

**Andrews Community Forest Committee
Meeting Minutes
Friday April 5th, 2024 - 6:00 to 8:00 PM**

**= See meeting packet for referenced document*

A video recording of the meeting is available [here](#).

Attending: Co-chairs Daniel Schmidt and Ian Stokes; Melissa Wolaver, Wright Preston, Chase Rosenberg, Julian Portilla, Cecilia Danks (joined 6:13). Members of the public: Sam Pratt, Lisa Miller, Bob Low (joined near end).

Minute-Taker and Time-Keeper

Brad and Chase, respectively, volunteered for those tasks

February Minutes*

Wright moved to approve, Brad seconded, unanimously approved.

VELCO

Wright and Melissa met with Josh to discuss two issues with the utility's use of their right-of-way and other parts of the ACFC. They feel that waste blocks left on the side of a stream after they'd served to support a now-removed bridge deck represent a hazard. Utility vehicles using the old VAST trail have also damaged water bars installed to prevent erosion. The utility has rejected requests to resolve these issues and the Town Attorney will be asked to provide legal advice on our options.

Member and Chair Renewals

A motion was made by Brad Elliott, seconded by Julian Portilla and approved unanimously by the ACFC (with Wright abstaining) to recommend to the Selectboard that it reappoint Daniel Schmidt and Wright Preston to the Committee seats they hold. Another motion was made by Melissa Wolaver, seconded by Cecilia Danks and unanimously approved to recommend to the Selectboard that it appoint Daniel Schmidt and Ian Stokes to another term as ACFC co-chairs.

By-Laws* Update

The requirement for the ACFC member serving as representatives of both the Conservation Commission and Trails Committee to be present for any vote was seen as a possible encumbrance. Wright moved to ask the Selectboard to remove this requirement, Melissa seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Members continued discussing other aspects of the by-laws that have been brought to its attention, such as discrepancies with the Management Plan. Melissa and Daniel will meet with the Town Manager to discuss an update.

Management Plan Update

The committee discussed reports* filed by the Summer 2023 subcommittees looking at a Trail Monitoring Plan and the overall Management Plan update (a.k.a. "Comprehensive Management Plan" or "CMP"). Ian has compiled the recommendations of both committees into a single document.

The discussion moved to the list of "Challenges"* compiled by members and the group's general progress in updating the Management Plan. Brad outlined concerns he has about language in the current draft that describes ecological protections to "aspirational" alongside recreational

interests. He reads the Conservation Easement as giving equal status all four of its “Purposes,” including ecological protection and providing for recreation. Brad, Daniel and Chase will get together to identify and discuss language changes to the current draft update to reflect compliance how to comply with the full set of Purposes. The goal is for the full Committee to discuss and vote on these new passages as they are presented in its regular meeting.

Chase explained his thoughts behind the inclusion of the “action vs. legislation” and his concerns about the ACFC falling into an endless loop of writing and discussing documents versus tackling concrete issues, such as handling the VELCO issue or developing educational programs. Daniel volunteered to update a previous ACFC’s “timeline” as a way to help keep the group on task.

The “challenges” discussion moved to “Mandating specific trail routes” in the Management Plan. Brad sees that as inserting a conflict of interest into the Plan by requiring routes that don’t comply with the rest of the Plan. Melissa feels the Plan should state that connections require legally binding assurance from the current cooperating landowners that public access to ACF through their property would continue even if their property changes hands. For now, she proposed building a loop trail within the northeast quadrant or focusing trail construction elsewhere in the Forest. Chase reported that the Sip of Sunshine landowner is working with the Trails Committee to an agreement to protect the Town’s investments and other interests even if his or a future owner’s feelings about public access change.

The Committee the moved to “Zones of influence and buffer zones.” It was decided that Daniel, Julian, Chase and Brad would get together to discuss this topic. Chase, Sam Pratt and Brad will be meeting on April 10 to discuss a Wildlife Management Plan with VT Fish & Wildlife’s Andrea Shortsleeve. Because that Plan will incorporate information about zones of influence and buffers, the ZOI/buffer working group will meet between April 10 and the ACFC’s next full meeting.

Cecila noted the importance of any subcommittees and working groups to provide information to the full committee and public to describe the insights they gained as well as the basis for their recommendations. She will also be adding some challenges to the list, which will be circulated ahead of the next meeting.

Sam underscored the importance of the full committee discussing and acting upon information provided by working groups, such as one he serves on that’s proposed a reorganization of the ACFC web page. It was noted that sharing information among members could run afoul of the open meeting laws. Daniel suggested that, for transparency, the sharing might need to take place in a public venue, such as the ACFC web page. Sam also asked to be included in the ZOI/buffer working group.

The date for the next meeting was set for 6 pm, Monday, April 29.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Elliott