TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOMS 1 & 2
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2023 AT 7:00 PM

Participating:

Irene Haines – First Selectman
Robert Funk – Finance Director (former)
William Brady – Chairman, Open Space Committee
James Ventres – Land Use Administrator
Linda Zemienieski – Executive Manager

First Selectwoman Haines called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

Ms. Haines explained that the purpose for the meeting is to discuss the Town's potential open space purchase of the Kronberg Property as well as a second bond authorization for future open space acquisition. She explained the two-step process for funding open space purchases. She stated that the first step is to pass a new bond authorization, indicating the Town has an appetite to purchase new open space parcels, and the second step is to bring future open space purchases to a Town vote at a referendum.

Land Use Administrator Ventres reviewed the specifics of the Kronberg property and the details of the proposed purchase and advised that 21 acres of the property will be set aside for future municipal use. He noted the success of the prior $5M open space bond authorization and stated that, over the past 20 years, the Town has acquired approximately 4800 acres of open space, equivalent to roughly $18M. He listed numerous benefits of open space and stated that the Town's 2008 Plan of Conservation and Development had a goal of adding 10,000 acres to its open space property.

Mr. Funk provided an overview of the cost of a 20-year bond for the Kronberg property stating it will add .015 to the mill rate or approximately $30 per year per taxable property. He advised that the Town is well within its debt service limits and a new bond authorization of $5M will have a minimal impact.

Ms. Haines opened the floor to the public and the following questions and comments were made:

- Bernie Gillis – asked about the status of the Town's debt for open space and Mr. Funk advised that the Town has paid off approximately $4M of open space loans and the current debt for open space purchases is approximately $405,000.00.

- Ken Tosi – stated he is formerly from south Florida where, in the past, much of the farm land and open space had been sold off to developers. He complimented the Town for

having a thoughtful open space plan and encouraged the public to come out in support of both purchasing the Kronberg property as well as the $5M bond authorization.

- Cameron Beard - stated he is a member of the Land Trust and noted that East Haddam's open space supports a tourism economy. He referenced studies which compared the impact on property taxes from purchasing open space versus developing the property. He stated that the studies found that keeping land as open space has less of an impact on property taxes than developing it because development results in the need for additional municipal services.

- Robert Smith – noted that properties offered as open space are evaluated to determine the type and level of development they can support. Mr. Ventres agreed and added that both the Town and the seller are also required to secure appraisals of the properties.

- Peter Govert – thanked the public for coming out to the meeting and stated he supports both proposals. He advised that a number of years ago fourteen Land Trusts and the River COG had funded the production of a case statement on the Lower CT River Valley. He stated that the resulting case study emphasized the beauty of the area and the value of investing in open space in the area.

- Rhea DiStefano – stated that the Town's purchase of the Kronberg property will have a positive impact on her personal property. In response to a question she raised, Mr. Ventres stated that the 21 acres that will be set aside for municipal use have not been earmarked for any particular use; however, if it is designated as "open space" it cannot be used for a municipal project in the future.

- Pat Young – stated that she is a member of the 8-Mile & Salmon River Watershed organizations and noted how that group can work with the Town to achieve its open space goals.

- Tony Irving – advised that he is the Chairman of the 8-Mile River Wild & Scenic Coordinating Committee. He complimented the Town on its foresight in setting aside 21 acres for future municipal use. He also commented on the value-added qualities of including open space in our communities.

Mr. Brady pointed out that the previous $5M open space bond authorization resulted in partnerships with the state, Land Trusts, and individual donors that grew into $18M of commitments, exclusive of the bond authorization. He noted that the fact that the Town passed the original bond authorization encouraged others to support its goal of growing the open space acres in East Haddam.

Ms. Haines stated that she had received seven emails in support of the Kronberg purchase and the $5M open space bond authorization; however, she did not read them into the record. She advised that the Town's bond council is drafting resolutions to send the questions of the purchase

of the Kronberg property and whether or not to approve an additional $5M authorization to a Town Meeting on January 17th and a referendum on January 30th.

There being no additional comments or questions from the public, Ms. Haines closed the Public Meeting at 8:07 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Sharon Wheeler, Recording Secretary