

## WEST WINDSOR SELECTBOARD

Draft Minutes

May 28, 2014

Present: Glenn Seward, Tom Kenyon, Bruce Boedtke, J.T. Horn (TPL), Kate Wanner (TPL), Rudy Gross, Dennis Lemire, Laura Stillson, Cathy Boedtke, Peg Merrens (UFLT), Arthur Steinberg, Aaron Gonthier (Windsor on Air), Al Keiller, Erik Schutz, Ted Siegler, Jim Lyall, Barbara Truex, Chris Nesbitt, Alice Anderson, Ann Valentine, Martha Harrison

- 1) Call to Order – Selectboard Chair Glenn Seward called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and introduced J.T. and Kate from the Trust for Public Land (TPL).
- 2) Announcements/Public Comment – None
- 3) Discuss possible acquisition of resort land with Trust for Public Land (TPL) – Kate talked about TPL’s Green Mountain Program, Connecticut River Program and Community Forest Program. TPL does not own any land or hold any easements; they work to acquire land for public ownership. Kate described the Barre Town Forest project, which is similar to the proposed Ascutney project. Kate said there are recreational, economic, health, scenic, and habitat benefits associated with the project, and the proposed acquisition is compatible with state goals to protect biodiversity. Kate described the 570-acre parcel, which would be purchased from the resort owner and added to the Town Forest, and the potential economic benefits based on the experience of Kingdom Trails in East Burke. Kate mentioned some of the possible funding sources for the project. Kate said the project will increase the size of the town forest to approximately 2,000 acres, protect the existing trail network, and secure the parking area for large events like the Vermont 50 and the mountain bike festival. Kate said the town would need to donate a conservation easement on the existing town forest as part of the project. The holder of the easement would depend on whether the funds come from federal or state sources. The easement would prohibit the subdivision and development of the property, although the prospective funders have expressed initial approval for a non-profit community ski area on the lower slopes. Kate said the appraisal has begun and should be completed by the end of July. Kate said this type of project usually takes about two years. Kate noted the various hand-outs available and additional information on TPL’s website. Rudy asked if there is a guarantee from the land owner that he won’t sell the property while we’re raising the funds. Kate said TPL will negotiate an option agreement with the owner. Dennis asked about the easement. Kate said funding sources require a match from the municipality and the donation of an easement would count toward the match requirement. Kate said all the existing activities would still be allowed. Ted said the easement details will have to be worked out. Arthur asked who is doing the appraisal. Kate said Peter Nault from McManus & Nault. Al asked if there is room to negotiate. Kate said TPL cannot pay more than the appraised value. Glenn said the land owner has the right to say that the appraised value is not enough and he doesn’t want to go through with the deal. Dennis asked if the acquisition is subject to town vote. Glenn said yes. Arthur asked about the tax implications. Glenn said the property, which is currently valued at approximately \$2 million (including land, buildings and ski lifts), would come off the Grand List. However, as the property is liquidated, the Grand List value will go down so the net effect will not be significant. Glenn said his analysis shows

an increase in the tax rate of 2 to 3 cents. If the town can get control of the property and increase the amount of recreational activity on it, Glenn said, that should raise property values in the area, which would minimize the tax implications. Ted said studies have shown that undeveloped land generally doesn't cost the taxpayers anything. Rudy asked if the taxes on the property have been paid. Glenn said yes. Tom asked what protection the town has against the construction of a wind farm. Kate said a conservation easement would not allow a commercial wind project. Glenn said the current owner is considering both wind turbines and solar arrays. Al asked if the owner will want some consideration for the option. Kate said TPL will usually handle that if the town is committed to acquiring it. Kate said the town could reserve a small area for solar energy generation if they wanted to. Dennis asked how the Selectboard will determine if there's a commitment from the town. Glenn said after the appraisal, if a deal can be worked out with the owner, the Selectboard will start engaging the public. Barbara asked about the effect of projects like this on property values. Kate said there is generally a 10% increase in value for properties that are within ¼-mile of a park or protected land. Rudy asked if certain trails could be restricted for certain types of uses (e.g. hiking, biking, horseback riding, and motorized vehicles). Kate said VHCB (VT Housing Conservation Board) does not allow ATVs, but otherwise the town would specify their preferences in a management plan, which would be subject to the approval of the easement holder(s). Kate said the state is working on a policy that would provide permits for people with disabilities to use motorized wheelchairs on trails and any easements would allow for that. Cathy Boedtger asked if the acquired land would be subject to the existing Act 250 permit. Glenn and Bruce thought that it would. Peg Merrens said the Upper Valley Land Trust (UFLT) would be happy to consider holding the easement and offered to answer any questions about conservation easements. Kate offered to provide templates for the VHCB easement and the Forest Legacy easement if anyone is interested. Tom Kenyon said there are some sections of the town forest that have never been harvested and he'd like it to stay that way. Kate said the County Forester would help the town with a management plan. Glenn said the Selectboard will keep the public informed as this process moves forward and encouraged people to contact him with any questions or concerns.

- 4) Reconsider 2014/15 sewer rate – Glenn said the Sewer Advisory Committee felt that the rates should be reduced by \$30 rather than \$60. **Tom moved to set the sewer rate for 2014-15 at \$865. Glenn seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**
- 5) Sign orders – Glenn said there are no orders to sign but there are three warrants for the impoundment and humane destruction of unlicensed dogs. **Glenn moved to sign the three dog warrants. Tom seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.** Tom said he would like to consider increasing the delinquent dog fee next year. Countryside Lock & Alarm: Glenn said Countryside Lock & Alarm would like an updated monitoring agreement; the cost stays the same. **Glenn moved to sign the updated monitoring agreement from Countryside Lock & Alarm. Bruce seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**
- 6) Adjourn – **Tom moved to adjourn at 7:35 PM. Glenn seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison