



**TOWN OF OAK RIDGE CONSERVATION EASEMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 15, 2021 – 11:30AM
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Attendees: Committee members Stephanie Ferrell, Miles Foy (by Zoom), Aleksandra Gill, Debbie Shoenfeld, Rom Simpson, Mayor Ann Schneider, Council liaison Martha Pittman, Town Manager Bill Bruce, Planning Director Sean Taylor

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 11:30 am.

2. APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 20, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

The meeting minutes of October 2021 were approved.

3. DISCUSSION WITH PIEDMONT LAND CONSERVANCY- Kevin Redding

Ann Schneider introduced Kevin Redding, Executive Director of the Piedmont Land Conservancy. Kevin's presentation included the following:

- Overview of PLC's open space easement program- PLC conserves property two ways, by owning property outright and by holding conservation easements (preferred method for cost reasons). PLC also helps facilitate public open space preservation by purchasing property and conveying to local or state governments.
- Process for obtaining easements, using Heritage Farm Park property as model- The process to establish a conservation easement held by PLC includes:
 - i. Property owner approaches PLC;
 - ii. Staff review of property to confirm it meets PLC's preservation criteria;
 - iii. Review by PLC Land Committee;
 - iv. Review/approval by PLC Board of Directors;
 - v. Staff negotiates terms of easement;
 - vi. Easement recorded at Register of Deeds.

Total time from start to finish is typically 6 months- 1 year.

- Discussion of PLC criteria for priority open space areas- PLC prioritizes connectivity of open spaces, watershed protection, preservation of animal and plant communities, farmland, scenic vistas, etc., all of which align with Town of Oak Ridge preservation priorities.
- PLC input on committee outreach to property owners and open house- PLC committed to attend Open House to provide information and educate citizens about

their conservation easement program, including information about Federal tax and estate planning benefits. The Town's role would be sharing information about the CORE grant program and how the Town and PLC are working together to preserve land. Format may be more like an "informational meeting"- a short presentation on the hour followed by informal Q&A and one-on-one discussion. PLC can provide informational posters and bulletins.

- Discussion of future working relationship between PLC & Conservation Easement Committee and Planning Director- The committee discussed a process that could include a "letter of intent," indicating PLC, the Town, and the landowner's commitment to securing a conservation easement. Town participation could include paying for a survey (if necessary), legal fees, stewardship endowment fees (typically \$5k-15k), etc. Appraisals must be paid for by the property owner if taking tax deduction.

4. NEXT STEPS

The committee agreed to invite Cathleen Turner of Preservation North Carolina to the next meeting. The committee also agreed to discuss details of the open house. Mayor Schneider also suggested a Chair and Vice-Chair, as well as recording secretary, can be selected at the next meeting. Further discussion is also needed regarding the committee's request of Council to have PLC evaluate the front 30 acres of Heritage Farm Park for a conservation easement.

5. NEXT MEETING- JANUARY 19, 2022, 11:30 am.

6. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 pm.