

Minutes of the Open Space Committee

February 2, 2009

Mayor Weinstein called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Present: Mayor Steven Weinstein, Councilmember Ed Trawinski, Acting Manager Joanne Kwasniewski, Superintendent of Recreation Jim Graff, Michael Hakim, Benny Salerno, Ira Frankel, Heather Blecher, Kurt Peluso, Joan Goldstein, Peter Weissberg, Peter Kortright, Maureen Moriarty and Ted King.

Absent: Wendy Dabney, Crystal Robbins and Jack Susser.

Mayor Weinstein welcomed everybody to 2009 and committee members introduced themselves. The resolution from 2005 for the Open Space Committee was distributed. The Open Space plan was discussed and the various properties listed in the plan.

The committee has had some input in the turf field at Vander Plaat and has helped Warren Point and Milnes School put in playgrounds. The committee had some input in the Kodak site, which was going to be developed and Wendy Dabney had input with the adhoc committee, which has helped with open space.

Mayor Weinstein stated that there is a list of properties listed in the Open Space and Recreation Plan throughout the Borough. The committee tries to meet on a monthly basis. The committee has been in contact with the Trust for Public Land, a not for profit organization, which looks for properties in your town where there might be a willing seller and lets the committee know about them.

Updates:

George Street Firehouse – Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the Borough Attorney met with Andy Karas, the attorney for the fire company. They are proceeding with their application to the Zoning Board because the lot line needs to be modified. Borough Attorney Rosenberg is hopeful that a closing will be in late spring depending on how quickly the fire company's engineer gets the plan to the Zoning Board. The Zoning Board has not received the plans yet.

The question was raised if funds have been allocated for benches or landscaping for the pocket park that the land swap will create. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that not all of Fair Lawn's pocket parks are developed in that way. Peter Kortright stated that this pocket park is in the center of a down town area, so you would want it to be successful. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the Council is looking at the budget and the committee must decide what they would like to do because money will have to be allocated. The Open Space money was only for property acquisition. Michael Hakim stated that the Planning Incentive Grant specifically is limited to acquisition, which does not have to keep the Borough from applying for more conventional grants for improvements. Applications are usually accepted twice a year. The suggested of benches being donated was made. Michael Hakim suggested having a plan in place, so things are not done randomly.

If this is a success this could be used as a prototype for future pocket parks. This could just prove the committee has been successful. Councilmember Trawinski stated that the

acquisition and preservation of the land as open space is the important part. The residents on George Street close to that park would probably favor not making that an active park. They have concerns that it be preserved as park land and not become a parking lot for River Road, but in terms of what the Borough does with it, the residents of that area should be brought in. Michael Hakim stated that when the residents take part in the designing of the park, they tend to take pride of ownership and protect it.

Lackland Property – Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that this is in the hands of the Borough Attorney. There has been no movement on this project. Councilmember Trawinski stated that there were e-mails between the Lackland property owner and Don Smartt. Mayor Weinstein stated that he will follow up on this project.

Communication with TPL – Mayor Weinstein stated that the Acting Manager should be the point person. The representative should be invited to an Open Space meeting to update the committee on where things are. Michael Hakim stated that he is skeptical on how they operate and just to be cautious on how much alliance you place in their hands. They are great with negotiations, but be careful of how much responsibility you place in there hands.

Communication with Green Acres-Applications, etc. – Michael Hakim stated that the application that was submitted in September for the 2008 special appropriations has run out of money. They will be announcing their decisions later this month, but the decisions have already been made. The Green Acres administration has made their recommendations. Based on the fact that Fair Lawn has not spent any money, the Borough is probably not in a good position. Although that is just a guess. The administration is on board with the Borough's program, but money is extremely tight.

The process of acquisition is tricky. There are numerous items that need to be completed and all of it takes time and effort from the administration. When the committee goes after a property, they must look at the long range picture and think comprehensively. Michael Hakim thinks that the Borough is in a time of opportunity. Real estate values have dropped and the Borough should take advantage of this. The question was raised if there were any properties on the list that would be affordable at this point. The committee thinks they need to look at what is available and what they can purchase it for.

All properties are on a pre-approved list. Someone or a group should be assigned the task of approaching these property owners. Although they have been approached before, maybe someone should approach them again. There are a lot of sellers out there and not as many buyers.

Mayor Weinstein stated that the Naugle property is stalled at this point. This could be one of the properties that the committee goes back to address because of all the properties listed, that would be the perfect property, for open space.

Michael Hakim suggested that a general letter can be prepared to come from the Council to the property owners on the list. This letter could state that their property has been identified, nobody is being forceful, but the Borough is interested. The property fits into the open space program and if they have any interest in selling, please advise the Council or if the property owner will give the Borough the right of first refusal.

2009 Funding – Michael Hakim stated that Governor Corzine has committed to find a funding source for the Green Acres program. It appears that it is not going to happen in 2009. However, Michael Hakim expects him to do the same thing in 2009 that he did in 2008, which is emergency appropriations to keep the programs alive. More than likely, the Borough will be able to put in another request in September.

Michael Hakim was asked if there was a timeline where Green Acres would come in and take back funding. Michael Hakim stated that other communities are more successful and those communities start spending their money and building their open space inventories. Then those communities start asking Green Acres for more funding and Green Acres wants to support those communities. Green Acres then starts looking around to see idle funds. Green Acres will generally give the communities a warning and tell those communities to use the funds or they will use it.

Councilmember Trawinski asked if there was a contract with the fire company. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the Borough Attorney was just beginning that process with the fire company's attorney. Michael Hakim stated that once the contract is completed, it should be sent to Green Acres as a milestone.

New Business: Mayor Weinstein stated that in the Resolution it states that the committee has a chairperson and a secretary. There is a tape, so a secretary is not as important, but it is up to the committee if you want to elect a chairperson. The committee decided to leave the Council Liaisons as the co-chairpersons.

Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the Council has been talking about a skate park. Currently, Superintendent Graff is looking around at sites. There are some ideas. There are pros and cons to having a skate park. The insurance does allow it based on very strict criteria, but the first step is to identify a location. The cost would be between \$100,000 and \$150,000, which the Borough does not have. Acting Manager Kwasniewski thought that this project could be another item the Borough could apply for, like the turf field.

Mayor Weinstein stated that many of the kids are skating all over. He feels it is a great idea and there have been petitions. The locations are preliminary. Superintendent Graff stated that Memorial is one site. The roller hockey court by the two street hockey courts has not really been used. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the location should not be in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Mayor Weinstein asked if the skate park was placed at Memorial, if any other activities would be affected. The roller hockey court was used for street hockey because lights at another facility were not working.

Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that the park would be developed by a company that has been certified in skate park design. It has to be built by a company that is a certified skate park builder. The park will be one dimensional and cannot be moved around. It was suggested that if the Borough cannot get one, maybe other towns could be involved. One skate park was built jointly in Old Tappan on the River Vale border. The residents from both towns have rights to it, but they have been having problems. Kids that don't belong to either town have been coming. There are very strict safety rules, which have not been followed. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that Tenaflly has had a good experience with the park, but they also pay a part time person to do the supervising. Tenaflly told the group of kids that wanted the park to design one and they had \$70,000 to do it with. The kids went out a

researched the skate park and they also helped to set up the rules. The JIF will not allow this anymore. The Borough could follow the rules of the JIF, but still involved the kids.

The handball court at Berdan Grove was mentioned as a possible place. Superintendent Graff stated that there are some people that play handball there and he believes that it would be too small. Superintendent Graff stated that he knew the recreation director in Tenafly and he would contact him. Michael Hakim suggested that he speak with Old Tappan and River Vale because they have had more recent experiences with the skate park.

Mayor Weinstein stated that he thought Memorial would be the best place. Acting Manager Kwasniewski agreed. It is a place where neighbors would not be disturbed.

A motion was made by the Open Space committee to move forward with investigation of the skate park.

Ira Frankel brought a copy of an article published in The Record. There are five areas identified as needing new bike paths. There were many reasons including more space for joggers and for people that work in town to be able to ride their bikes to work uninterrupted. Ira Frankel went around town to look at potential areas. There is an area by the Ambulance Corps., which connects both sides of Berdan Avenue. It is an area that is being used by kids for that purpose. This article states that the State is willing to give out some money for the purpose of bike paths.

The Planning Board required that the Ambulance Corps. put in a new sidewalk with their application. With emergency vehicles backing in and out the Board did not require them to put a pathway in. There is also a State highway, which creates a dangerous element.

Councilmember Trawinski stated that the Borough received a grant for Radburn's pathways, which allowed the Borough to refurbish those pathways. There was a study performed by RBA that looked into the pathways and this study could be used for the bike path grant as well. If any other the sights that are in the study are there, the study has already been reviewed by the DOT. Acting Manager Kwasniewski stated that she will locate that study.

Michael Hakim asked if any of the recent Master Plans addressed this issue. Councilmember Trawinski stated that he wasn't sure if the study was ever incorporated into the plan.

A Land Conversation Rally brochure was distributed. Michael Hakim stated that it is a gathering of various conservation groups that have similar objectives but different approaches. It is an opportunity for them to get together to try and consolidate there efforts. Councilmember Trawinski stated that this year they are trying to bring pressure on the Governor because he said he was the environmental governor. March 6 is a pre-rally and March 7 is the rally. The brochure should be forwarded to the Environmental Commission.

Mayor Weinstein stated that if anyone is interested, they should attend. Michael Hakim stated that he would encourage it. Every community has their own advocates. This is an opportunity to see what others are doing and to learn.

The question was raised as to how much money is in the Open Space fund. Mayor Weinstein stated that they will know for next time.

Mayor Weinstein stated that at the Work Session on February 17, they will put on the discussion regarding the general letter. If there is approval, the letter should immediately go out. The list of property owners can be obtained on behalf of the Mayor and Council. The George Street situation should be expedited between now and the next meeting. Acting Manager Kwasniewski will speak with the Borough Attorney.

Michael Hakim stated that if the hold up is the fire company's engineer, maybe the fire company can put the pressure on them.

Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for February 23, 2009.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned.