issues discussed included: parking area plowing in winter; characteristics of the trail; treatment of invasive exotic plants after cutting; characteristics of the parking area; and speeding and safety on Pineswamp Road. Kristen Grubbs also discussed briefly the adjoining property to the west owned by

Parris Pelletier, whom the Town is in discussions with to acquire a conservation restriction over the rear third of the property, where a potential trail extension from Turkey Hill Conservation Area could lead to Hamilton Wenham conservation land further to the west.

Beth O'Connor stated the feedback and discussion at the meeting would be taken into account and a draft Land Management Plan would be created for the property. The document would be circulated internally amongst signatories and then posted on the Town website and/or emailed to interested residents for further comment and feedback. A final draft would go before the Conservation Commission at a public hearing following the draft revisions for signature. She indicated the trail project would be starting in the next few weeks and likely be wrapped up in the next month or two. Establishing the parking area would be made a priority so parking along the road in the right of way could be avoided because of the safety concerns. A sign-up sheet was circulated for people to put their email addresses if they were interested in reviewing the draft LMP and being notified about adoption of the LMP.