

OPEN SPACE MEETING – April 12, 2021

Members Present: Joseph Sabatini, Ray Bonker, Russel Raffay, John Morytko, and Eric Duch.

Members Absent: Scott Yappen

Also present: Heather Gracie, Ben Spinelli, and Caitlin Phillips

John Morytko called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

OS Financial Status Report:

Open Space Trust Fund Balance: \$488,716.15

Reserve for Debt Service Balance: \$145,009.32

Outstanding Debt Service Balance: \$259,200.00

Mr. Bonker noted that the committee should continue to highlight the Item D money reserved for Byram. Mr. Spinelli will check the amount in this fund. Mr. Morytko asked if there's anything outstanding from the Trust Fund and Mr. Sabatini said there's no encumbrances, but they did recently purchase the equipment for the line painting machine that may not have been encumbered yet, for about \$6,000.

Approval of Minutes – February 8, 2020 – Motion by Joseph Sabatini, second by Raymond Bonker to approve minutes as presented, all in favor. Motion Carried.

CO Johnson Park

Improvement Plan Concepts Review:

Mr. Bonker said they had two options with this plan. There was initial preference by the Council for the second option, as it does not involve moving the CO Johnson building. But when everyone had more clarity on the plan, most liked the first option that involves moving the building towards the back parking lot. There was discussion involving the dog park placement, in which across the street makes sense for access to the trail. The downside to option 1 is it's expensive relative to option 2, but this is a ten-year plan so the costs won't be all at once. Given the committee's record of finding alternative funding sources, Mr. Bonker doesn't think the price should bother them too much. He thinks the committee should first make sure the plans are correct and then focus on something simple like the dog park implementation as one of the first sub-components. So, the committee should have a 1-2 year plan as well as the 10 year plan. Mr. Sabatini added the Council should consolidate the plans and consider the comments provided, including relocating the field house. He thinks it would take a month or more to get that done, and will follow up with them. He confirmed that the expectation is to have the plan before the council before the next Open Space meeting in June.

Mr. Bonker encouraged the committee to look at the dog park components, that way they can start looking at grant funding, highlands approvals, etc. Mr. Spinelli said the one issue for the CO Johnson Park improvements would be the dog park in regards to highlands regulations. Mr. Duch asked if this had to do with impervious coverage, and Mr. Spinelli said it's about the quarter-acre of disturbance. Mr. Duch asked if there's any new material about this project. Mr. Sabatini stated that on the 03/16 Council meeting, 2 concept plans were presented and one option was to put the dog park near the existing retention basin, or to put it across the street. The benefit of placing it across the street is that it's near the trailhead and a small parking area could be made. The area is flat and has been cleared by the timber harvest of the ash trees. The general consensus was that if it's possible to move the park across the street, that would be the preferred option. Mr. Spinelli asked Mr. Sabatini to request of them to put Tamarack Trail on the map. Mr. Bonker said he thinks he'd move the parking

near the peach tree area for less disturbance. Mr. Sabatini said the two issues with that are that there's a right-of-way to get to the cemetery, and he doesn't want to put a dog park right in people's backyards. He thinks the committee should let French and Murillo come up with the options and present them to the committee, since they're aware of the topography. One of the issues presented was that the park is left-sided when looking at it regarding parking. Putting athletic recreation on the right would be too close to the dog park with limited parking. To accommodate people going to the dog park, part of the thought process was to move it across the street. Additionally, it sets up a new lot, so that gives more flexibility to the other side of the street for any desired improvements. Mr. Spinelli said it looks like they're getting the most out of the CO Johnson park possible, so it'd be hard to put the dog park there because of the configuration. Mr. Sabatini said the next expectation is to get the final proposed plan outlined with issues they would have combining the concepts into one, possibly revising the preliminary estimate, and having a meeting with the council and stakeholders. The goal is to review what's presented before they're authorized to finalize the plan.

Potential Grant and Loan Programs:

- A) Rec Improvement Grant Opportunity
- B) Green Acres Grant/Loan Program

This grant was announced through the Department of Community Affairs and is due by 05/24. Mr. Sabatini said he met with Mr. Spinelli, Mr. Morytko, and Mr. Beecher, the Chair of Recreation. He believes it makes sense to consider a project at CO Johnson park. When you look at the grant, there's around 2.5 million in funding, focused on communities with systemic strain from COVID-19 and those with unmet recreational improvement needs. Byram would not likely be at the top of the list, but there is an application in place for Riverside Park to replace the playground equipment, which would not need engineering work. Mr. Sabatini will work with Mr. Spinelli on the narrative that needs to be put together for the grant, and look to do a resolution for the council.

Mayor Rubenstein joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Duch asked if there is any room in the application for Riverside Park for improvements on the kayak launch. Mr. Sabatini responded this isn't a heavy lift in funding, and the playground park project would be about \$100,000. He sees the kayak launch more as an approval issue than an improvement issue. Mr. Spinelli said any capital expenses would need to be minor. Mr. Morytko said Byram may not necessarily be the target for this grant, but what they're doing is a community project, which fits the requirements. Mr. Spinelli reminded the committee this is a reimbursement grant, so they have to reimburse the money after it's spent. Mr. Bonker clarified that for this grant they're targeting Riverside Park, not including the kayak access but also not dropping it. Mr. Bonker asked how to go about that loan, using it all at once or spreading it over time. Mr. Spinelli said it's unlikely to get the money for the whole project, so it'd be funded from different sources like bonds and Open Space funds. The committee would put together a financing package with the sources being used. Mr. Sabatini said these loans are available every two years, so they'd apply for the application consistent with the level of work for the park, and then two to four years later when there's another phase ready, a new application would be submitted. Mr. Bonker asked if the loan must be spent in the two year timeframe, or can progress be shown instead. Mr. Sabatini responded that he thinks you'd need to couple the loan with a bond ordinance or alternative funding measure, and once the funds start being used is when the loan would begin. Mr. Bonker noted it's important to see how to balance the funding sources over the next 10 years. Mr. Sabatini said French and Murillo should put together a strategic plan to show what priorities go first since some improvements may be dependent on other

improvements. The key for this grant is to get the concept in place and see what the committee deems a critical element.

Forest Stewardship

Ash Tree Timber Harvest at CO Johnson and Tamarack

Heather noted the weather conditions of the winter did make the harvest more difficult, but it was successful. Smaller loads were taken out and transloaded at a different site because the rigs were too big, and straw was put down. The site is in a disturbed state, and she will monitor it over the next few months. She noted that on one of the volunteer days there will be tree planting done. She'll be working with Mr. Morytko and Mr. Duch on Friday at the CO Johnson/Cranberry site to consider the trail expansion project. Mr. Duch asked if she took a look at trees that were left standing 6-8 feet off the ground after the harvest, and it looks like in a couple spots stumps were dragged. When Heather is there on Friday she will take a look.

Volunteer Day:

There is a volunteer day on May 8th that Heather and Donna Fett are working on. It's a half-day event to control invasive plants along the Tamarack Trail. There's an RSVP to know how many are in attendance; if it's a large group (over 15) they'll need to be broken up. Mr. Morytko said when the details are confirmed they'll circulate it to the committee and others who may be interested. They'll be targeting barberry, garlic mustard, narrowleaf bittercress, etc. They are encouraging people to bring their own tools, including hand tools, trimmers, shovels, pitchforks, bug spray, and water. There will be waivers for the volunteers to sign beforehand and a sign-in sheet. Heather is hoping to have enough volunteers to form a Friends group to monitor the trails.

Visit to CO Johnson/Cranberry Overlook:

Heather will be looking at the CO Johnson/Cranberry trails with Mr. Morytko and Mr. Duch on Friday. Mr. Duch hiked there two weeks ago and tracked where he went to get an idea of the landscape. Heather said her plan is after this to look at improvements for Stand 20. In Stand 19 there's mile-a-minute weed that needs to be handled. They'll also look at Glenside Park to address invasive plants, and will consider doing a small harvest. Heather said she'd have some maps with her for Friday. She also noted there's oak regeneration in Stand 20 that's impeded by less desirable trees, which she wants to take a look at, potentially to thin those trees to give the oaks more sun. Heather reiterated her concern regarding the mile-a-minute weed. Mr. Raffay asked if there's an app to track invasive species. Heather noted that she knows there's one from the invasive strike team, and one for plant identification. There are some invasive plants that go beyond the scope of volunteers, so that's when you could use forestry groups.

Mr. Bonker asked if based on the data from the timber harvest, how big does a harvest need to be in order to be economically viable. \$3,000 was generated from this harvest but they lost money, spent on the legal framework, so he's hoping that now this is all in place so that there's less of a loss for future harvests. He also wondered if the harvesters would be willing to do the harvest with less trees. Heather responded that this harvest wasn't economically viable, and the harvesting depends on the species. This harvest had a short distance to haul the trees, and species have different values at various times. If a harvest is a small job but there's something else going on in the vicinity, the small harvest becomes more appealing because the foresters' fixed costs are less. So this question really depends on species, distance, accessibility, market fluctuation, etc. Looking at long-term impacts, Heather said she doesn't want to harvest trees and then get a low price, so they could have things ready to go and gets bids in, and Heather could recommend to wait more time for better prices. Right now there's so much ash being salvaged and not enough people to do it, and she doesn't want anyone doing the harvest that they're not familiar with and doesn't have the proper insurance. Mr. Morytko said he knows there's a lot of

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discussion about state legislature about forestry and stewardship plans that goes in many directions. He'd like to discuss this to hear Heather and Ben's insights.

Byram Outdoors

Mr. Spinelli said he discussed with Mr. Sabatini how to best manage this social media project. Mr. Sabatini took the artwork for the new logo and applied it to the website, and has a concern about managing two websites. Mr. Spinelli said they could develop the content and then post it on the Byram Township website under its own set of tabs. They can add places to fish and kayak, and things that would have been added to the other site. They'll keep the Byram Outdoors domain name and have it redirected to that portion of the town website. Mr. Sabatini and others can update the website, so the administration becomes more manageable. Mr. Sabatini said they're looking to repurpose existing functionality on the website. There's a page on the site labeled Recreation, and they're looking to rename that Byram Outdoors. Under the "Departments" section they'll put a Recreation department, and that's where they'll put program-oriented information and recreational activities that are occurring through that department. Byram Outdoors will take over the section of the website that already exists with trails; there's an existing functionality that was modeled off of the New York/ New Jersey Trail Conference a few years ago. The hope is to incorporate the same functionality for the other targeted items. Under "Community," there's a list of lakes that would get moved over to Byram Outdoors, and would cover canoeing, kayaking, and fishing. They're also looking to integrate the new logo on the main page of the website. The other goal is to get some new photos for the website, perhaps more seasonally driven, to give the main page a new look.

Mr. Morytko asked if social media was a goal down the line. Mr. Spinelli said they'll still get some content; they'll take photos of the timber harvest and the volunteer events to be posted, and Mr. Spinelli will take photos of people enjoying activities in the various seasons to keep the content refreshed. Mr. Morytko asked if there would be a way for people to submit photographs, and Mr. Spinelli said they could email the photos to him. Mr. Sabatini said Facebook would remain Byram Outdoors, and Mr. Spinelli will post 2-3 times a month regarding the outdoor activities in Byram.

Mr. Bonker asked if the brochure Mr. Spinelli made can be sent out with the mailing from the EC about phosphorous, which is mailed out during the summer. Mr. Sabatini said he would be okay with it being sent out now. Mr. Bonker said it's important to have the social media links and content on those pages already, so that if people are excited by the information in the brochure, they can actually find more details online. Additionally, this way when people see the new logo for the town, they understand that it's not just to update the design but that there's new projects going on. Mr. Bonker said he doesn't mind waiting until the summer so long as he knows the brochure will be sent out at that time. Mr. Duch asked if the brochure is ready to be printed, and Mr. Bonker said it was approved by everyone so it's ready to go. Mr. Morytko suggested reviewing it again to make sure the links and info are all current. The question would be if the content is online before the brochure, or start advertising now. Mr. Sabatini said the brochure should have a mayoral cover letter, representing the Council. If the goal is to have the brochure direct people to other information, the committee needs to lay out what those items are and how to get that ready so the timing of the brochure mailing is appropriate. Mr. Morytko said that whatever is being promoted in the brochure, there needs to be content online to back it up. He'd like to make a decision at the next meeting on when to send the brochure and check in with where the committee is at with the information. Mr. Bonker agreed, and said he'd like to just make a decision at the next meeting with all the questions and discussions having already been done ahead of time. He likes the supplemental cover letter, since it can talk about Byram Outdoors and what they're hoping to do with CO Johnson Park. This way people get

clarity on projects going on in Byram, and the letter can tell them what to look forward to. Mr. Morytko agreed, saying the letter is a way to show the assets of the town.

Trails Expansion

Hudson Farms trail system development, Byram Trail connections to Hudson Farms properties, Trails Grant Application:

Mr. Spinelli said he had discussions with landowners who owned properties that were identified in the trails plan as key missing links. In order to get the Kellogg property, they need access to those properties to make it unified. He feels the Hudson Farms property is ready to move forward, and would like some control over the visuals of the trail markers, where the kiosks will go, etc. The committee needs to lay out the routes first for clarity. Mr. Spinelli said Autumn is looking to hire someone to administer the open space program so she can put the money out to the municipalities.

Mr. Bonker asked what the issue is with making progress, and Mr. Spinelli said the personnel were cut back. Mr. Morytko asked if there's a way to say this is approved money that should be used. Mr. Spinelli said it has to come from elected officials that say the voters approved this money, and there are projects ready to access that money that would be of benefit to the county. Mr. Bonker asked who to go to in order to solve it. Mr. Sabatini said he'd refer to Mr. Spinelli on this, and wonders if this falls under the county administrator or goes directly to the commissioners. He asked how much money is available to the committee for grant opportunities. Mr. Spinelli said that is part of the county budget every year; a lot goes to farmland preservation and are split between the state and county. Mr. Bonker added that it was 90% farmland preservation and 10% open space acquisition, but the maintenance money doesn't have the 90/10 split. Mr. Sabatini asked if it's certain the money is set aside for the maintenance grant, and Mr. Spinelli said he'd could find that out. Mr. Bonker noted if they have a ten-year development plan, the committee will go back to the money quite a bit so it's good to have this resolved. Mr. Spinelli also noted he'd like to do the wayfinding of the trails, which would be a \$10,000 grant.

Mr. Morytko circled back the Hudson Farms trails, and Mr. Spinelli said they'll push that forward. Mr. Spinelli added that it's important to get these trails connected to the greater trail system, because otherwise they'd be isolated. Right now, there's a good chance they can connect the Hudson Farms trails to the township.

Riverside Park Kayak Launch

Mr. Spinelli said Riverside Park is difficult to deal with because it's in the buffer zone and highlands preservation, so it's regulated. The project has been to bring a kayak launch in, working with Judy Thorton from the Highlands. She contacted the DEP, who likes the idea and thinks the challenges of this project are not hard to overcome. Ms. Thorton told Mr. Spinelli that as long as they don't disturb more than a quarter of an acre, this would be considered a capital project. The next step is to get someone from the DEP, highlands, and township out on the site together. Mr. Morytko said the concept for this project is minimal anyway; they want to put something in that's functional, accessible, and the least disturbance. Mr. Spinelli noted they'd need a modified riverbank with a level area and cleared pathway so people can access the water. That section of the Musconetcong is popular with kayakers. Mr. Spinelli said the site visit should happen before the next open space meeting.

Historic Preservation: Lockwood Cemetery

Mr. Morytko spoke with Mr. Gonzalez from the Historical Society regarding historical markers and trails. Mr. Gonzalez has three markers identified, and will get a summary of the signs considered a priority. The signs are a 50/50 split with the county, at about \$2,400. They discussed doing something in relation to the trail, mansion, etc. and if there's an opportunity for marking. Mr. Gonzalez also identified the lost hamlet of Byram that is near the canal trail. He also identified Sussex railroad, which doesn't have any marking. It's a state property so there's likely another process to put something there. He also discussed Cranberry Lake, regarding the rail trail. That property is currently being redeveloped and the applicant is looking to incorporate a historic stone entry, so there should be a discussion with the people working on the property. Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Morytko also discussed involving groups like the Boy Scouts in cleanup of the cemetery. At the next open space meeting there will be more information to see if the committee has more specific interest. Mr. Sabatini asked that if Mr. Morytko speaks to Mr. Gonzalez, that he asks what needs to be done and the challenges regarding the cemetery; the superintendent noted that some of the gravesites are collapsing, so how can this be taken care of. He knows there's some focus on identifying individuals buried there and getting headstones restored, but would also like to focus on general cleanup and see who takes care of that.

Member Reports

Environmental Commission – Mr. Duch said there is an Arbor Day event on 04/24, where they will give out 500 seedlings from South Jersey. On 05/08 there is a spring trail cleanup with invasive plant removal with Heather.

Planning Board – Mr. Morytko said the Adam Todd property is being redeveloped and they're looking to preserve some historic stonework near Cranberry Lake.

Open to the Public

Mr. Morytko opened to the public. No one from the public came forward. Mr. Morytko closed to the public.

Mr. Duch reminded the committee that there is still an open spot. He met someone previously that he'll invite to a meeting to see if he's interested in joining.

Adjourn – Motion by Eric Duch, second by Joseph Sabatini to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m. All members in favor.