

Minutes

Water Street Land Use Committee

5:00 p.m. August 23, 2022

257 Water Street, Jamaica, Vermont

Attending: Erica Bowman, Jacki Brown, Anne Connor (recording), Andy Coyne (adjacent landowner), Ed Gotgart (neighbor), Norma O'Brien, Kate Ullman (selectboard liaison)

Convened: The meeting commenced at 5:04 p.m. The committee met outdoors for the entire meeting to view the property for reference and due to COVID concerns. Jacki Brown opened the meeting with a summary of past actions and the committee's purpose. She noted that the goal was to have a natural space inhabited by beneficial plants.

1. Review sketch of the property for accuracy

- The committee walked the length of the property along the sidewalk. Norma O'Brien noted one correction to the hand-drawn map: The mowed strip shown on the map should extend just to the Coyne's shed, before the O'Brien property line.

2. Land management plan: Discuss which invasive species to remove

- *The committee voted to remove only the black locust, Japanese knotweed, and "errant woody plants" in the herbaceous zone, approximately the first 40 feet from the sidewalk (to the current undulating line of trees, brambles, and sumac).* These would be the plants targeted in Phase 1 of the project (2022-2023). This 40-foot section would be the meadow zone. The goal is to remove the targeted invasives in late fall 2022.
- *The committee agreed by consensus that the sumac grove was a beneficial native habitat plant (not an invasive species) and should not be removed in the initial phase.* However, the committee noted that the sumac could be trimmed in future phases to prevent unchecked spread.
- The committee discussed the possibility of a future phase in which invasives behind the tree line might also be removed to prevent spread into the meadow zone, but the committee deferred the decision to a future year. Discussion considered neighbors' concerns about disturbing the existing root system as well as budget issues.
- Erica Bowman suggested adding bittersweet to the target list, as it is an aggressive invasive species. *The committee agreed by consensus to delay targeting bittersweet to a later phase, restricting Phase 1 to the species named above.*
- *The committee agreed by consensus to target some of the black locust growing outside the guardrail (streamside) as part of the project's first phase to help prevent its spread to other locations.*

3. Land management plan: Discuss individuals' opinions on managing the front meadow

- Speaking as an adjacent property owner, Andy Coyne expressed a strong preference to keep anything with a deep root system to help prevent erosion during future floods.

- Norma O’Brien, another adjacent property owner, agreed that she wanted to retain as many trees and roots as possible.
- Jacki Brown expressed an interest in a pollinator meadow with greater biodiversity and more beneficial plant species.
- Anne Connor agreed that increased biodiversity would be desirable, especially wildflowers.
- The committee discussed whether to remove a large maple and a small cherry tree, but no determination was made.
- The committee discussed whether to plant new maple trees in the meadow zone, but the committee did not commit to this for Phase 1 due to concerns about ease of mowing and roots disturbing the sidewalk.
- The committee noted that goldenrod plants densely inhabit the meadow zone. Erica Bowman noted that it is a misconception that goldenrod causes allergies, as it has no free-floating pollen. Ragweed is the real culprit and blooms about the same time as goldenrod.

4. Land management plan: Attempt consensus among committee members for a recommended Land Management Plan

- The committee discussed two options presented by Erica Bowman, Landscape Architect.
 - **Option A: Clear-cut method.** Completely strip and till the entire meadow zone and leave the earth bare for one to two years before planting it with new wildflower seeds. This method would allow greater control over the contents of the meadow but could leave it as bare earth for nearly three years (including the time it takes for the new seeds to germinate). Drawbacks include a prolonged period of reduced aesthetic value and the increased possibility of soil erosion from the bare field. Andy Coyne also noted public concern about brush-hogging the entire field.
 - **Option B: Ribbon method.** Strip and till only specific “ribbons” of land, then seed them or add plugs of beneficial grasses and flowers. This method would increase the biodiversity of the meadow zone and retain much of the existing goldenrod. It would also avoid the “bare field” experience. Ribbons could also be introduced where knotweed and black locust are removed. Erica proposed strategically adding flowers that bloom at different points throughout the growing season. She suggested a 3-grass mix that could include “Lovegrass,” with a pink foamy appearance. Ribbons would be added in phases over several years, starting with as many as the budget would allow in Phase 1.
- *The committee voted to select Option B, the ribbon method.*
- The committee discussed optimal timing for the ribbon method. Fall would be the best time to cut and till “ribbons” to avoid disturbing young animals in the spring. Most wildflower seeds need to overwinter, so they should be planted in the fall following the cutting and tilling. Any plugs could be planted in spring—the earlier in the spring, the less need for irrigation.
- Ed Gotgart, who resides at 213 Water Street with his son John Gotgart, offered to let the Town use the artesian well in his backyard to irrigate the new plantings. A hose would

need to be run from the Gotgart property to the town parcel for this purpose. The committee enthusiastically thanked Ed for his offer.

5. Discuss land ownership options presented by Susan Ahl

- The committee discussed the options offered by Susan Ahl via email. However, based on the terms of the Ottaqueechee group's gift of land to the Town, the parcel cannot change ownership to adjacent landowners or other private individuals. Also, as discussed previously by email, the committee has not identified a land trust suitable to take on this parcel.
- *The committee agreed by consensus that the Town of Jamaica should retain the land.*

6. Discuss timing for presentation to the Selectboard

- *The committee agreed by consensus to have its presentation to the Selectboard ready for the September 26, 2022, meeting.*
- Erica Bowman agreed to develop an updated plan with a detailed budget.

7. Discuss grant applications

- Anne Connor noted that State grants were available from \$500 to \$1,500 for this type of project, including grants without a matching funds requirement. Anne offered to help the Town apply for such grants once the plan and budget were finalized.

8. Discuss project funding

- The committee discussed the budget allocation needed to remove invasives and make the ribbon method a reality. Andy Coyne suggested that the Town's road crew could cut the invasive plants to help save money on that portion of the project if the Selectboard agrees. Jacki Brown added that the road crew's help would be welcome on tasks for which they have the proper equipment and skillset.
- Erica Bowman said that to develop an accurate budget, she would need to calculate the square footage of "ribbons" in the cost of seeds, plugs, and labor.
- Anne Connor noted that the cost of an irrigation hose to run from the Gotgart property should be included in the budget.
- The amount of the budget request to the Town of Jamaica for Phase 1 would depend on: (a) total estimated project cost for Phase 1 (to be determined by Erica Bowman with input from the committee); (b) availability of in-kind labor from the Town road crew; (c) estimated grant dollars available to offset Town spending.

9. Discuss next steps

- The committee will provide input via email regarding the Phase 1 budget and plan before submitting them to the Selectboard at the September 26 meeting.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at about 6:15.