***Draft-not yet approved* SPECIAL TOWN BOARD MEETING**

**Public Information Session on Acquisition of Land for Recreation**

Town of Ulysses

November 9, 2023

A video recording of this meeting is available on Youtube.

The meeting was held at the Trumansburg Fire Hall at 74 W. Main St., Trumansburg

via videoconference on the Zoom platform.

Notice of Town Board meetings are posted on the Town’s website and Clerk’s board.

CALL TO ORDER:

Ms. Olson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

ATTENDANCE:

TOWN OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Supervisor- Katelin Olson

Board members- Michael Boggs, Liz Weatherby, Rich Goldman, Mary Bouchard

Town Clerk- Carissa Parlato

OTHERS PRESENT:

In person:

Brad Buell, Kaile Tsapis, Leo Soderholm, Roxanne Marino, Karen Lucas, David Lucas, Marc & Phyllis Kaplan, Nancy Cusumano, Dan Clement, Geri Keil, Sharon McPherson, Gregg Weatherby, David Johnson, Jim Boyer, Chrissy & Hunter Sherwood, JW Barrett, Michael Cohen, Sigrid Pauen, Todd Edmonds, Joel Podkaminer, Celia Clement, Lucy Keeler, R. Cooper, Susan Ritter, Scott & Tina Sherwood, Deb Austic, Lanny Joyce, Barbara Horton, Marion Boratynski, Greg Scherer, Jordan Bonafede, Katie Cacciotti, Mark Washburn, Heather Washburn, Keith Hannon, Sally Yates, Sheryl Rakowski, Rachel Kennedy, Barbara Hotchkiss, Vivien Rose, Cheryl Thompson, John Paul Jones

Via Zoom:

Beth, Beth Muraca, Katrina, Terry, Lizabeth Morse, Chris Collins, Kim G, Heather Hughes, Melissa, Deloris, Rebecca Schneider, Joel Fey, Jimmy, Nancy, 19513230442, Dori, Maureen Shallish, Sue Newman, Mark’s iPhone, Carol & Bill, Michelle Artibee, Denise Kooperman, Debbie, Fred

MEETING:

Ms. Olson thanked everyone for coming and explained how questions would be handled as well as the difference between a public hearing (where the Town Board listens) and a public information session (Town Board answers questions).

She gave the background of the Town Board’s decision to purchase land for recreation- and what the results of the 12/6 Special Election will mean.

She explained that the purchase of the property at 2141 Kraft Rd., if approved, will be made using $210,000 from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and $8500 from a Town recreation reserve.

Ms. Olson said that this type of purchase may feel like a new idea but in the past people have looked for land such as the Duddleston farm on Falls Rd., and South St./Crescent Way - but nothing has materialized until now. The Town also tried to purchase Jim Brown’s property on Rte. 96/Perry City Rd. but lost to a cash offer by an out-of-town private developer.

She noted that the town cannot counter an offer- it must pay a fair price- determined by an appraisal from an independent 3rd party with no financial stake in the outcome. The Town can’t use the county’s assessed cost as this could be viewed as a conflict of interest. The Kraft property has an appraised value of $7k/acre.

The sale of Camp Barton had to go through the same appraisal process. Even though it was assessed at $3.6 million, NYS had to pay the appraised value of $5.5 million.

The Town Board takes its finances and taxes very seriously, demonstrated by the fact that it has never overrode the NYS tax cap. Its tax rate is the lowest in Tompkins County, although still high and a burden for some.

One-time funds from ARPA present a one-time opportunity and the purchase of the space is an investment in the future. Ms. Olson estimated a cost of $3 million to develop the property, but the Town will work with partners so that taxpayers are not burdened. The Town of Newfield has done something similar.

Ms. Weatherby said that she was not on the board when the topic of recreational land was raised in the past but has seen first-hand how sports and rec activities bring a community together- the school sports teams are packing the stands.

Someone in the audience asked what the purchase has to do with COVID. Ms. Weatherby responded by saying that COVID’s effects on kids are mitigated by getting them outside.

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

Ms. Olson and Ms. Weatherby addressed topics and questions submitted in advance of the meeting as well as questions from those in attendance:

1. Election information:
	1. Wed. 12/6/23, 11am-8pm at Racker Center or Village Hall. If already registered with county- just show up to vote. If not, must register with town on 11/18 or 11/21. Must be 18 years of age, a resident for the last 30 days (not just a property owner). Absentee ballots available too.
2. How will property be purchased and is recreational property an allowed use of ARPA funds?
	1. The purchase contract is subject to permissive referendum. If voters approve the purchase, the contract will continue, if not it becomes null and void. Buying land/investment of outdoor space is an eligible use for ARPA funds per the final rules of COVID state & local recovery funds (section 2.22) as of Nov. 2023. Ms. Weatherby gave examples of other towns who have used funds for recreation, e.g. Livingston County, which released funds to its municipalities specifically for creating or upgrading open spaces. Further examples were given from Towns of Sparta, York, and Enfield. Funds must be allocated by end of 2024 and used by end of 2026. Funds cannot be used for reserves or pensions. The Town opened first after COVID due to the parks and open spaces- which are remediating factors for pandemics.
3. Zoning- what is/isn’t allowed?
	1. The proposed property is in the Ag Zone. Zoning is the purview of the town and a reflection of the will of the people. Town zoning currently allows regional parks and preserves in the Ag Zone. The public vote will show whether recreation is an appropriate use of the property.
	2. Pages 38-41 of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan specifies uses of this parcel to include farming, parks, natural areas and outdoor recreation.
4. Appraisal vs. Assessment:- will town sell the land at a loss if project doesn’t go through?
	1. No. The board thinks that land will continue to increase in value and that this project will make the community a better place. The Washburns could sell it to someone who will put in dense housing or spread liquid fertilizer. If anyone is willing to sell at a similar price point, they should approach the town board.
5. Water & traffic impacts:
	1. The Town Planning Board and member Rebecca Schneider (national expert) will not approve anything that adversely affects ditches. Site plan review is a tool to help mitigate environmental issues. The Town cannot put any limitations on the parcel if it is in NYS Ag District but if town owns it can have a better plan for stormwater. Re: shape of property- a flaglot offer more protection to those using it than an open parcel surrounded by roads. Parking can be done on property rather than on road. Any development will need to go through a NYS environmental review to be sure that it has the least impact- wells, traffic, vegetation, can be very sustainable if the community desires. The board would prefer to have community input on the design rather than design it and then tell the community what it will be. (Some audience members disagreed).
6. Why do we need this property when there is the school, Black Diamond Trail, Jacksonville Park, Fairgrounds, Camp Barton, Taughannock Park…?
	1. Recreation fields do not fit on these spaces. Camp Barton is now a state park that will require a fee to access so will not be suitable for public recreation. Non-school sports cannot access school fields until 5pm. Fields are usually full and need time to rest.
	2. Someone asked why private clubs should use public fields. The response was because they are coaching/training kids in the community.
7. Getting to the site/public transportation:
	1. Public transportation is a future possibility as TCAT (local bus) has worked with the current rec program to help transport kids. 65% of people in the town live outside of the village. The town is looking at how to connect the Black Diamond Trail (which is half a mile away from parcel) to the village. The county can help assist with this.
8. Plans for partnering to create a design the property:
	1. The Town would like to partner with a private non-profit for fundraising in the way that the local development corporation (LDC) (Ulysses/Village/Covert) is with Camp Barton. The town and the public would still get to decide what happens on the parcel.
9. Is the town in negotiations for Falls Rd parcel?
	1. A conversation will take place but the town is under contract for Kraft Rd. and must stay that course. No other offer has been made or is being considered for the Falls Rd. The board is always happy to have conversations about potential properties.
10. What will happen if the property doesn’t pass SEQR?
	1. SEQR was needed for the purchase. Since a purchase action doesn’t have any impact, it has passed. Once there is a development plan, another SEQR must be completed. If it doesn’t pass then modifications would be made.
11. How was the location chosen?
	1. Town reached out to many property owners with 20-30 acres to see if they would sell. Wanted a parcel that would fit into the community and accommodate sufficient use- youth population has increased since 2010.
	2. Question from the audience about why the town is doing this for 500 kids-
		1. The space will be for all ages and not just kids. There is not a free playground for kids in town. The space could serve multi-generational needs with a community garden, walking trails- more than just kids sports.
12. Why not use the $ to fund a year round pool for the community?
	1. Pools are very expensive- $10 million. Also would make most sense for school to have a pool but $210,000 would not make much of a dent in this.
13. Grading will negatively impact water table- will town provide a water district?
	1. 3-6% is the grade on the property. The town has a water source committee working on a protection plan. The town is currently working with Grassroots on a water dist.
14. Traffic concerns- roads not well maintained and trouble getting county to maintain.
	1. Ms. Olson agrees and will speak to the county. This concern seems to arise from the belief that the space will have a lot of traffic. However, it will be primarily used by people in the town who are already driving in the town. It will not be a stadium. A new use on the road may increase the chances of a lower speed limit or maintenance.
15. What are the liability & maintenance costs?
	1. Have looked into this with Camp Barton- $15-30K/year due to the lake. Would likely be less than that since the property is set back from road and 3x smaller. For maintenance- no plan yet as it would be dependent on the property use (i.e. whether community garden or soccer field) so not sure but the highway dept. already currently mows many areas/cemeteries in town. Snowplowing would also be necessary.
16. Re: selling property if referendum doesn’t pass- would money need to be given back to gov?
	1. No- money would go back into general fund and would not be lost to taxpayers. Federal gov. is really monitoring communities that got over $10 million.
17. In addition to school kids, there are adults who need recreation too – is town taking the whole population into consideration?
	1. The park would be accessible to all ~5000 residents of the town- space for adults as well as kids. One-third of the town is in the Ithaca school district.
18. What is the plan for keeping people off of adjoining properties? How will property owners be protected from the park?
	1. The park should reflect the needs of the neighboring properties as well. Trespassing signage, fencing, berms, vegetation are all options for buffering neighbors. The intention would be not be to install lots of lighting.
19. Could other regional groups use the space too? How do you make sure that Ulysses folks can use it?
	1. Outside groups could potentially use the fields for a fee.
20. How do you decide fees for pick up groups or formal clubs?
	1. Unsure until we know how space will be used. Perhaps the fee would be just for reservations.
21. If this project doesn’t go through, is there another plan to deal with new influx of population due to new development in the village?
	1. ARPA funds must be allocated by end of 2024 so if this doesn’t go through, there probably won’t be enough time to go through another effort to purchase rec space due to the time it takes government procedures. A no vote will be interpreted as citizens not wanting funds spent on recreation. It would be unfortunate if kids were told they can’t play sports due to lack of space.
22. Why wasn’t land closer to Trumansburg chosen?
	1. Several properties closer were explored but all failed- none are available at cost that are feasible. Again, please let the town know if you know of suitable properties.

ADJOURN

Mr. Goldman made a move to adjourn at 8:13pm. This was seconded by Ms. Bouchard and passed unanimously.

*Respectfully submitted by Carissa Parlato, Town Clerk*

*12/21/2023*

**APPENDIX:**

*(Written questions attached)*