

Thursday, December 7, 2006

Lauren Gaherty, Senior Planner
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
1 Fenn St., Suite 201
Pittsfield MA 01201 413-442-1521 (p) lgaherty@berkshireplanning.org

Re: Comments, *Becket Open Space and Recreation Plan 2006*

Dear Lauren Gaherty,

Thank you for presenting the Becket Open Space and Recreation Plan 2006 for comment. I am commenting here as a Becket resident and citizen, although I am also currently a member of the Becket Zoning Board of Appeals and of the Becket Zoning By-Laws Review Committee.

I have been a full-time Becket resident and business owner for thirty years, and a seasonal visitor since the early 1960s.

I think the *Becket Open Space and Recreation Plan 2006* is an excellent inventory of Becket's outstanding natural and historic resources - forests, rivers, ponds and historic districts located in a unique up-land environment clearly deserving of protection and enhancement.

The needs and goals survey, as outlined in the Five Year Action Plan (pg. 52-57) have been carried over from Becket's 1989 and 1998 plans, highlighting that implementation has been at best spotty since then. The current layout is easier to read and understand and should provide a fine tool for guiding town planners and for educating Becket residents of the critical need to take some meaningful and timely actions. That means **now!** to protect what otherwise may be lost for ever.

Just the same, I must observe that a vision and tenacious will has been there all along. The Becket Board of Health's and Conservation Commission's efforts to protect water quality and wetlands have been and are ongoing. It is high time that Planning and Zoning initiatives are put in place to back up what these boards, up to now, have tried to achieve in their lonely struggle. Members of the Becket Building Department, notably the former Building Inspectors Stephen Houle and Keith Fox and our current official William Girard, have and are providing critical links between town departments to guide growth and development. These departments deserve the full support of Becket residents and citizens.

Missing from or inadequately highlighted in the Five Year Action Plan, although mentioned in the narrative text (pg. 44-48), are the planning tools available to achieve these goal. An index of definitions and list of acronyms would be appreciated as an addendum to the Five Year Action Plan outline. There is much emphasis on private landowner initiatives. That's good.. But there is too little real emphasis on available planning tools that would allow private and public goals to work hand in hand: Scenic Mountain and/or up-land zoning and Smart Growth planning, possibly overlay districts, to direct future development to existing village centers: the North Becket Village, Becket Center and West Becket with eased intensity regs, acreage, frontage and setback requirements.

Cont'd on page 2

Finally, some minor omissions. On page 11, among the Residential Development Centers, the major subdivisions Sherwood Forest and Sherwood Greens are listed; missing is Becket Woods. Each of these private development subdivisions have Road District Maintenance and taxation by-laws. On page 27, table heading "Rare Plan Species in Becket" should read: "Rare Plant Species in Becket."

Thank you for letting me comment. We will keep in touch.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Madeleine Swindlehurst". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Madeleine Swindlehurst

Becket MA 01223-1016

Phone: 413-623-5351 (with answering machine; preferred direct contact)

e-mail: swndlhrs@rnetworx.com (for document transmission)

2/16/2007

Open Space Committee
Town of Becket
557 Main Street
Becket, MA 01223

RECEIVED

FEB 22 2007

BERKSHIRE
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Dear Committee Members,

I want to thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Town of Becket Open Space and Recreation Plan. I commend the efforts of the Open Space Committee to undertake this process and achieve this high level of planning. I understand the complexities of issues this committee is dealing with and the varied attitudes, needs and wants of our diverse town. This is a well written and organized plan. As a Licensed Forester I have taken great interest in many parts of this plan. I will comment only on areas where I feel that the plan has misleading or incorrect information. I will not comment on items I am not familiar with as I understand you will receive enough of those.

Page 24: Flood Hazard Area - The definition of a 100 year flood is "a flood with a 1-percent chance of occurring or being exceeded in a given year". Meaning that each year the chance is the same, it may occur four years in a row or not at all for 500 years. Your 3rd paragraph is misleading in stating that "Each year that passes with out waters reaching this elevation increases the statistical likelihood for the next year."

Page 26: General Inventory – The forest types used in this paragraph are not standard forest types used in environmental fields. Please consider revising using Oak/Hardwoods, Northern Hardwoods, Hemlock/Hardwoods and White Pine/Hardwoods and Spruce/Fir. These would be the four main types in the Town of Becket however there are small amounts of several other forest / cover types.

Page 27: Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species – It would be positive thing for endangered species to be inventoried on Town owned lands. It should be very carefully thought out whether to attempt this on private land as this may result in sever financial loss to the land owner due to new restrictions. At the very least land owner permission should be sought prior to any inventory of private lands. Legal Counsel should be sought prior to any activity such as this to ensure that the town would not be held liable for future losses.

Also near the end of this paragraph is a misleading statement about rich mesic forests. Your language gives the impression that all sugar maple dominated forests are rich mesic forests. This is untrue as many sugar maple stands are artificially created (sugar bushes) and rich mesic forests may be dominated by other northern hardwood species in some cases. The presence of sugar maple is only one of many factors which qualify a stand as a rich mesic forest.

Page 30: Vernal Pools – The comments stated above about inventorying apply here as well.

Page 32: Jacob’s Ladder Trail Scenic Byway – In the second paragraph I believe you want to say white pine forests instead of red pine forests in the third sentence. I am not aware of any red pine along the Trail in the Town of Becket.

Page 37: Salt Intrusion – It should be noted as well that winter salt use on our roads also has negative affects on vegetation and fish populations along the main state and town roads.

Page 51: Goal 4, Objective D & E – See my notes above from page 27 and 30 on this topic.

Page 55: Goal 3 – To the best of my knowledge the old Huckleberry Line is not a single ownership path and there is no ROW or easement that would allow for easy construction of this trail. Again, this could have a dramatic affect on property values which the old line runs through. I would assume the same holds true for the Becket-Chester Line.

Please accept my comments and suggestions which I hope will be helpful in completing the final draft of this plan. If you would like more information or clarification on any items I have brought up please feel free to contact me. I would be happy to help.

Sincerely;



Kristopher Massini
84 Tanglewood Circle
Becket, MA 01223
243-8159