

City Council Workshop

Agenda Item #2

July 10, 2017

Open Space Plan

During the Fall of 2015, former City Manager Jim Gailey and City Councilor Tom Blake asked the Conservation Commission to review an inventory of City-owned properties to determine whether any of them were suitable candidates for conservation. The Commission agreed to conduct a preliminary screening of the inventory list and volunteered several Commission members to a joint working group, along with members of the Land Trust and other interested parties. The purpose of the working group was to conduct a more rigorous review of the parcel inventory and make recommendations related to the future disposition of the parcels, i.e. retain for conservation, sell at public auction, etc. However, after several meetings it became evident that a formal and up-to-date Open Space Plan would be needed in order to make a thoughtful recommendation on the disposition of each parcel in the inventory. Members of the group have noted that the 2001 Open Space Strategic Plan was never formally adopted, contains outdated information, and does not provide the guidance necessary for the task at hand.

The Conservation Commission is proposing that the City pursue the following tasks:

- Create and appoint an *ad hoc* Open Space Planning Committee tasked with developing an updated Open Space Strategic Plan
- Procure a professional consultant with open space planning expertise to guide the process and write the plan
- Formally adopt the new Open Space Plan and commit to implementing the plan.

City staff have identified a funding source to help procure a consultant to shepherd this process and write the plan, subject to the director of the *ad hoc* committee and rigorous public input. We agree to the Conservation Commissions proposal and are seeking guidance from the City Council as to how to proceed with this matter. Members of the Land Trust and other interested parties will likely be in attendance at your meeting to provide their recommendations.



City Manager



South Portland Conservation Commission

TO: City Councilors
FR: Conservation Commission
RE: Open Space Plan 2017
DT: July 7, 2017

The Conservation Commission has reviewed the 2001 South Portland Open Space Strategic Plan (OSP) and gathered input from the Open Space Inventory Committee composed of Conservation Commission members, South Portland Land Trust representatives and community participants. The creation of this inventory committee was the direct result of community displeasure after developers approached the city to develop public property (Sawyer Park on Westbrook Street and Hamlin School).

It became clear during the inventory process that the lack of an up-to-date Open Space Plan prevents effective evaluation, protection, and preservation of open space. Although the 2001 plan created an evaluation process and provided a prioritized list of properties, it concentrated on private properties and lacked recommendations for mechanisms for long-term preservation of both public and private properties. History shows that the 2001 Plan served as a blueprint for developers and thus resulted in the loss of several valuable properties. It is important to note that the 2001 Open Space Plan was never formally ratified by the City Council nor was it incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan. The city has evolved into a more progressive, environmentally conscious place to live and work. A more modern and thorough Open Space Plan will provide guidance to community members, employers and developers in maintaining an engaging, welcoming and beautiful city.

The Conservation Commission presents the following plan for revising and rewriting the 2001 Open Space Strategic Plan to the City Council and awaits the Council's decision and direction to move forward with this project.

- Allocate a sum to be determined to hire an outside consultant (FB Environmental Associates) to guide the process in achieving the following broad objectives:
 - Convene a representative community-based committee containing representatives from city boards and commissions, business owners, developers, community members, the South Portland Land Trust and other appropriate interested parties. This process will incorporate a diverse stakeholder group and an open public process with a long-term time

- horizon to develop a community vision for open space and to create a successful Open Space Plan to support that vision.
- Review the 2001 Open Space Plan to ascertain which elements can be preserved as the basis for a revised plan. Several additional topics have been generated over the past 16 years that need to be incorporated into a revised Open Space Plan. These topics include, for example, a greater emphasis on preserving habitats, creating more neighborhood trail access, improving conditions for pollinators, preserving wetlands, conserving rare species and eliminating invasive species, paying closer attention to geologic features, researching historical and cultural significance, and understanding recreational and educational significance.
 - Review and update the list of prioritized private properties.
 - Create a prioritized list of public properties that need to be preserved.
 - For future properties that may become available for preservation, create a strict and thorough property evaluation and rating process for the Planning Department, Planning Board, and City Council to use in determining viability for preservation. Most protected would be property that already has protection to remain in its current use. Least protected are properties that have no public value beyond sale or development according to its current city zone.
 - Research methods to acquire and preserve open space (e.g. city ordinance, conservation easement, and other means), the corresponding perpetual security of each, and recommend the best methods for the city to implement preservation of private and public open space.
 - Add the revised Open Space Plan to the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Establish an Open Space Plan implementation sub-committee to work with City officials to ensure the complete adoption of the new plan and to facilitate any new or revised ordinances required for implementation.

