

## OPEN SPACE MEETING – February 9, 2026

**Members Present:** Messrs. Sabatini, Dlugos, Morytko, Duch, Bogardus

**Members Absent:** Messrs Esposito and Mayor Rubenstein

**Also present:** Forester Heather Gracie, Secretary Caitlin Phillips

This meeting was called to order at 7:04pm by Chairman Morytko.

### OS FINANCIAL STATUS REPORT:

Reserve for Open Space: \$433,905.13. Mr. Sabatini said he's working on the budget. The Open Space tax will be about \$110,000.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – January 12, 2026 minutes. Mr. Dlugos motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Bogardus. All were in favor.

### DISCUSSION ITEMS

#### *Cranberry Overlook Project / Forest Stewardship*

Ms. Gracie noted they got the prescribed burn application submitted, and the Committee should reach out to Mr. Efinger to see where it is at. Usually, to make the community aware, they put up signage. Mr. Morytko said they'll wait until they have a better idea of the timeline, so people can remember what it's about. Mr. Dlugos said Mr. Duch volunteered to handle this. Ms. Gracie said after the burn, they can monitor the area to see if another burn is needed in a few years, if volunteers are needed, and if invasives come back. It's also important to keep the trail safe; some beech trees are affected by a disease going around. They should also be aware of trail markers and see which ones need replacement or to be made more visible.

Mr. Dlugos said he is working on the Briar Ridge loop. Looking at the trail assessment, there is a lot of barberry, and Japanese knotweed by road. Ms. Gracie said this is a good thing to target early. She is waiting on the Cranberry Overlook work. Mr. Dlugos said the Open Space Grant this year seems to be moving towards stewardship. He heard the Highlands is offering money to towns that emphasize watershed issues. Mr. Morytko said they can put money towards things that need professional help. They can walk with groups on the trails to help with education. Ms. Gracie said since the trails group are people who walk these places regularly, they can point things out that need to be removed, and use GPS to locate trees with issues. Mr. Dlugos said ash and beech trees are the main focus. He can recommend that they make pins of the locations, or use flagging tape. Ms. Gracie said they can do a social media post about the controlled burn to bring awareness and education. Alex from her office can be involved with this process.

#### *Trails Grant Project*

Mr. Morytko said a previous grant application was included as an example of what's needed. Mr. Dlugos said he discussed with the grant group the parameters for the funding. They can attend a pre-application meeting, and discuss the plan to see what else may be needed. They don't see the parking lot as road creation, and can fund parking lots since it's part of trail head enhancements. Mr. Morytko noted they can look on the website for information. Mr. Duch asked who can help put the budget together. Mr. Sabatini said they need to know the project first, and then they can speak to the engineer for the scope of work. He would be involved with the roadways and signage. This would need to go to the Council to authorize the funds. There should be a marketing component, for the Trails Conference and locally. The group noted they want to focus on trail crossings and blazing, with a marketing component. Mr. Dlugos said they should make sure the trail fits with the parking area.

### *Properties being dedicated to Open Space*

Mr. Sabatini said he's looking to move forward with foreclosures on some properties in town. He did a title search for the properties, but the project was put on hold. There's a new law that makes foreclosures more difficult, as they require tracking down any potential heirs that may have an interest in the property. The title searches need to be acted on, or they can be lost. He identified the ones already looked at, and all were in a similar area under common ownership. They're in the Lackawanna and Bank Street area. One property is current on taxes, but not accessible. The parcel is shown on tax map page 8, included in the packet. He can see if the owner would like to donate or sell the parcel. Mr. Dlugos would like to go look at the property. Mr. Sabatini said he needs to get an idea of the timeline for title searches, and needs to see if the Committee thinks it's worth looking into. Mr. Duch noted his concern about any steepness on the property. Mr. Sabatini said someone uses a quad to go up there. He can reach out to the property owner to see if they're interested. The Committee confirmed their interest, and asked Mr. Sabatini to continue with the process.

### **OPEN TO PUBLIC**

No public was present.

### **MEMBER REPORTS**

Mr. Dlugos said they have a hike scheduled for 02/22. They've also collaborated with the Recreation Department for family trails' passports, to show which trails people have walked on. He also mentioned trail restoration projects.

Mr. Sabatini said the town budget will be reviewed in March. The main issue is with the increase in health benefit costs.

Mr. Sabatini said Harvey Roseff passed away recently. He noted that the Council needs someone to join for the rest of the year. Then someone else would be elected for next 3 years. Any interested parties should reach out; four people have done so already.

**ADJOURN** – Motion by Mr. Dlugos, second by Mr. Sabatini, to adjourn the meeting at 8:48pm. All members in favor. Motioned carried.