

TOWN OF COLUMBIA  
SPECIAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES  
JUNE 1, 2017

A Special Town Meeting of the electors and citizens qualified to vote in the Town of Columbia, Connecticut was held in Yeomans Hall, 323 Route 87, Columbia, CT on Thursday, June 1, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.

Present were Deputy Selectman Steven Everett; Selectmen Robert Bogue, Rob Hellstrom and William O'Brien; Town Administrator Mark Walter; Town Planner Paula Stahl; Town Attorney Henry Beck; Ann Dunnack

MODERATOR: Robert Baldwin  
ASSISTANT TOWN CLERK: Gail C. McGrath  
CITIZENS: 80 +/- Present

The meeting was called to order by Deputy Selectman Steven Everett at 7:02 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. The meeting was turned over to the Moderator to explain the procedures and who may vote at this meeting per the Town Charter. The Moderator asked the Assistant Town Clerk to read the legal notice.

**CLAUSE 1:** Motion was made by Steven Everett.

**I move to approve the Town purchase for \$105,000 an undeveloped parcel of land consisting of 57+/- acres identified as parcel 3 on Map 43 by the Town Assessor from the title owners thereof once all requirements and conditions contained in the resolution of the Columbia Board of Selectmen adopted at its Meeting on March 21, 2017 have been addressed, and that such purchase price be taken from the Town's Land Acquisition Fund established pursuant to Town Ordinance 8-13 and Section 7-131r of the Connecticut General Statutes as set forth as line item #20-6388-013 in the Town Budgets for the fiscal years ended June 30, 2017 and beginning July 1, 2017.**

The motion was seconded by Russell Wheeler. The Moderator reread the motion and opened the floor to Deputy Selectman Steven Everett, who turned the floor over to Town Planner Paula Stahl for a presentation on the Wells Woods area. He indicated he would like the floor back if time permitted after Paula Stahl's presentation.

Paula Stahl's presentation spoke to the background of the Wells Woods area and the reason(s) we are here tonight. Paula said that Wells Woods is about 1,300 acres of land in the SW part of Town. The area is primarily undeveloped and has both historical and environmental significance. This area is a priority for protection by the Open Space Commission and the Columbia Conservation and Agriculture Commission. The Oberlander property is about 57+/- acres in the center of the Wells Woods area. It has noteworthy wetlands, with the Mint Brook flowing through it and is an outstanding area both in wildlife habitats and ecological integrity, noting that outstanding is the highest category issued to land. There is an existing trail, an old

stone bridge over the brook, old barn, house and mill foundations. There are four town-owned road beds in this area whose use was discontinued in the early 1900's but the land is still owned by the Town. The \$105,000 purchase price is the fair market value for the property, obtained after a recent appraisal by the Town. This is a significant area for open space protection in Wells Woods.

The Moderator opened the floor to discussion. Questions pertaining to boundary markings of and signage for the property, accessibility to the property, parking, future purchases of land in the area and funding for them, purchasing land for open space and not agricultural use and hunting were raised and discussed.

Edith Prague, 138 Route 87, stated this is an exciting piece of property; it is critical that the Town own it and have access to it.

Ann Dunnack, 103 Lake Road, Chairman of the Open Space Commission, noted that the commission looks at properties and then makes recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. They have been in touch with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), who helps municipalities put together large projects. The TPL has been helping the commission to contact land owners and put together purchases. Should this parcel be purchased, a management plan will be developed to address issues such as parking, access, hunting, hiking, etc. and the public will be invited to come and share their thoughts on the plan.

Andrea Drabicki, 131 Route 87, noted the old town roads that are in the Wells Woods area and how owning this property gets us closer to the southernmost part of the airline trail.

Todd Shepard, 2 Bears Den Way, an abutting property owner, had concerns for accessibility to the property and was concerned about investing without a plan for parking.

Steven Everett, 534 Route 87, noted all the questions and concerns raised at tonight's meeting. The Town has a plan to purchase this area of land and a lot needs to come together for this to happen. We don't have all the specifics, but the plan and everyone involved, has to come together in a financially prudent way. This will take time, but we have to start somewhere.

William O'Brien, 164 Pine Street, moved to call the question. Motion was made to call the question (2/3 voted needed). A voice vote to call the question was made. The Moderator determined that there was a majority voice vote to call the question. The Moderator re-read the motion. A voice vote was taken on Clause 1. The Moderator determined that there was a majority voice vote to pass the motion.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail C. McGrath  
Assistant Town Clerk