

Richmond Conservation Commission

Tuesday July 9, 2024 7:30 PM

Meeting Minutes

RCC members present: Daniel, Kit, Sam, Jeanette, Judy, Bob Low, Bob Galvin

Members of the public: Gary Bressor, Jon Kart

7:30 p.m. Public introductions and comments

- Gary Bressor was here a year ago with a proposal for a connecting trail. Long process, became route of choice of transportation committee, selectboard has conditionally endorsed it but said that nobody has the bandwidth for a multi-million \$ project. ad-hoc committee being formed to find creative ways of doing things. Gary thinks there will be opportunities in the future to partner w/Conservation Commission. Folks feel disconnected from town, and this is the only route that Gary thinks will connect those people to town. Gary wants to see someone from this committee throw their hat in the ring. Currently called "Gateway Trail".
 - JR: is there any deadline for signing up?
 - GB: there will be 5 people on the committee, give name to Selectboard sooner rather than later. Apparently, lots of federal \$ to connect towns separated by highway projects. VT Supreme Court had a ruling last year that is favorable to this project, according to Gary.
 - DS: Is there landowner permission?
 - GB: No permission at this time.
 - BL: Are draft maps available?
 - JK: Not sure it's a good idea to make maps public before there is more certainty in the interest of not aggravating landowners

7:35 Appoint minutes taker and approve/amend June minutes

- JR's proposal: lightly-edited document Judy sent around will be the minutes and the other more heavily edited document will be more of a workplan/list of topics. Suggest that we use the lightly-edited minutes as the minutes.
- **Motion to approve the lightly-edited minutes is approved by RCC.**

7:45 Additions, amendments to agenda

- JR: Virginia Clark from Planning Commission was interested in the Vermont Conservation Design & BioFinder training. JR thought if she popped on, we could move that item to a closer time.

7:50 Winooski River: Review FOWR areas of interest, determine RCC areas of interest and develop next steps and action plan

Takeaway list:

1. Engineering projects (culvert work) – Josh sent around a funding opportunity for a grant and we could start working on this.
 2. Geomorphic assessment
 3. Rain garden
 4. Snipe Ireland Road fish community work
 5. Invasive Species Assessment/Removal (Daniel is already talking with the folks @ Riverscape, so he will talk further with them about an invasive assessment of the riparian area). JK would be happy to show the folks the hotspots.
 6. Resiliency Piece surrounding local farmers and buffers
 7. Educational sessions
- JR: Let's go over last month's notes that she took and sent around to the RCC.
 - DS: What are the needs of the community? We want to zoom out a bit and figure out high-need, low-cost opportunities. What are 5 things the community needs? What is the need of the community, what are the resources we have, and what is the desire of the committee? Need all 3 to be most effective.
 - JR: FOWR Interested in the "engineering projects: dam removals, culvert replacements, etc." -> there are a lot of folks on the committee interested in wildlife crossings, so this seems like a natural starting point.
 - FOWR want a few things the most, but does RCC want to do them?
 - BL: Bob's favorite is a geomorphic assessment of the Winooski. What are the issues with the river and what do we do with it? It takes time and money, and we have both!
 - JK: By doing the geomorphic assessment, we are better set up for additional state funding. While CRF is flush, it doesn't have the \$\$ for even a single culvert replacement. The other thing is how to animate and get people engaged?
 - JM: Are there different parts to the proposed study?
 - JK: Generally if the state is approving and funding, there should be no gaps. We may have to get a section of Bolton or Williston involved, depending on how convos w/river engineer go.
 - JR: Jon, should we do phase 1 or phase 2?
 - JK: Should just be able to move to phase 2. Should reach out to DEC's river ecologist for next steps in that process.
 - BG: A rain garden might be a good way to focus education and outreach in a highly-trafficked area of town.
 - SP: Estimate for rain garden was \$20k, could we possibly cut costs anywhere? Let's consider and understand the cost breakdown of such a project. FOWR estimated \$20k.
 - JK: Sam said there is a stream restoration piece; that connects with Snipe Ireland fish community, could be a way to involve the public as well. Potential field trip, and we can talk with a fisheries biologist to get a sense of what they would recommend doing.
 - JR: From doing programs w/kids on Snipe Ireland, it's a great place to safely get community members involved
 - BL: Is the Donahue Brook situation resolved?
 - JR: No clue where that stands right now, looks like the State and AOT are going to be involved moving forward. Selectboard voted our funding proposal down.

- SP: Thinks it's wise for us to wait until we know whether FEMA/the state will be involved.
- DS: When Ethan Tapper was doing some work in Hinesburg, he contracted with a company that works there who does invasives assessments and removal. Esp with knotweed being upstream in Waterbury, there could be an opportunity for an assessment. Could get a contractor to do it and pay them with RCC funds. Company called Riverscape Ecology, he thinks.
- JK: Along the river, there's volunteers green and Overrockers reserve (town parcels). Everything else is private property, so would there be public issue with using conservation reserve funds on this property?
- DS: As long as there is public access, I think we can make a good case for the funding.
- KE: Talked w/Chuck Farr and he would like to leave the land the way it is. It's going to be hard to change
- JK: To buy an easement, it's a lot of \$! Natural Resource Conservation Service and also Vermont Land Trust have institutional knowledge and resources to help us fill in gaps with knowledge.
- SP: Farmers market table might be a good way to get our finger on the pulse of what the Richmond community wants. This is a good avenue to get out into the public and engage with interested members of the public. Some of the lowest-hanging fruit is the communications piece of this issue. There are free programs, flooding was only a year ago and many Richmonders were impacted.
- JR: Do we have the requisite expertise to be talking with folks about this?
- SP: We don't necessarily need expertise, we can just be honest about our resources and capabilities. Some programs already exist and we just need to connect them with the right info, and FOWR will likely have literature on programs like Stream Smart.
- JK: To draw people in, may want to include info about paddling the river (start/stop)
- JM: Wants to get invasive mapping done in Richmond.
- JK: Easier to get iNaturalist data for things like this. Could be done in a couple weekends with data collection.
- DS: Issue with iNaturalist: creating polygons of an area rather than just a point.
- JR: Survey123 can be used to work around that problem.
- DS: Does town have ArcGIS account?
- JK: Don't think so. Avenza maps also works offline and can be used to deal with this.
- SP: Could we put signs on public lands where invasives are present as an informational project around time?
- JM: Finding a way to map them and couple this with communication and community involvement would be huge.
- JK: Regional Planning Commission would be a good group to try to work with, because the FHWA grants might just be too big for us to navigate as a commission.
- JM: Don't think the water got to the library, so maybe putting a rain garden there might be a good idea.
- DS: Rain gardens are often put in municipal areas, and so can be permit-heavy and bureaucratic.

- SP: volunteers to reach out to FOWR to get more information about rain gardens. If there are a # of data points we need to get from FOWR, he's willing to collate and ask them a few different things as a follow-up email.
- BG: Do we want to table or do outreach at Town Meeting Day? Seems like a good idea to keep that in mind as an opportunity.
- SP: For tabling at farmers market, might be a good idea to rotate pairs of two so there's flexibility w/scheduling throughout the summer.
- DS: One thought on outreach is that when they did the recreation/conservation panel, there were a lot of community members involved. We could do something similar surrounding flooding. It's a hot-button issue that could be a really exciting opportunity to connect with residents. A panel discussion for this seems awesome.
- JR: Let's move forward with the things we've discussed.
- JR: Sec of **Ag** just let her know that Advisory Groups don't need to have warned meetings, so need to check in w/Josh to see how that works w/recent open meeting law conversations.
- BL: For any of these projects, does anyone want to draft someone in the community to join the fray?

8:50 Consider Sam P's request for suitable river or brook for cleanup and willingness to help

- SP: Might be harder to find a spot where there is a concentration of trash/river debris.
- JR: Does Jon Kart know of any places?
- JK: No.
- SP: Could we shift this to an invasive plant removal day instead? **Folks like this idea!** If there is trash to pick up, that's great, but it doesn't seem like there are spots that need a trash/debris cleanup nearly as much as invasive species removal. Based on his knowledge of the variety of volunteer opportunities available to Cox employees, he thinks this should be an easy pivot. JR will reach out to Sam P.

9:00 How to sustain a regular invasive species removal effort in Richmond

- JR: SWAT team for invasives involving high school kids would be great!
- JM: Did some research and has some general takeaways. People who sustain a long-term effort have tried a number of things, but having a coordinator or coordinators is key. Positive visibility is also important. Seems like we need to have an interest in coordinating something like this and keep it organized.
- KE: During the week is better than the weekends. Would be willing to do something like this on the weekdays, but need training.
- JR: Could have teams and compete to see who pulls the most weeds.
- JM: Coordinator means someone coordinating and engaging volunteers, and also to connect with experts.
- JK: Anyone can become an expert quickly!
- BL: Could we engage w/high school biology curriculum?

- JK: Over the last few years, several teachers have brought their classes out during the spring and fall. That's great, but there are invasive needs that happen outside the school year. Ideally, you'd have folks working in the summer on this stuff.
- JR: What about camps? Might be limited in duration...
- DS: Between Richmond Mountain Trails and the Richmond Trails Committee, there are a lot of folks out there doing trail work. Dan thinks we can get a lot of people involved if we connect with the trails folks' efforts. Also, Dan thinks we should be thoughtful about how and when we are doing invasive removal. We can be doing more harm than good. Lots of questions arise – does the plant have berries on it? Are the berries shaking out as you drive down the roads? Etc, etc etc. We could put together a high-priority list, what time of year, and how to do it. Japanese Barberry for instance is near some of the trails work, so that's a natural place to start.
- JR: This comes back to the map idea – it would be easier to do the above with a map.
- JM: One other idea is to do a shoutout when we are going out to do this work on Front Porch Forum and make sure that folks are supported and encouraged.
- DS: We could think about getting a license to a mapping software like ArcGIS for the RCC, if nobody has access we can use.
- JK: Can export a file from BioFinder to a PDF.
- SP: Might make sense to go to BioFinder to get the initial map. We could possibly publish our own "Richmond Invasives" map.
- DS: We have a survey on Survey123 where you can ID species, note density, then click button and walk around area and it creates a polygon. That info gets sent to Dan's map that he then gets a bunch of different spots. DS is going to look into whether we can just use this survey for our work and will talk to city.
- JR: Let's talk to the Town Planner to see if there are any sorts of these maps available.

9:15 BioFinder Training: Consider RCC hosting a Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) and Biofinder training for our commission, the Andrews Community Forest Committee, the Town Planning Commission and any other interested committees. It would be helpful for us all to have a better idea about the goals of the VCD, our responsibilities related to Act 59 and how to use the recently updated BioFinder to better understand how Richmond's wetlands and woodlands fit into the big picture of 30 by 30 and 50 by 50. Maybe we could share the link to a recorded zoom training and then discuss organizing an in-person presentation and training for ourselves and other committees.

- BL: Have folks watched the BioFinder webinars? If not, that is the place to start. Bob will be sending around an email with the webinars. Let's have folks watch the webinar before we have a more substantive discussion on this topic.
- JR: What should I tell Virginia about how this helps with planning?
- BL: Should there be an information session in the town center? This is exciting and here's what it can do for you.
- KE: Kit found the way that other BioFinder trainings work to be a bit individualistic and it works

9:25 Matters arising

N/A

9:30 Adjourn

MOTION TO ADJOURN - ACCEPTED

Minutes (formal or informal) are due at the town offices 5 days after any public meeting.

Please send RCC chair a draft within 5 days from this meeting (by 7/16/2024).