



TOWN OF ACTON
OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
November 3rd, 2023

7:30 am VIRTUAL and In Person

Acton Town Hall Room 9, 472 Main Street, Acton, MA 01720

Committee Members Present: Karen O'Neill (Chairing Meeting Co-Chair), Terry Maitland (Co-chair), Matt Mostoller (AWD), David Marshall, Michaela Moran (Planning Board Liaison), Brandon Comstock (Full Member), Jane Moosbruker (Full member), David Martin (Select Board Liaison)

Committee Members Absent:

Non-Committee Members present: Ann Budner of 9 Horseshoe Drive, Mike Gendron (Conservation Manager), Ian Bergemann (Land Stewardship Coordinator), Andy Magee, Meredith Houghton (SVT), Joe Cooney (ACT), Susan Mitchell-Hardt (ACT), Alexander Wahlstrom (AWD), Matt Sanda (UpStream Carbon), Scott _____ (Upstream Carbon)

- I. Meeting is opened by Karen O'Neill (Chairperson) at 7:31 am.
- II. Minutes reviewed. Matt motioned. Michaela seconded. – Voted and accepted at 7:35 am.
- III. CR Updates:
 - a. Susan said the Substitute Reviewer from the State said by the middle of this week, they would review the Anderson Land CR and send comments soon. Susan mentioned that Pete Westover has created a draft 6.1 Morrison Farm CR. Susan will send to AgCom and then invite them to walk the property on November 14th to discuss where the stakes should go to mark the exclusion of the structures.
 - b. Mike said the Conant/549 Main St CR is with the State and MOU is getting finalized with SVT. Town has begun our town CR monitoring program (after receiving funds from CPC last year), started with HAARTZ land – bounds installed and hired someone to do the BDR. Terry asked how much we got initially – \$40,000.
 - c. Susan said ACT completed 4 CR monitoring this fall – Wright Hill, 176 Central St, Grassy Pond, Gaebel/Piper Ln.
 - d. Wetherbee/Moritz -Karen mentioned Susan, David Martin, and herself met with Ray Lyons on October 17th. David Martin said that the meeting went well, exchanged information about potentially removing radio towers prior to Town acquisition, also discussed general logistics. Karen mentioned that the Town Manager hired an appraiser. Appraisal was received in OSC 11/3/2023 and could be distributed to committee members shortly and needs to remain within the committee. Discussion about the report would need to take place in an Executive Session.
- IV. Oct 24th – Karen met with Community Preservation Committee: Mentioned ongoing projects like Wetherbee/Moritz, Triangle Farm, and Donald properties. OSC asked for set aside funds and CPC encouraged OSC to ask for the same amount as last year: \$750,000. Karen finished application (with help from Andy). Karen asked OSC if we are “okay” with the \$750,000? Brandon mentioned that CPCC said “not to be shy,” in relation to more money. Ann Budner asked in the Zoom Chat: “Is it possible to ask for more?” and Karen answered that OSC could. Jane asked if we can discuss the appraisal within OSC, David Marshall explained we would need to schedule an Executive Session. Andy explained that \$750,000 is a record number, historically CPC gave \$500,000, but last year they did give \$775,000. Andy mentioned that typically OSC requested 35% of annual distribution. Brandon asked if this would be the 1st of 2 asks for funding? Karen said that is correct. David Martin explained that we would ask the CPC to approve borrowing to purchase land, which means the CPC would pay back that loan over a couple decades.

V. Susan commented that Brian Butler of Oxbow Associates is doing a voluntary assessment (Species and Environmental) of the Moritz property. Karen said that report may help provide access to grants.

VI. Fundraising: Karen mentioned multiple ways to fundraise – grants, donors, Town

Andy explained the CPC annual report (“Go ahead report”) – describes how to do CPC application. Beginning sections explain history of funding for CPC and past funding amounts for each category (Open Space) and each year OSC has a section – good for historical context. Andy recommends reading it. Last year, Bill Alesbury produced a spreadsheet on how to fund Wetherbee/Moritz e and Conant properties. Andy shared his spreadsheet: shows Fiscal year “revenue” from local CPA tax, along with State matching, interest accrued – made “model” on what Fiscal year 2023, 2024 – 2029. Karen will be sharing CPC application with the committee. Andy explained OSC would take 35% of available funds. If we buy Wetherbee/Moritz in FY2024 – what would that look like? OSC has \$1.015 million in FY23. In FY24 we would have a \$1.765 million. Suggests we pay 1.250 million “down payment” in June 24 – leaving us with \$515,000 (set aside budget, after Wetherbee purchase). Next 3 years, pay \$750,000. We would need Wetherbee owners to accept delayed payments – a short term bonding. Bonding or series of payments vs a “lump sum payment”. Grant money would aid/reduce use of CPA funds. Karen asked if the spreadsheet could be shared with the OSC. David Martin – discussed payment overtime with Ray Lyons – he (Ray) did not rule it out but did not prefer it. David said if we convince them to do it. What is the legality of a private party holding a public entity’s mortgage/publicly accessible land? David said we could borrow over short term but Town would hold, not have family hold property. Terry said this may leave OSC pretty tapped out with funds.

VII. Grants update - Brandon: CPC said to call it “Moritz” instead of “Wetherbee”. Brandon mentioned that we could get money for networking/outreach from Land Conservation Networking Mini Grant & Neighborhood Outreach Project (both are rolling applications). (*NOTE: to reduce confusion, we will refer to this property in our notes as Wetherbee/Moritz.*)

a. **Mass DCS – 3 grants:**

- i. Conservation Partnership – 50% up to \$175,000(reimbursement based and trust required/ due in Spring/ Trust needs to apply),
- ii. Land and Water Conservation Fund – 50% up to 1 mil (reimbursement/Yellowbook appraisal) – due 1/2/2024
- iii. Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity – 52-72% up to 500,000 – due Expression of Interest in March/ App in July (reimbursement based/ “a good fit”)
- iv. MA DCS Total Potential: \$1,675,175

b. **MVP grants** – Contact suggested to reach out with Andrea Becerra (Sustainability) and would need to turn in **“Expression of Interest” form due 12/15**. Karen asked if this grant is filled out by the Town or individuals? Meredith from SVT mentioned the application would need to come from the Town of Acton (municipality) and they mentioned coordinating with Andrea so you are not competing against each other. Sustainability may be pursuing other MVP grants. – Mike offered to follow up with Andrea. Mike mentioned they received MVP 2.0 to fund writing a new MVP Plan, which would make the Town eligible for more MVP grants. Brandon reiterated that the EOI is due 12/15. Terry asked what is the purpose of the grant? Matt answered it is project specific. Meredith mentioned she has seen Towns in the past have received multiple MVP grants in 1 year. Andy mentioned that MVP grant was used for River St project, dam removal specifically, and the need to speak to Andrea about it. He also mentioned that Selectboard may want this MVP money used in a different way.

c. **Mass wildlife Land Acquisition grant** – Bettina Abe reached out and received response about this being a potential source but not ranked high on their projects list, due to the fact they prioritize connections to hunting and fishing. The contact for the grant said that this could be brought to their attention, and

they would potentially consider in January. Andy mentioned an Endangered Sparrow may be on the property or near the property. Brandon mentioned that Moritz abuts a pasture land highlighted by Mass Biomapper.

- d. **Brandon: National Grants need to have more research done.** Susan and Brandon: mentioned there might be some volunteers willing to do Ghost Writing. Karen mentioned we need to build a “pyramid of funds” that includes CPC, fundraising (donors), and grants. Karen said we have a year to get this done. Karen asked if Brandon could be point person on working on grant options with the Town (Mike, Ian, Andrea). Karen mentioned Meredith and Susan talked about fundraising. Meredith. Karen mentioned Susan (and ACT folks) and Andy have the experience of how to manage individual fundraising. Susan mentioned letter writing, email, poster campaigns. For Piper Ln property they mailed 600 flyers with pictures of the property. Susan mentioned Wetherbee/Moritz walk with landowner and Oxen. Birdwalks on property next door (Wetherbee/Moritz).
- e. **Mike mentioned for the DCS grants the Town needs a new OSRP (Open Space & Recreation Plan) for those grants.** Mike is drafting a letter to the State about our current OSRP and scheduled OSRP, and seeing if that means we can still apply for funding. Andy mentioned that they have run into this problem before but said the State has been forgiving about it. Matt mentioned you can't always combine DSC grants. Andy mentioned for the River St project, they applied to multiple grants knowing they couldn't combine. Ian mentioned we received Signed letter of support from AgCom. David Martin mentioned if we could have a decision date added to Brandon's spreadsheet and that we would need to know by end of March “what money” we will be getting/what we will be asking from CPC and Town Meeting. Brandon asked if he wanted Award Dates? David Martin responded that either award dates or decision dates.

VIII. **Brandon mentioned that Towers were of concern** by CPC members. Terry mentioned that there was tripping & throat hazard from metal wires. Andy mentioned there is a lot of copper wire – a contractor may be interested. David Martin said they mentioned that to Ray Lyons that it would be easier for the Town to acquire if that attractive nuisance wasn't there. Joe mentioned if the original government entity that built the towers would be interested in remediating. Jane read the appraisal and pictures show towers are down on Weatherbee/Moritz land. Karen replied that some towers are still up. Karen said next steps will be an updated spreadsheet from Brandon, Susan and ACT may be putting together a fundraising group. If you are interested in joining that fundraising group, please contact Karen or Susan. Meredith mentioned the Land & Water Fund has two workshops coming up and that this specific grant is a Federal source of funds which leads to additional hoops to jump through with grants and a Yellowbook appraisal (which is costlier to do and requires a specific license) – she also mentioned award dates are difficult to get information about. Karen asked if Meredith could forward workshop dates to her/OSC. Brandon plans on attending the workshops.

IX. **Upstream Carbon** – Matt & Scott: Boston-based software startup and carbon developer. They are interested in using their software with conservation planning, specifically raising funds via carbon markets for conservation campaigns. Matt explained that carbon markets for Forest carbon projects was around \$1.1 billion in terms of corporate investment in carbon credits generated from those projects. Upstream Carbon's focus is forest conservation, meaning if you can identify potential loss of forest and the associated carbon storage vs the potential of protecting that forest and the continuing carbon storage properties. This avoidance of carbon removal provides carbon credits. Most projects are improving forest management. Upstream Carbon uses machine learning to model all open space in the State of Massachusetts to calculate the risk and probability of that space being developed. A webpage mapper provides a priority list of properties that are most at risk. They calculate a carbon analysis based on science data from Pokers's Lab.

They estimate with 33 acres there's about 3700 metric tons of Co2. The value of that on the carbon market is around \$75,000 which means they could secure up to 75,000 in terms of funding that would go towards conserving this land and preventing its loss. Karen said she will send out Upstream Carbon's contact info and webpage for anyone to ask questions. She mentioned she had prior experience doing this with Audubon in Belize which has used a similar method to conserve land.

- X. Comments/Concerns/Announcements:
- XI. The next meeting is December 1st, 2023 at 7:30 am and will also be hybrid.

Meeting moved to close. Michela motioned to adjourn, Matt seconded. Unanimously adjourned
Meeting adjourned at 8:45 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ian Bergemann, Land Stewardship Coordinator, Town of Acton