

RICHMOND CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting minutes, Tuesday April 19, 2022

7:30 PM

Richmond Town Center Meeting Room, 3rd Floor – 203 Bridge Street, Richmond, VT

Commissioners attending: Kate Krieder, Bob Low, Judy Rosovsky, Ibit Wright

From the public: Caitlin Littlefield (RCC at-large Andrew Community Forest Committee member)

Appoint minute taker: Judy Rosovsky is taking minutes

Minutes approval: February and March minutes passed as amended

Agenda:

7:30 p.m. Public comments and introductions

7:40 Appoint minutes taker; review March minutes

7:50 Additions, amendments to agenda

7:55 Andrews Community Forest Committee – request for comments from RCC

9:00 Beeken/Rivershore Trail Bridge Repair Conservation Reserve Fund (CRF) Application -update by JR or Jim Monahan

9:10 Emerald ash borer (EAB) wood milling CRF request – moved to 7:50 p.m.

9:20 Green Up Day update

9:25 Matters arising

9:30 Adjourn

Public Comment: None

EAB wood milling CRF request: Caitlin Littlefield reported that she has a quote from the miller who did the earlier work. Those wood products were moved by Caitlin and Jeff Forward to Jeff's barn – thank you Jeff! – for possible use in the Town Center renovation. There are 16 8X3 planks and about 10-15% of the wood has been milled.

For the miller to deal with the rest of the milling and processing (firewood) the cost is approximately \$5,500. Caitlin asked for \$4,000 and possibly Richmond residents could deal with the rest. This might limit access as the hope is to direct the firewood to residents in need.

Originally the wood would have been taken to Underhill but because it is potentially infested it should stay in place. Wood for Good could come in the fall and process and distribute the wood, but they require a minimum of 2-5 cords, which might be available.

There are “half-moon” planks available for an enterprising bench builder, too.

The RCC recommended getting the wood processed all at the same time and amending the letter with the new cost (not to exceed \$5,500) and new date for completion and a sunset date of 3 years from approval (if approved). Town assistant manager Duncan Wardell is trying to solicit additional bids, as 3 bids are required.

In addition, the RCC recognized the success of Caitlin’s grant and work and expressed appreciation. Caitlin expressed a desire to be freed from further work on this plan. The RCC agreed and believes her work on this EAB project has been superlative.

The following motion was made:

Motion EAB Supplement

Recognizing the success of the Richmond EAB initiative as described in the attached summary Report, the Richmond Conservation Commission recommends that the Selectboard support additional Conservation Reserve funding not to exceed \$5,500, to cover the costs of milling and firewood processing as described in the request received 4/20/2022. The request is in accord with CRF guidelines and priorities as outlined in the initial funding package and in its prior recommendation for CRF funding. Approval should sunset three years from the date of final approval, approximately May 2025.

The RCC approved this motion unanimously.

Andrews Community Forest Committee – request for comments from RCC

What to do about comments for ACFC? Max and Dan are trail advocates and we want a balanced discussion. RCC asked Caitlin re timeline. Caitlin said the ACFC is processing comments from the public, and Jesse (ACFC chair) wanted Trails and RCC to have clear say as separate from public. Nick from ACFC has coded all the comments and aggregated into 25 categories. Caitlin will be assembling a response to those comments then soliciting feedback from the ACFC. That may be done by the end of April ACFC meeting. She hopes that the ACFC will see the merit in finding a facilitator for a public meeting.

She feels good about the compromise that she proposed. ACFC gave thumbs up on trail design. Some on the ACF committee feel that they voted and are done. ACFC is getting pushback from others opposed to the current plan. The ACFC had an overwhelming number of pro-trail comments.

Bob observed that it is crucial for trails to be compatible with the ACF Master Plan. Caitlin remarked that there are internal divisions over that. The Management Plan (Mgt Plan) does allow trails, though it was observed that the Mgt plan has potentially contradictory instructions/self-contradictions. Should the Mgt Plan be changed to clarify these potential conflicts? So no clear road map yet.

Ibit noted that comments like that of Sue Morse were detailed and well researched; will those comments be weighted? Caitlin said not per se; assessment is not quantitative, hence aggregation into categories. Ibit asked if Ian Stokes (former Trails committee chair) comments were included and Caitlin said no, and a concern is that some positions are entrenched. It was pointed out that the Concept Map trail would have gone through a vernal pool.

Bob remarked that the dilemma for the ACFC is that there are missing pieces in the ecological study and he is not sure how trail proposals can be made without that information. The ecological assessment only covered spring; it would be good if the trail were assessed in July/August too (or ideally year round). The Mgt Plan calls for a 50' buffer on each side of any ACF trail. A 200' buffer is aspirational but may not be possible. No-one can remember if a 50' trail assessment had been done yet. Ibit cited Sue Morse as saying that even with a 50' buffer trails still have an impact on birds etc.

Bob asked if the trails are going to be phased in, as required by the Management Plan? Yes, Caitlin said that they can be phased in though she'd prefer that the design get locked in at the beginning. Concern was expressed about the slippery slope of phasing in terms of continuous challenge to proposed additions. And there is a difference in design and building.

It was indicated that the RCC would be open to a request for Conservation Reserve Fund funding to cover additional costs for trail assessment.

Trade-offs were discussed, like deer yards, now using old skid road to best utilize existing disturbed areas.

There was a discussion of the request from ACFC for RCC comments on the current ACFC Trails plan. Two members of the RCC are not present, and prevailing opinion is that the RCC would prefer to see the Trails Plan/Mgt Plan as a package, as it is hard to assess the one without the other. This seemed ok to Caitlin and JR agreed to write a note to Jesse explaining our situation.

Bob left due to generator issues, leaving the RCC without a quorum.

A discussion ensued on types of trails: ACF as connector for wildlife; how much will trails affect that wildlife? No-one wants divergence of bikers and non-bikers. Hiking causes issues too. Preston Legacy has trails specifically for bikers, ACFc could be general trails, but then not as fun for bikes.

If trail building phased in use and need for additional trails could be assessed over time. If not high demand, may not need the additional trails. CL pointed out that the Mgt Plan calls for a loop. Ibit was on the ACFC and doesn't remember the loop – wondered when it was put in? Parking limits not a deterrent since people can bike in. Caitlin thinks the trails at ACFC won't be as appealing as Cochran's are.

ACFC will probably bring a proposal to the Selectboard after their next 2-3 meetings.

If a facilitator is brought in, it may be best that they not be a Richmond resident, given the level of contention around this issue.

JR will send a note to Jesse mentioning this meeting. The meeting scheduled for April 12th did not take place due to JR's partner being hospitalized and JR's inability to access Zoom and change the Zoom host from her iPhone (having forgotten to bring her laptop to the hospital that evening).

Update on Green Up – Ibit Wright

So far has sent 1 email and 1 Front Porch Forum (FPF) post. Linda Parent and Ravi Venkataraman are helping. Ravi has offered to keep the laminated map up-to-date with the online map. Ibit checked with statewide Green-Up and they are not ready with on the online map. There was no clipboard or paper at the town office yet. Richard and Ibit have been hanging posters.

Update on Beeken/Rivershore trail repairs – Judy Rosovsky

Jim Monahan checked in with Jim F. from VLT and they don't have a problem with the trail repairs. There are 3 bridges on 4 properties and Jim M. is contacting those landowners.

The Selectboard wants the Requests for Proposals sent out prior to the funding request, and they should be sealed bids as required by the Town's Purchasing Policy with a note stating they are contingent upon funding. Jim M. felt this would delay trail work and would mean the bridges won't be repaired till next year. The Trails Committee is likely to change their request to volunteer labor, no bids, just supplies. JR has offered to ask the RCC if they would help with that work, if need be. Jim M. is away and will be in touch with JR about this request.

Minutes:

February and March minutes were passed as amended.

Adjourn:

The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes (formal or informal) are due at the town offices 5 days after any public meeting. Please send me a draft within 5 days from this meeting (by 4/24/2022).