

## OPEN SPACE MEETING – June 14, 2021

**Members Present:** Joseph Sabatini, Ray Bonker, Russel Raffay (Appeared Later), John Morytko, and Scott Yappen.

**Members Absent:** Eric Duch

**Also present:** Heather Gracie, Ben Spinelli, Alex Rubenstein, and Caitlin Phillips

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

### OS Financial Status Report:

*Open Space Trust Fund Balance:* \$482,226.59

*Reserve for Debt Service Balance:* \$145,009.32

*Outstanding Debt Service Balance:* \$259,200.00

Mr. Morytko confirmed the Pioneer Manufacturing Company is the field lining machine and is being used. Mr. Bonker said he'd still like to see Item D, the planning incentive grant money; Mr. Spinelli was going to check on the balance for this.

### Item for Discussion

#### *Return to In-Person Meetings 07/01*

Mr. Morytko noted the Council decided to go back to in-person meetings as of July 1. This won't impact the Open Space Committee until August. A reminder will be sent out that the next meeting is in person. The public can attend.

### Approval of Minutes – April 12, 2021

Mr. Morytko said there's a minor edit on the second page regarding the cost of the kayak launch and the playground improvements. The park project is the \$100,000 estimate, while the kayak launch wouldn't be too costly.

A motion was made by Mr. Bonker to approve the minutes, all in favor. Motion Carried.

### OLD BUSINESS

#### Forest Stewardship / Trails

##### *Volunteer Day Report*

Ms. Gracie reported on the invasive species removal at Tamarack Park. There was a lot of volunteer enthusiasm with around 10-12 volunteers, and they completed about 2.5 acres. She feels the volunteers know enough now that she might not need to be there for future events, and noted there's interest among the volunteers in continuing similar work.

##### *Stand 20 Review / Cranberry Overlook Trail Updates and Expansion / Trails Grant Application*

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Ms. Gracie reported that she and a few other people looked at the Cranberry Overlook area for potential trail expansion, and flagged areas and came up with a preliminary map of their tracks. She's not sure where this stands at the moment, and looks to Messrs. Spinelli and Morytko to where to go from here.

Ms. Gracie discussed the potential thinning of Stand 20, part of Cranberry Overlook. They marked 95 low-grade species trees for a thinning from below; the site has a lot of native plants and tree regeneration. She needs to review this project with the regional forester, to obtain a harvesting plan with the amount of trees, timing, process, etc. She prefers to do a thinning during the late fall or in winter. Trees there are marked with little blue dots, and are thinned for air circulation, canopy expansion, and general understory conditions. Heather is hoping to look at other properties around August to present to the Committee.

Mr. Bonker asked if Heather had a cost estimate for the thinning. Heather said the trees are small, and recommends if it's a larger tree away from the trail they'd girdle it, and smaller trees they'd lay them down and chop them so they can recycle into the soil more quickly. This would also be the most cost-effective route, and it would take a day or two to complete. She doesn't think this would be more than a couple thousand dollars, and can get quotes for the Committee. Mr. Sabatini said they need multiple quotes, ideally 3. Mr. Bonker confirmed a trail runs through the stand, and thinks this project would good for the trails grant. Mr. Spinelli said this trail would be the backbone of that trail system and the next step is to make an application for the grant, stating they want to start implementing this information. Mr. Morytko asked about wayfinding for these trails. Mr. Spinelli said this could be written into the grant, and wayfinding isn't that expensive, and can be expanded as more trails are added to the system. Mr. Morytko said they can get a lot of this put together by the time the grant is released. Mr. Spinelli recommended including from Cranberry Overlook to Johnson Lake, and CO Johnson to Tamarack Park as the basics for the trails. He suggested going out to the area with members of the Committee, and noted that the Northern route is easier, keeping people off the Tilcon property. Mr. Morytko is looking to have this review of the area in the next month or so.

Mr. Bonker reviewed the three new trails at CO Johnson park; they're meant to be natural trails with no asphalt. Mr. Spinelli said they could put the trails together, and this would be a natural extension from Tamarack Trail into CO Johnson. Mr. Bonker said the grants wouldn't be in large dollar amounts, so was thinking of submitting multiple applications for the multiple projects to maximize funding. Mr. Spinelli said the main focus is on distances, how many decals, installation kits, etc. for this project. Mr. Morytko noted the next steps are to head out to the trails to get a better idea of them, and for Mr. Spinelli to get an estimate on the project costs. Mr. Spinelli suggested also looking at trail crossing signs, crosswalks across a road, etc. Mr. Bonker asked if it'd be too much to walk Cranberry Overlook and the woods on the same day, and others said it should be doable.

Mr. Spinelli reminded the Committee about preserving the route over to Tamarack. Mr. Bonker said this is a second trail that branches off near the dog park and heads towards Tamarack Road. It's not an existing trail but it's one the Committee should have defined in their plans.

### **CO Johnson Park**

*Latest proposal being reviewed / Green Acres loan application*

Mr. Bonker said the dog park is what would have the most benefit for the most people at the lowest cost. The discussion from the last meeting has shifted from a grant towards a loan. They'd like to proceed with the next steps, and the deadline is July 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Spinelli said the information of the site plan and cost estimates are

assembled, and they need a list of anticipated waivers or exemptions from the Highlands. Judy Thorton should be able to set up a meeting through Mr. Spinelli with the DEP and the Highlands to meet with French and Parrello. Part of the grant application is to approach the State to talk about the permitting issues. They have a letter of support from the County Planning Board now to help with the application. The Committee still needs a letter of support from the Planning Board and a resolution of intent from the council. Mr. Bonker asked that the action for the council is to allow French and Parrello to go ahead with the project, and asked about the finances. Mr. Spinelli said the meeting through Judy Thorton is to avoid spending a lot of money early on. The Committee can authorize the work for French and Parrello, but before they spend the money, the Committee will know where everything is at. Mr. Spinelli added that they could have French and Parrello show how they'll incorporate the plans into the Highlands regulations. Mayor Rubenstein said he discussed this with Dennis, checking in on the likelihood of approval, who said it would be very likely to be approved. He also asked how much money would be spent before they know for sure, and it was noted that it would be early on in the process, so the total spending would be less than \$10,000 before they knew of any issues.

Mr. Bonker asked Mr. Spinelli about the likelihood of approval for the loan. Mr. Spinelli said it's pretty likely, and then the committee would need to analyze if that's how they'd want to handle their financing. A lot is dependent on the quantity and quality of the applications being submitted. Mr. Bonker noted they'll see price estimates for the dog park that are around \$300,000, but it's not just for the dog park. The details on the pricing show one of the biggest items is the parking lot, and electricity and water, though they might not do electricity and water to the extent of the design. Mr. Bonker affirmed that the Committee is committing the funds to do the project, and stated that's why they'd really like to get the loan, to avoid spending 60% of the reserve money. Mr. Morytko said one of his concerns is how the loan project affects the rest of the project and other projects in town. Mayor Rubenstein noted that the public has told them they want a dog park, so the focus is on the cost, and the loan is the cheaper and easier way to get financing. If they don't get the loan, he'd think they'd leverage the Open Space funds against the bond, and bond the dog park. They asked French and Parrello to be conservative regarding the cost, to make sure they know they have enough money for the project. One of the items discussed was lighting—they discovered other towns don't use lighting at night, so they might not use that in the end. Reviewing what is needed and what can be changed could help them evaluate the costs.

Mr. Bonker noted they want a big parking lot not just for the dog park but also as a trail head. So, to say it's a "dog park" cost is inaccurate, because there's a few things that are connected in the project. Mr. Spinelli said he'll make sure the narrative reads that way, emphasizing that it's more than just a dog park, because the application becomes more attractive that way. Mr. Sabatini said they won't go for permanent bonding for this project because it's not enough money. If they don't get the loan it'd be rolled into a bigger permanent bond issue that they'd go for at a later date. They've been working on their debt service, so triggering a permanent debt issue is highly unlikely. He also noted the grant application requires a public hearing, and a resolution is needed for the governing body. The Council noted they'd authorize French and Parrello at their next meeting to move forward with the design work, with the proposal not amounting to more than \$39,525. Mr. Sabatini thinks the funding for that would be the Open Space Trust. Mr. Spinelli said they have letters of support from people in town that will be put in the package, and a letter of support from the County that deems this consistent. The Planning Board will provide a similar letter deeming the project consistent. The survey results will also be included that show the support from the community. Mr. Spinelli added the Council will be in a better position

with a recommendation from the Open Space committee saying they think it's a good idea as well and a good use of funds. Mr. Morytko said he wants to make sure they don't give the impression of funding this through the Open Space trust fund. Mr. Sabatini noted the Council needs to provide direction on their expectation regarding future funding utilizing the Open Space trust. There are different approaches for funding, but right now the Council is providing direction to move forward with the dog park. The Open Space Committee should then vote to support the expenditure to engage French and Parrello with the understanding that there will be a point before exceeding \$10,000 that French and Parrello will have approval or not to go ahead with the project. In order to get the application in by the deadline they're taking advantage of multiple items, including an Environmental Site Assessment. They have to do a site walk as well for the survey.

Mr. Spinelli noted at this time that he needed to leave the call, so went through his important points. There's a grant application in for Riverside Park for the playground and kayak launch. The dog park project will be done by the end of the month. Mr. Morytko asked if they've been able to get anyone to Riverside Park. Mr. Spinelli said Judy Thorton is getting someone from DEP to come out, and they'll get a date to meet with someone from the committee. Someone from the DEP took a look at the site and their first impression was that this would be tough, but they could fit the project within the Highlands Exemption. Mr. Morytko said he'd try to be there for this meeting. Mr. Bonker asked if there was another kayak launch that was in discussion at Johnson Lake. Mr. Spinelli said there's one now, but it's not easy to use. Floating docks aren't expensive, and DPW would take them out in November and put them back in April.

Mr. Morytko asked Mr. Spinelli about the Byram Outdoors project. He said he'd have content by the end of next month for the website. Mr. Bonker confirmed they won't send out the brochure until that happens. Mr. Morytko said he'd want to wait until there's more content. Mr. Sabatini said the brochure will be a separate mailing with a letter from the Mayor or Committee.

The Committee circled back to CO Johnson Park, and Mr. Bonker asked if they could combine three items, stating they support the dog park, endorsing the \$39,000 for French & Parrello, and support the application for a Green Acres loan.

Mr. Bonker motioned to approve this statement, seconded by Mr. Sabatini. All in favor.

Mr. Bonker added that they'll authorize the \$39,000 but won't spend it all until they get some visibility on the likelihood of permits.

### **Byram Outdoors**

#### *Brochure printing: quotes, packet contents, and mailing date*

Mr. Bonker noted regarding the brochure that the residents of Byram are a good test group, because a lot of this it to market Byram to non-residents. But they have to have enough content there for everyone, and maybe they'll get some feedback and can make improvements over time. Mr. Sabatini said they received 3 quotes so they can move forward with getting them printed. They requested 5,000 double-sided and pre-folded brochures. The max quote is \$1,175 and the least amount is \$625. The quotes come with different specifications, so they

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need to make sure this is done professionally. The extra brochures would be used to drop off at businesses, while 4,000 will be mailed out. They're looking to spend no more than \$1,200 on the printing.

Mr. Bonker asked if the brochure content is set, and added that if things could be changed, he'd like to see a small version of the town trail map included. It wouldn't be used for navigation purposes, but as a visual for letting people know the map exists. They could also include a link or code to tell people they can find a detailed version. Mr. Bonker would like to emphasize to people that 98% of the town is being used specifically for this kind of activity. This would be a marketing effort to tell people this is in Byram and to use it.

*Website updates: further content (links, photos, etc.)*

Mr. Morytko asked if they could add Byram Outdoors to the Community menu as a dropdown for visitors to Byram. They may be more inclined to use that section of the site if they're not from town. Mr. Sabatini said Byram Outdoors comes out under "Township Offices." They're not using a separate site, but changed the Recreation section to Byram Outdoors, keeping parks and fields, and renamed the trails section. They added a section for fishing and boating. The Byram Outdoors site will link to the Byram site. He recommends having a quick-link for Byram Outdoors rather than having it under "Community." They should be able to have a trail map section. Mr. Spinelli is meant to get the content and make sure Byram Outdoors links to the site.

Mr. Yappen asked if the logo is official. Mr. Bonker said everything will be using it besides the Police Department, who will use the police shield. The primary audience for the logo is for non-residents. Mr. Yappen asked if anyone had feedback about the logo. Mr. Bonker said the logo makes sense to him because people are using the trails, and places are full on weekends. He sees people using the lakes as well, and sees a lot of traction that the Byram Outdoors project will encapsulate. Mr. Morytko agreed, saying it's a good thing to give the town an identity. 98% of the town is highlands, so they are "outdoors" because of their assets. Mr. Bonker said Sussex County combines people and nature, and from a competitive standpoint, he wants to differentiate Byram from other towns. He thinks they have natural attractions that can be considered unique.

Mr. Sabatini and Ms. Phillips will work on the brochure details for the next meeting. Ms. Phillips asked regarding Mr. Bonker's earlier point about using the map on the brochure, if they could include any of that information on the letter and emphasize the 98% of positive land use with perhaps a QR code or link. Mr. Bonker agreed, saying Mr. Morytko and Ms. Phillips could draft that and circulate it to the Committee and then the Council for final approval.

Alex exited the call at this time.

### **Riverside Park Kayak Launch**

Mr. Morytko said he'll get the date from Mr. Spinelli to meet at the park with the DEP and highlands and get the impressions of the project. Mr. Bonker said this seems like an easy project that makes a lot of sense to get people onto the Musconetcong Canal. He asked if there was a grant out for the playground at this park. Mr. Sabatini said there are two requests in. The updated quote for the playground equipment increased to around \$150,000, and is the same project as at the start. The other grant is through State Farm Insurance, and they

won't know for another few weeks if the project is selected. If it is, the project becomes a popular vote project. Mr. Bonker asked if this grant is only in New Jersey. Mr. Sabatini said it's U.S.-based. Mr. Morytko asked about other private funding routes to help with the stages of the project. Mr. Bonker agreed, saying on the dog park project, if they could approach a Petco or other major dog industry, looking for sponsorship. Mr. Sabatini said it's complicated, because typically money cannot be asked for by promising something in return. There would need to be a public bid process. Mr. Bonker asked if the company wanted to partially sponsor the dog park, could they have something at the park that notes their sponsorship, but not a formal advertisement. Mr. Sabatini said that could be doable. Mr. Morytko wondered if they'd need a separate entity rather than a government office. Mr. Yappen added that he'd be willing to be part of a subcommittee to find organizations that provide that sponsorship. Mr. Bonker asked about contributions that went directly to the Open Space fund, and if they give money to the town, is that enough for them to get a tax write-off. Mr. Sabatini said this would be something to discuss with the legal council. When someone makes a donation to the town, it's accepted by resolution of the governing body and it's directed for a specific purpose. If the funds are not used for that project, they'd have to be returned.

## **Historic Preservation**

### *Historic Markers*

Mr. Morytko said there are two markers submitted to the County. One location is right on a trailhead, and the other is close to the rail trail parking lot, so it's accessible but a little less visible. Mr. Bonker said they already have 4-5 markers in Byram, and asked how they're paid for. Mr. Morytko said they're split with the County; they'll install them and pay for half, and the historical society is seeing if Byram would pay for the other half. Mr. Sabatini said to his knowledge they haven't paid for those in the past; they give the historical society a donation every year of around \$1,000. Mr. Bonker said the last time the society needed money was for the Roseville School. He wonders where the money would come out of, i.e., the annual donation or other Open Space funding. Mr. Morytko said he asked the society for more details and will report back. Mr. Bonker said it doesn't sound like a lot of money, and they're located near some of the trails. If it's only a few thousand he's okay with it. Mr. Morytko noted it could be helpful to have the markers on Byram Outdoors.

### *Lockwood Cemetery*

Mr. Morytko said the maintenance of the cemetery has been good, and he talked with the historical society about the process, particularly maintaining historical cemeteries. He wants a project plan from a volunteer angle on the priorities and what is feasible, as well as if it's cleanup or repair projects. Mr. Bonker confirmed that DPW does minor maintenance there.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Johnson Lake Kayak Launch**

Mr. Morytko went through survey details and was reminded of the discussion of the kayak launch at Johnson Lake, because it received great feedback on the survey, with 700 "yes" votes to have a kayak launch there. He's wondering what the next steps would be for this. Mr. Sabatini said there's limited parking and there are two

places where people already put their boats and kayaks. There's no safe crosswalk for parking across the street, and it's on a bad curve. The road is a shared-access driveway, so people can pull over, but they're limited by topography, so he doesn't think there needs to be any more than what's there today. Mr. Morytko asked if this is limited, would it be marketed as a kayak launch or would it be local knowledge. Mr. Sabatini said it can be identified on the website as a boating location, but if it gets more utilization than now it may present challenges. Mr. Bonker asked if Mr. Morytko is looking for a post that states it's a kayak launch. Mr. Morytko said he's just curious because of the survey results and to see what can be done.

Mr. Yappen asked what bodies of water residents have access to. Mr. Sabatini said Cranberry Lake and Johnson Lake, and Lake Lackawanna and Forest Lakes are private but people can become members. Mr. Bonker added Lubber's Run and Musconetcong are public. Mr. Yappen asked what restrictions Johnson Lake has; people can fish and kayak, but can't swim. He noted that a lot of residents ask what's available, so it is a demand to have access to bodies of water. Mr. Sabatini added Jefferson Lake is open to the public, and he sees a lot of people using the water at the available places. Mr. Yappen said it seems like there are roadblocks to the Byram Outdoors goal from its swimming inaccessibility, and Mr. Sabatini said there doesn't seem to be any, because he's seen a lot of people using the sites. Mr. Morytko noted that swimming is one of the activities that doesn't have a lot of spots besides private locations, but they can promote the assets they have. Mr. Bonker noted that they used to have public swimming available with a small beach area at Lubber's Run that didn't work out well, so he would caution any further swimming availability. Mr. Sabatini added that maybe they won't encourage day-trippers, but they want to use the lakes for their residents, and encourage people to live here. Mr. Raffay said people who are not residents of the private areas have the opportunity to pay membership and use the area as well. Mr. Yappen noted that he was focusing on the push for eco-tourism rather than for residents.

## **MEMBER REPORTS**

Mr. Morytko opened to the Committee for any updates or questions.

Mr. Yappen reminded the group the Triathlon is this coming weekend.

Mr. Raffay asked if anyone had been to Arbolino Park in Netcong, where they have ADA compliant weight sets, and recommended the Committee stop by. The outdoor gym is something he'd want to look into. They also added a handicap-accessible kayak launch and dock.

Mr. Morytko said he joined a Sussex County Trails Partnership meeting, and learned that they do a lot of work with Kittatinny Valley Park. They were organizing groups for clean-ups, and may open these groups up to Byram and vice versa. Mr. Morytko noted at that meeting Byram's work and their priority of trails. He said they had people on the call that are good connections for Byram.

## **OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**

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

**ADJOURN** – Motion by Mr. Bonker, second by Mr. Morytko to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m. All members in favor.

DRAFT