

Open Space and Recreation Commission Minutes

Meeting Date: May 5, 2021

Location: Outside at Rock Spring Golf Club

This is to inform the general public that this meeting is being held in compliance with Section 5 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, Public Law 1975. The annual notice was emailed to the Star Ledger and filed in the Township Clerk's office on October 30, 2020, and published in the

West Orange Chronicle on December 10, 2020.

Present: Joe McCartney-Chairman, Heidi Cohen, Walt Douglas, Patricia Nathan, James Rawls, Linda Stiles, William Sullivan, Brent Scott, Councilman Bill Rutherford.

Absent: None

The meeting started at 7:05pm

MOTION by Douglas

Move to approve the minutes for the March 3, 2021 meeting as amended. Seconded by Rawls and carried without dissent.

MOTION by Nathan

Move to approve the minutes for the April 7, 2021 meeting as amended. Seconded by Scott and carried without dissent.

Old Business:

Councilman Rutherford reported on the Crestmont Country Club opportunity:

The Crestmont Country Club owners have a preliminary site development option for 300-400 units of residential housing for 95 acres on the south and east edge of the property. This will cause the destruction of 95 acres of wooded land. A group of approximately 100 families organized to object to the new residential development.

The owners are looking to sell the full 95 acres to the Township. Two appraisals were previously distributed to the Commissioners in the amounts of \$2.1 Mil. and \$2.3 Mil. The Township recently received a third appraisal in the amount of \$7 Mil.

The Township is in negotiations and has agreed in principle on the purchase terms, however the agreement is not finalized.

If purchased, the land would be deed restricted as open space. Recreation facilities would be passive in use with possible facilities such as a recreation center, bicycle path, hiking path.

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Question arose to what tax revenue would be lost should the Township purchase the land. Councilman Rutherford noted it would be about \$20K, with the total taxes totaling approximately \$840K. The land is currently assessed at \$500K.

Chairman McCartney reported on Ridge Road:

Stiles requested an update on the status of the proposal (by others) to purchase 12-acres along Ridge Road. McCartney noted the Township administration will not support the purchase. Only 4 of the acres are buildable, the area is zoned for 2-acres lots and they are along a private road with over 1,500 front feet on Mt Pleasant Avenue.

Chairman McCartney reported on "The Rock":

McCartney circulated pictures via email of the installation of the bee hive at the site.

Recreation Needs Assessment

Rawls raised the Township's need for a second synthetic turf to support Lacrosse and other field sports. The only synthetic turf fields are located at the high school. The proposed increase in Open Space tax could support this field. Cohen suggested this need helps support the previous discussion for the completion of a Township wide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment. McCartney asked if Heidi Cohen could develop a proposal to present to the Council. This is and **ACTION ITEM** for Cohen.

McCartney said he would check with Bill Kehoe, Recreation Director, to see if a needs assessment was previously completed. This is and **ACTION ITEM** for McCartney.

New business:

Councilman Rutherford reported on the Rock Spring Golf Club:

Councilman Rutherford reported on the status of the Rock Spring Golf Club financial and redevelopment analysis after the completion of the first playing season. The proposal presented by Mayor Parisi. The development included a new access road from Northfield Avenue behind the houses along West Road, moving the clubhouse to the northwest with the current clubhouse site to be developed as residential. This concept was not well received from Township residents and council people.

The development opportunities continue to be evaluated, with one such option to develop the clubhouse to include a luxury hotel above. Rawls suggested that a parking deck could be built along the cliff at the back of the existing clubhouse.

The existing golf course is a popular destination course due to the design by Seth Raynor & Charles Banks. Cohen noted that Seth Raynor was mentored by C. B. Macdonald. Macdonald was responsible for bringing golf to America and for the use of template holes. The goal for the redevelopment would be to maintain the 18 hole golf course and respect the golf course's history.

The Commission can give suggestions while the mayor takes the responses regarding the housing under advisement.

Chairman McCartney reported on The West Orange Open Space Tax:

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The Township currently has ½ cent per \$100 assessed value for Open Space tax. Chairman McCartney is proposing to raise this in support of various land acquisition and recreation development opportunities and needs. The Township can raise the tax to 1 cent without a referendum. This would equate to approximately \$20 per resident.

Chairman McCartney previously reported the average Open Space tax in Essex County amongst the 13 of 22 towns assessing such a levy, is .015%. West Orange's assessment is roughly \$5/resident. Nine Essex County towns do not charge any open space taxes.

Cohen suggested the Commission and Township complete a feasibility poll to gauge the residents tolerance for the level of tax increase and use of the tax. Cohen volunteered to identify the steps required and report back. Chairman McCartney assigned this as an **ACTION ITEM** for Cohen.

Chairman McCartney reported on a possible revenue opportunity at "The Rock":

NJ DEP Green Acres Program has recently changed their regulations to allow the installation of solar panel installation on sites that received Green Acres funding. An adjacent resident does not object to the possibility. McCartney posed the possibility of participating in the statewide community pilot solar program on the site. There was some objection to changing the use of the site from what was presented as part of the acquisition process. If the Commission was interested in pursuing this possibility, Cohen suggested the proposal would need to be brought back to the community to review and comment on. No next steps were discussed.

Next meeting to be held June 2, 2021 at OSPAC at the gazebo.

MOTION by Councilman Sullivan

Move to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Scott and carried without dissent.

The meeting adjourned at 7:34pm

Minutes submitted by Commissioner Cohen.



Joseph P McCartney

Chairman

7/27/2021