

Minutes of Town of Conway Open Space Committee Meeting, March 2, 2023

In Attendance: Janet Chayes, Andy Levchuk, Mac McCoy, Michele Turre, Aimee Anderson

(Note: Andy submitted his resignation 4/14/23.)

1 November 16, 2022 minutes - Approved

2 Potential PickleBall at South River Meadow

Jan Warner re-presented a proposal and reasons for building and locating 4 courts in the S. River Meadow just south of the current parking area, noting the increasing popularity of the game and interest to provide more courts for townspeople. There are 55 known players that have signed up and played either next to the existing tennis court or in the top floor of Town Hall. Jan is proposing 4 courts to be built and if approved by the Community Preservation Committee, there will be a warrant at the upcoming town meeting requesting funding from the Community Preservation Fund.

The Community Preservation Committee and Select Board had apparently requested the Open Space Committee to provide a recommendation on the proposal.

One of the main concerns raised by committee members was the impact of increased runoff into the S. River. Various construction and permeable materials were discussed. Michele requested consideration of a permeable surface for the courts to offset runoff. Jan noted the cost is twice as much, and it makes for an unplayable surface. Generally, the game is played on a fine asphalt and requires a hard surface.

It was noted by other committee members that the S. River took runoff from so many places as it ran through town, and that impact of this project seemed like a negligible addition, and that the grass area between courts and the river should generally be adequate for absorption.

A second main concern raised by the committee was the visual impact to the open space of the existing natural area. It was noted that much debate had been done in the past when it was known as the Rose Property to designate the primary use of the meadow as agricultural, as a nature walk area, and important to flood mitigation. Pros and cons of using part of the land for courts and bringing increased traffic and interest to the area by pickleball players were debated. It was noted that times and town citizens' interests change but should the originally intended use of the meadow accommodate that?

Dimension of a single court is 20' x 60'. Four courts would be built together in a large rectangle space (about 50' x 130'?) to make construction efficient, but it would be a larger single impermeable surface. The S. River meadow area is roughly 11 acres. The area of the courts would take up a small but visible part of the meadow area.

Committee members asked what other town properties had been considered for location. Jan explained that expanding the current tennis court area by basketball courts had been considered but drainage issues and more limited space make it inappropriate.

The impact of increased noise on neighbors was questioned. They had been surveyed and no one protested but they weren't expressly enthusiastic or supportive of the proposed development.

Committee members asked why not locate at the grammar school. Jan's answer was mostly focused on why the S. River Meadow is the best location, mainly for accessibility to the town center, but there appeared to be good reasons to further consider the school, and the Committee asked Jan to further investigate the possibility of locating the courts at the school.

The Committee appeared evenly split over whether to make a positive or negative recommendation as there were so many questions, and no formal vote was taken. It was decided to compile and provide a list of pros and cons to other committees, citizens and the Select Board to consider.

Pros for Locating Pickleball Courts at the S. River Meadow

(presuming there is adequate interest for creating more pickleball courts for town citizens)

- Easily accessible to town center.
- Would be visible to passersby to make their existence more widely known.
- Would bring more attention to the open areas of the meadow for walking and learning about the ecology of the area.

Cons for Locating Pickleball Courts at the S. River Meadow

- Reduction of open natural space in the S. River Meadow.
- Increased traffic to the natural area.
- Possible negative impact on flood mitigation which the area was developed to do.
- Increased noise and traffic could impact the nearby residents (see note of survey above).

3 Birds of Prey Presentation on Mar. 19 in Town Hall by Tom Ricari

Janet proposed we provide \$350 as honorarium in recognition of the presentation.

The honorarium was approved by the committee.

4 Farmland of Local Importance Designation

Tabled.

5. Ongoing Projects Were Briefly Noted

- Bigelow Meadow
 - Andy will contact Owen Wormser to ask for an MOU about his offer of voluntary assistance.
- May Nature Hike Proposed:
 - Mac agreed to organize and host a hike somewhere in the town wild areas. It has to be posted to the Visitor by the 20th of the previous month.
- Interpretative & Plant Signs at South River Meadow
- Oversight of the South River Meadow
 - Replace Plank at trail at northeast end of meadow.
- Invasive Plant Control at other Town Properties
- Trout Unlimited to do a brook trout study off one of the town brooks.

Motion to close the meeting approved. 5. Town Website

After the official meeting, Adam Reed demonstrated how the Committee would update our section on the town website.