

Becket Open Space Plan Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes for 16 August, 2022

Attending: Berkshire Regional Planning Committee: Cara Farrell & Lauren Gaherty
Committee Members: Meredyth Babcock, Alvin Blake, Cindy Delpapa, Larisa Shpitalnik, Ken Smith, chair
Other: Jeff Wilkinson- appointment to Committee anticipated

Meeting called to order at 5:05.

Meeting Minutes:

M Babcock sent corrections via email to C Farrell including clarifications about the Highland Footpath initiative. Motion made to approve 19 July 2022 minutes with corrections, (Blake/Smith). MSV (in the affirmative: LS, KS, AB, MB, abstaining: CD).

Update on Committee members. J Wilkinson and K Karlberg are submitting applications to be appointed by BOS. Appointments may be in place for the next meeting.

C Farrell is scheduling meetings with pertinent town boards and recommended residents, (Conservation Commission, Parks & Recreation Committee, Bill Elovirta and Rita Furlong). M Babcock recommended meeting with Chris Swindlehurst. A Blake recommended interviewing the new town administrator. These interviews could help decipher ownership questions for some parcels and gain a better perspective on historical issues.

OSRP survey results: M Babcock pleased to see a large number of respondents interested in knowing more about land conservation and a majority of respondents supporting the use of town resources/staff working on open space activities. Other takeaways from the survey results include what appears to be some inflated expectations on what the OSRP can address and confusion about land ownership & control, (e.g. keeping the Dreamaway open as a restaurant and controlling activities in October State Forest).

Objectives and goals: Committee needs to focus on drafting objectives and goals to present at the next public forum. BRPC has augmented the action map, as recommended by the Committee, with open space in adjacent towns to better understand regional corridors and connections. Conservation focus areas and lands currently used for recreation but are not protected, which includes the children's camps and Palmer Brook Fishing Club, are now on the map. J Wilkinson asked for the map to include even more of the adjacent towns. L Gaherty noted this expansion would reduce the scale and make the map harder to read. Perhaps there could be two maps- one at a larger scale and one more focused on just Becket. Reorienting the map from portrait to landscape could help.

M Babcock would like to add to the list of action items. A priority for her is revisiting the transfer of the North Becket municipal parcel adjacent to the federal Conte Reservation lands to the US Fish & Wildlife Service. There was an effort to sell this parcel to the US Fish & Wildlife Service but a clouded deed prevented the sale. Unclear if US Fish & Wildlife Service/Conte still has the funding and will to purchase this parcel if the deed issues can be rectified but believes this is an important action item. Another action item involves the lands on Gobble Mountain owned by the town of Chester for water supply. The action would be to research how to attach permanent protections on the lands should the town of Chester sunset the drinking water reservoir on this parcel. It would be key to ascertain the ecological values of this land during the research effort. M Babcock would like to see this same sort of research completed on all Town of Becket owned lands to make sure there is permanent protection of all undeveloped parcels. A one hundred acre parcel near Papa Bob's off Rte 20 was just purchased and unclear what development will be pursued. The parcel does have extensive wetlands. Neal Toomey's property is slated for protection by Mass Audubon. Mass Audubon hopes to obtain some state funding, once Becket has an updated and approved OSRP, for this project. A Blake again mentioned the fifty acres across from the Becket Quarry with a brook flowing through a portion of the property identified as significant. Only five acres of the parcel is slated for

a commercial growing operation. An action item would be to work with the new owner to protect the remaining forty five acres as conservation land. C Farrell asked if anyone knew the status of the old golf course off Rte 20. The ownership is not clear as it is not a part of Sherwood Green. The land is mowed and M Babcock would like to see it converted to pollinator habitat. J Wilkinson offered to research ownership of the land.

As for priorities, C Delpapa's open space recommendations include: prioritizing acquisitions adjacent to other open space to increase the contiguous area of protected lands to reduce fragmentation & to build regional corridors of protected land, protect floodplains using the modeled increased inundations due to climate change, protect steep slopes and work to protect generous vegetated river & wetland corridors. The town would benefit from researching local wetland bylaws from across the Commonwealth to identify and work to adopt those aspects of wetland bylaws most pertinent to protecting the wetlands and natural resources of Becket. The survey clearly showed preserving the rural character of Becket was important to almost all respondents and these actions would directly protect this identified resident priority.

A Blake recommended more information and research on trails. Essau's Heel trail would like to expand. Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival intends to rehabilitate their on site trail. Might wish to look into the DCR's designation of all but one trail- and the Appalachian Trail- in October Mountain State Forest being open to off road vehicles as this reduces the experience and usability of the trail system for passive recreation and wildlife viewing. M Babcock noted Gobble Mountain, though outside of Becket is accessible from Becket, has some funding for a trail link to the Keystone Arches trails. Swimming areas available to the public include Center Pond which is open to residents of Becket & Washington with a low cost resident permit. Yokum Pond, Buckley Dunton and Shaw Pond have public accessibility. Buckley Dunton, Shaw Pond, Greenwater Pond and Center Pond all have public or other boat launch areas. Many survey respondents noted bicycling is not ideal. It may be worthwhile to have targeted outreach to bicyclists to better understand what would make the roads more accessible and usable. A recommendation would be to improve roadways for bikes whenever they are rehabilitated. Pickleball is gaining in popularity and the town may wish to add a court. There is public tennis courts at the elementary school but the courts are in need of some repairs.

OSRP timeline. C Farrell noted the work is a bit behind as she is working to schedule interviews. Once she talks to a few more people and town boards to fill in some gaps, the draft plan can be sorted and sent for review. C Farrell will work with Beverly at town hall about a place for the public forum and will send a poll out to select the next Committee meeting date.

Motion made to adjourn the meeting (Smith/Blake). MSV (in the affirmative: KS, CD, LS, AB). Meeting adjourned at 6:28 PM.