

FOSP Survey Subcommittee
March 21, 2012
Meeting Minutes
ACP Conference Room, Town Hall

Attending: Jessica Sullivan, Chair, Chris Franklin, Frank Governali, John Greene, Mary Ellen FitzGerald, Critical Insights

Staff: Maureen O'Meara, Town Planner

The meeting began at 10:00 a.m. No public comment was made.

Mr. Governali made a motion to accept the March 5, 2012 subcommittee minutes, which was seconded by Mr. Franklin. The minutes were approved with an amendment noting that no public comment was made, rather than not received.

No public comment was offered.

The committee reviewed the most recent draft survey with MaryEllen FitzGerald.

Q1: Mr. Governali noted that the question is posed as number of acres. Mr. Franklin asked if that could be changed to a percentage. Ms. O'Meara noted that the number of acres the town typically uses is acres owned/easements by the Town and Land Trust. It does not include state and federal land, but those lands are likely also commonly considered open space by the public. Ms. FitzGerald agreed. Mr. Greene suggested that the question be reworded along the lines of "The Town is 9,000 acres in size. What percentage of that do you think is legal public access open space?" The committee agreed.

Q2 and Q3: All agreed to leave as is.

Q4: The committee agreed to leave out the phrase "available to town residents."

Q5: No change.

Q6: Mr. Governali suggests deleting the reference to "public" so that the question could apply to farms. The committee agreed.

Q6a: The committee also discussed the term "rural character." Mr. Greene said that the committee would not define rural character. Ms. Sullivan noted that the term rural also has numerical and legal references that we may not want to draw

into the discussion. Mrs. FitzGerald asked if the question should be open-ended. The committee agreed to leave it as is.

Q7: The committee was concerned with the string of verbs and agreed to just use “protect.”

Q8: The committee was concerned with the reference to increase spending as it may be interpreted as increased taxes. The content of the question appears to be covered in another question, so it was deleted.

Q9: Mr. Governali said this question includes the two controversial options. Where are other options? Mr. Franklin suggested adding “to preserve open space” to the answer instead of in the question. The committee discussed the difference between not increasing the tax rate and funding new projects by retiring old debt and the overall increase in the taxes that residents will pay if no new debt is approved. The committee agreed to change “taxes” to “spending” and add “current” in front of land use regulations.

Q10: Mr. Governali asked if we should include “increase taxes” in the question when taxes don’t increase if you are retiring and adding debt in the same amount. Ms. FitzGerald recommended that you have more than 1 question on willingness to support (taxation) in order to get a better understanding on the actual level of support. Ms. Sullivan said that you can’t always assume that taxes won’t increase because you may not always have a revenue neutral scenario option.

Mr. Governali asked if the question could have two options, 1 that is tax neutral and one that increases taxes. Ms. Sullivan and Ms. FitzGerald were concerned that the survey question would then become too confusing for the respondent. Mr. Greene noted that when he reads the survey, he needs to remember that it is different when someone is asking you that question on the phone. Ms. FitzGerald said that people don’t think of taxes going away.

Mr. Governali asked if we could use the word “consider.” Ms. FitzGerald responded that the answers you collect will then have less weight. Mr. Greene said he wants enough information from the survey so the report from the committee is useful to the Town Council. This is important to the report so we need to ask it. We can include the thinking that people may feel differently about more funding if the tax rate does not increase. Ms. Sullivan endorses keeping the question clean. Ms. FitzGerald also said there is value in comparing this question to the responses you received the last time you asked it in the comp plan survey. [See p. 34 of the Comp Plan survey report]

Mr. Franklin expressed concern that we may be hemmed in by the survey responses if only 30% support funding for open space. Ms. FitzGerald explained that, when you have a specific issue, you can also look at possible support from the folks that answer neutral in the survey. Ms. Sullivan wants to leave the question in because it is straight forward. We understand we can be tax neutral, can partner, such as with the Land Trust, we can raise funds. This is a clean question.

The committee referred to the charge. Mr. Franklin said it references “preferred methods of funding” and we are not pursuing that. Ms. O’Meara noted that the committee has adjusted the charge and asked the Town Council for changes twice. The committee could test for funding support and still be within the overall intent of the charge. Mr. Governali asked if the question could ask about shifting funding. Ms. FitzGerald suggested another way. The question could be asked if we should increase or reallocate. The committee agreed. Ms. FitzGerald will ask another question that asks about reallocation and will look for a model question.

Mr. Franklin asked if we use the list from Q7. It was agreed to add the missing items from Q7 to Q10. Ms. FitzGerald cautioned the committee not to back itself into a corner. Mr. Governali does not want to just ask about the open space criteria as items, he wants the public to consider more reallocation outside of open space categories. Ms. FitzGerald agreed that you want to measure overall support for open space and not the types of open space. Q10 will include a, c, a combination of e,f,g and i. Municipal buildings was suggested to be added, but will not be.

Q11: This is the funding support amount question. Mr. Governali wants the amount of support to be represented monthly. He wants people to think about this as a living expense, like the cable bill. Ms. FitzGerald said these questions are usually posed annually because tax bills are posted annually. Ms. Sullivan said she thinks of taxes as annually. Ms. FitzGerald suggested that both numbers be used, such as 2 dollars a month, which would be 12 dollars annually. All agreed. The committee also changed the amounts monthly to \$1, \$2, \$5, \$8 (this as a cushion). All agreed.

The committee agreed that they would endorse this survey as discussed and present it to the full committee on March 28th. Ms. FitzGerald will get a final copy to Maureen a few days before that meeting to give committee members time to review it in advance of the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Maureen O’Meara, Town Planner