

Water Street Land Use Committee Site Visit

June 14, 2022

Meeting Minutes

Present

Committee Members—Jacki Brown, Erica Bowman, Anne Connor (ANC), Norma O’Brien
Select Board Liaison—Kate Ullman
Others—Gracie and Andy Coyne (AC), Susan Ahl, Lexa Clark

Minutes recorded by Susan Ahl so that committee members could fully participate

The purpose of this site visit is to discuss the opportunities, obstacles and options, in order to make a recommendation to the town of Jamaica in deciding what, if anything, to do with the property on Water Street. Property is adjacent to land owned by Tom Tolbert (Jacki Brown), Gracie and Andy Coyne and Norma and Bob O’Brien, and was conveyed to the town through the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, using Vermont State funding, after the devastation of Hurricane Irene.

Discussion:

NO: After Irene, government/FEMA said area was to be cleaned up and left “natural”
Tax maps are incorrect representations of actual boundaries

LC: Process of town buying property was contentious. Intention in transaction to leave the land “natural”. Watching nature re-take the area has been healing. Proposal being considered is “opening a wound again by disturbing land which has family history”

Question regarding an intention to “clear cut”?

EB: emotion attached to the landscape

A managed natural landscape with an “invisible” plan with two levels:

1. Remove invasives
2. 1x mowing in very late fall to manage woody species

JB: Also to be considered is plan for intentional meadow/pollinator field

SA: Why this project vs. other town priorities? What are the decision criteria for determining which projects get attention?

What is the larger plan for invasive management?

Does this land need to be maintained? Why or why not?

EB: Town plan ratified and includes a plan for invasive management, no specific action on that right now

JB: many of the areas in town with invasives are state property or private property

JB: some individuals wanted to see the land improved, honor what happened during Irene, beautify

ANC: consider shrubs and trees which will hold the soil—functional and beautiful

NO: fear of flooding if it is disturbed or cleared at all

What is happening with the trees which were planted recently, some of which did not survive?
Plan for even minimal management requires expense and cost to the town. Important for town to consider the impact on those with fixed income as expenses and taxes continue to rise, but income remains stagnant. Cost/benefit of spending the money? Town needs to be discerning.

AC: Town did not budget for current inflation and increased costs of fuel. Costs for road maintenance this winter will potentially be outside of the budget

JB: I would like to see a wildflower meadow

NO: No cutting back. Fine to remove some invasives. Take a minute

AC: Why sudden urgency around this property? Doing fine untouched.

JB: Perhaps a result of petition which misrepresented intentions

KU: Timing of mowing matters re: managing invasives

Urgency vs. Focus

Committee formed to create recommendations for management:

General discussion regarding different stories/plans/intentions for the land: significant concern over creating invitation (implied or intended) for public access and use. Adjacent landowner' privacy concerns, other concerns with impact on parking, roadway

Seemed to be consensus that public access is not a recommendation by the committee

SA: management plans must include transparency regarding input necessary, timing, cost up front and over time, project management framework

Recommendation/town formalize plan future forward, to protect adjacent landowners and to not create future access to public

The group walked the property and identified many species of plants—native and beneficial stands of sumac, grasses, aster, goldenrod, white poplar, other pollinator and habitat-friendly species. “Good natives” are already being quite successful in the area (EB)

Old apple trees left “as is” or pruned/managed? Raspberries (blackberries) Beneficial to wildlife

“Snags”—dead trees, purposefully left, beneficial to wildlife

Identified Invasives and recommended actions:

Black Locust; extremely invasive, thorny—several larger trees and a few saplings

Japanese Knotweed: extremely invasive, very difficult to eradicate. Removal options:

consistent/persistent cutting, overlay with chicken wire, burn at the site, dig out entire system. Larger areas would require excavator, some areas could be removed by hand.

Extensive stand of knotweed in one area visible from sidewalk, many other smaller spots, particularly behind the treeline

One proposed contractor would grind down woody plants, dig them out with machinery and take material with him (\$1500)

Multiflora Rose: invasive, kills plants it climbs, extensive areas observed, especially to left of sumac stand as seen from sidewalk

Oriental Bittersweet: very difficult to eradicate. Kills plants/trees it climbs. Some small areas observed, especially behind the treeline near O'Brien's property line

Burning Bush: invasive, requires digging out or cutting Small areas observed spreading from adjacent landowners

Japanese Barberry: invasive, small area observed

Black Swallow Wort: noxious weed, highly toxic: small area observed

Goutweed, Tradescantia, Vinca: invasive, remnants of previous garden beds

General Questions and Additional Discussion

Establishing new meadow may have more impact and requires up to three years of successive management to incorporate increased diversity of beneficial plants

Why not just throw wildflower seeds at it? EB: Grasses and established plants will outcompete most seeds introduced to unprepared site

Renovating a meadow requires soil prep, up to three years, can be prescriptive about plants and biodiversity

Intentional meadow=pollinators, habitat and beautification

Any meadow plan involves cutting?

Yes, at minimum, 1x/year in very late fall to discourage woody plants

Lay outline

Remove woody plants

Create a map for yearly mowing

Knotweed and removal of other invasive species by excavation creates a "hole"—additive plan includes planting that area with native or non-native but beneficial plants such as shrub willow

What is the tolerance regarding native vs non-native plants being added?

Should plants be added at all?

Where is the boundary between "managed" and not?

How far back would invasive removal go?

Where is the boundary for mowing?

What to do about pedestrian strip currently mowed by Peter? Tractor on highest setting already, grass is brown

Selectively remove sumac to manage raspberries and mow every year?

What are the criteria for adding new plants, if that option is chosen?

Invasives at back of property—if removed, by hand?

Participants agreed on the need to remove invasive plants, though did not agree that it should be a financial priority for the town.

Possibility of partnerships/grants/other funding sources

Committee Next Steps:

- Consider perspectives and information shared today
- Identify stakeholders
- Continue drafting management plan/options:
 - a. Just remove invasives
 - b. Remove invasives and add beneficial plants/shrubs
 - c. Remove invasives, add beneficias and prepare area for mowing by removing impediments such as large rocks and stumps
 - d. Remove invasives, add beneficials, prep for yearly mowing, prep for intentional meadow
- Identify options for who could do the work
- Meet again before making recommendations to Select Board

Addendum:

As the on-site meeting drew long, available committee members met indoors to wrap things up.

Present: Jacki Brown, Kate Ullman, Erica Bowman, Norma O'Brien.

Minutes prepared by Jacki Brown.

- JB: Things to consider in planning which weren't recorded include the spread of invasives across the street, on the bank of the Ball Mountain Brook; and whether or not to replace the four sugar maple saplings which Karen Ameden planted.
- JB: Reiterated her primary desire to accomplish a planned pollinator meadow on the southern front of the property (along the sidewalk).
- Timeline for next steps was discussed: Erica needs time to put together a new proposed management plan (by August). In the interim, she will share a planning document which we all may be able to contribute to.
- It was agreed that while any initial work may not commence, if approved by the Select Board, by late Fall; it is in our best interest to pursue funding/grant opportunities and potential contractors in the interim.
- No date and time was established for a next meeting.

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