

Andrews Community Forest Committee
Monday, September 16th, 2024 - 6:00 to 8:30 PM
Minutes

Location: Richmond Town Center Meeting Conf. Room A, 3rd Floor, 203 Bridge Street.

Present: Daniel Schmidt, Ian Stokes, Julian Portilla, Melissa Wolaver, Chase Rosenberg , Cecilia Danks (online), Wright Preston, Brad Elliott.

In Person: Matt Dyer, Jon Kart, Bestsy Hardy, Jim Monahan, Nancy Zimny.

Online: Paul Hauf, Joy Reap, R. Low, Dan Wolfson, Tyler Merritt, Kit Emery.

Standing Items:

- Roll call and confirm Quorum; Welcome and identify public in attendance.
- Appoint time-keeper and minutes taker

Minutes of August 26th, 2024 meeting: Approved with change proposed by Brad: Meeting of Sep 16th is about trail plan work.

Additions/Changes to Agenda: Brad raised the possibility of Ethan Tapper updating the Forestry Plan.

Daniel notes that before engaging with Ethan Tapper, he will check to see if the committee/town has obligations to work with the country forrester. (Tabled for future meeting)

Managing zones above and below VAST trail and/or powerlines

(with reference to the *draft Wildlife Stewardship Plan, the draft Comprehensive Management Plan and the draft Trails Stewardship Plan subcommittee (Sept. 2023) reports.)

- Melissa invited each ACFC member to make a one-minuted ‘bulleted’ listing of what they consider most important on this topic. Topics mentioned included:
 - Review of history of the committee’s work and the status and evolution of the trail plan
 - Desire to include some trails that were not multiuse and designated for pedestrian traffic only,
 - The challenging nature of the terrain might mean that dispersed access is not really widely accessible.
 - Concerns about impacts on wildlife in the zones of influence and concerns around the sustainability of maintaining the 9 bridges in the Sinuosity trail plan.
 - Concerns about flooding and the steep gradient of the forest.
 - Concerns about not seeing David Sunshine’s easement and concerns about the viability of trail connectivity to his property if it’s not clear that it’s a 10-15 year commitment.
 - Desires for creating accessible terrain for people in town.
 - Tracing back where common ground has been established among the committee members: some trails for exclusive pedestrian use, dogs on leashes or no dogs, no ebikes, long seasonal closures for trails and noting that Arrowood and Sinuosity made further modifications to the initial trail proposals when they made their second round of visits to accommodate for sensitive areas.
 - Science needs to inform decisions of committee members but science is insufficient to be the sole basis of decision-making.

- Note that committee may never reach unanimity and that this was never the charge nor is it reasonable to expect it to do so when there is so much strong sentiment about the trails plan.
- Chase expressed plans to visit the DRB with Wright Preston to inquire about their view on whether the ACFC trail plan was going to need to be reviewed by an engineer as a site plan.
- Work begins on a proposal for a motion that seeks a phased approach in which the first phase focuses on trail improvement and accessibility, “universal design” (though not necessarily ADA compliant) on trails below the power lines. Phase 2 would include further work on trail mapping and evaluation of trail suitability.
- Reservations about creating such a motion without further information on flora, fauna and habitats and potential impact.
- Discussion about whether more information is needed or whether there is enough information. Further discussion about whether more expert input is needed or if there has been enough expert input.
- Suggestion for phase 2 of the trail work to include consultation with DRB and potentially engineers, definition of management objective and corresponding tasks, and planning to see if further modifications could/should be made to the trail plan to further mitigate potential impacts on flora, fauna and habitat.
- Amendment proposed to move forward with trail building up to the ridge.
- Proposal to eliminate/rewild skid and logging roads.
- Support for measures to reduce impact on wildlife such as season closures, restrictions on big events and monitoring traffic on trails.
- Support for moving forward with at least phase 1.

Open for public comments:

- Support for trail connectivity
- Concern for committee members leaving due to poor environment.
- Review of history of committee work from 2018, noting that initial reviews for connectivity were concluded 6 years ago. Support for the idea that there is enough information. Initial trail plan was approved 6-2 but withheld from select board until further consensus could be reached. Many in the community support the plan as is.
- Desire for action and forward progress. Recounting of the support from Andrews family for town access to the forest.
- Resistance to the phase approach since it feels like it falls short of the approved plan.
- Appreciation for the careful and considered work of the committee. Support for the wildlife stewarded ship plan proposal. Support for limiting trails or no trail above the power lines to protect flora, fauna and habitat.
- Encouragement to compromise and make decisions. Note that wood for bridges is cut and ready from fallen Hemlocks. Defense of Arrowood plan and efforts.
- Support for the science that suggests trail work on the upper section of the forest could damage flora, fauna and habitat.
- Concern that mountain biking is driving the conversation. Concern that trails would disrupt the current continuity of the forest block which is so important to wildlife. Concern that not enough is known about the type of mountain biking that will occur, a desire to understand more about the kinds of trails and riding that will occur. Concern for rogue trails in the forest.

The committee attempted to craft a motion to approve before the end of the meeting. The components of the motion evolved with amendments. The motion outlined was similar to the motion above. Discussion about whether phase 2 was about evaluation of trail appropriateness or about stepwise plans to complete prior to building the trail.

No agreement was reached. No votes were taken. The chair resigned and the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:30 pm