

# **BURKE CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

## **Minutes July 15, 2009**

The meeting was called to order by President Ric Prescott. Minutes were approved as proposed by Andie Kupetz, and seconded by Joan Harlowe.

1) Potential new commission members: Ric was able to reach Kristen Langlais and Jeff Hoffer, and both were interested and may attend tonight's meeting.

Present: Andie Kupetz, Cathie Wheeler, Ric Prescott, Joan Harlowe, Sue Leskin, Mark Maghini, and Jeff Hoffer, who expressed interest in joining the BCC

Absent: Chris Manges

2) Committee Reports:

Maps: Joan was able to provide copies via the internet to Board members of both conserved lands and those lands in current use within the Town of Burke. The Commission has been advised that the goal of the Town is to have all maps digitally available.

3) Development of the Darling Ridge

Tonight the BCC welcomes Marilyn Pastore. Marilyn joined the BCC to discuss her concern for protection of the ridge. She advised us of the permitted approval under Act 250 of 450 bedroom units in existing buildings. These permits have been recorded, and reports have been filed over the years. With the economic downturn to consider, the Pastores did not proceed with full development plans and, over the years, they have adapted to a changing business model. They did open the Creamery, and devoted much personal resource to bring buildings "up to speed", as many were failing.

They considered opening a bed and breakfast. The yellow building was converted into four units, and worked on in consultation with the Historic Preservation Trust of the State of Vermont. They tried to sell the units as condo units, but were forced to maintain the B & B concept.

Then things picked up as the economy brightened. Weddings were a sustaining business. One of the barns, the Morgan Stable to the left of the Creamery, contained both apartments and a cross country ski center, which did not fit the Pastore's business model. Some of the interior features were removed, and lighting was installed. This building is now permitted for 5 units (lesser use). The Reception Barn is utilized for meetings, and for breakout groups.

Other properties have been improved. There is one half of a new roof on the Piggery. To do the next half would not be lucrative. They have done just enough to keep the barn going. The old stage was taken down. They tried to remove changes to the barn which were not authentic to its architecture. The proscenium was taken down. They had guidance from architect Rob Brown. Minimal changes were made under his direction.

The biggest barn needs a roof. All these barns need loving care, and that takes money. They have to sell off some of the land. Ann Cousins, President of the Trust, is working with them in keeping with the need for historic preservation.

Historic preservation should be permitted broadly. Keep all options open. There are many schools of historic preservation. Marilyn does not personally identify with modernization. They have tried to keep all of the properties architecturally preserved, including the windows, clapboards, and porches. In so doing, they have had to make many compromises. Eric Gilbertson is a "good caretaker" of the buildings.

The original permits were for all the barns as living units. Phase 1 was the Morgan, the Creamery and the Farmhouse. These are not saleable living units. Phase 2 involves the State having jurisdiction over the properties, and the Town of Burke (the Zoning Board) having jurisdiction over the septic and water permits over the land.

Continuity was not always available in the Town. Historic preservation is one of the top criteria of the Act 250 permitting process. If plans are not made, then property might languish. Planning ensures the future of the land. Condo association bylaws and rules had to be projected to pass Act 250.

In preparation for development, the Pastores have submitted to the Town for review a Sketch Plan Review, which presents a schematic drawing by a landscape artist. This preliminary plan has received approval of the Town of Burke's Development Review Board. Marilyn has used Don Marsh, landscape architect, who has his own firm now. Dwellings would fit the contour of the land. Marilyn told the BCC that she respects the ordinances that have been passed by the Town.

The BCC asked about the concept of "cluster". Marilyn thinks that things will "not work out that way". She feels the preliminary plan already preserves a one-hundred acre viewscape of the properties on the ridge.

Size and height will be addressed. She believes the buildings "should be enduring" and of good quality. She showed the BCC members the preliminary drawings of the development.

Kingdom Trails is involved in the protection of the ridge as well. They have received a grant from the National Parks. Originally, part of that grant projected inclusion of the Victory Bog and Fritz's place in a corridor for a "wilderness" experience, but carving it out proved too hard and too long, and was therefore abandoned.

The BCC then discussed the entire ridge, the remainder of the Darling Hill Road, and protection issues with respect to preservation. There is considerable sentiment to consolidate a group charged with determining the history and future of the ridge, and whether to preserve an agricultural landscape or allow the ridge to "go to development". Agencies involved directly are the Vermont Land Trust, and the Passumpsic Valley Land Trust, as well as the Fairbanks Museum. Other landowners on the ridge are also trying to preserve land, principally the Downings. Marilyn mentioned that a portion of her land is currently under lease for truck farming by grower

Alyssa Doolittle, and that children at the Burke Town School are helping to grow potatoes.

The Fairbanks Museum has raised funds to showcase the history of agricultural use of the landscape, and owns an exhibit which portrays the demise of dairy farming in the region. This exhibit was originally owned by the Museum of Folk Art in Middlebury, Vermont, and gifted by that organization to the Fairbanks Museum, which has restored the Threshing Barn and has a lease for that barn. This was a good partnership for the Pastores, as they had no use for that particular barn, and the Fairbanks may decide to hang the exhibit there.

Other properties discussed were the Sanctuary, in terms of liability when visitors are allowed to visit, but conflicted by the fact that the animals within the Sanctuary are supported by the people. The Theater Barn needs fixing. The roof is very old, and has been patched many times over the years.

The Shelburne Farms is a nonprofit, with a for-profit subsidiary. The Pastore's operation is just the opposite.

As Marilyn prepared to leave, Ric suggested that all ridge owners meet informally to discuss preservation issues. Marilyn expressed interest.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m., with the motion by Sue Leskin proposing, and Ric Prescott seconding.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Leskin, Secretary