

**Richmond Conservation Commission, Draft Meeting Minutes**  
**March 8th, 2022**  
**7:30PM, Virtual Meeting via Zoom**

**Commissioners Present:** Judy Rosovsky, Elizabeth (Ibit) Wright, Daniel Schmidt, Bob low, Kate Kreider

**Members of the Public Present :** Ravi Venkataraman (Town Planner), Jim Monahan (ACF and Trails Committee member), Jon Kart

**Appoint Minute Taker:** Kate Kreider taking minutes

**Additions/Amendments to Agenda:** None

**Review February Minutes:** Minutes discussed and Ibit provided feedback with changes regarding phrasing and wording to improve clarity. Judy suggested that the commission wait until next month to approve the minutes to allow for edits. February minutes will be reviewed for approval during the next meeting.

**Beeken/Rivershore Trail Bridge Repair Conservation Reserve Fund Application:**

Jim Monahan presented his proposal on behalf of the Trails Committee. In August of 2022, Jim and fellow Trails Committee Member Callie Ewald did a thorough assessment of the bridges on the Beeken/Rivershore Trail in Richmond. As a result of this assessment they identified five bridges requiring rehabilitation or replacement, including three that need full replacement. The idea is to replace the bridges in-kind while also widening and lengthening them to allow the possibility of handicap accessibility in the future. One bid has been obtained from VYCC (Vermont Youth Conservation Corps) and the Trails Committee is requesting a total of \$23,189 from the Conservation Reserve Fund.

**Discussion** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Bob:** The proposal is solid, I just have one question. On page 3 where it states that 'A more fine-tuned budget will be made available,' do you think you need more quotes and do you think that the price will change a lot?

**Jim:** We didn't know if we would need more bids before this will be approved, so we only have one so far.

**Ravi:** at least 3 bids are required unless there aren't enough vendors, or the cost of the project is below a certain amount. You would need 3 bids for this project.

**Bob:** What is the timeline for construction? It sounds like we need two more bids before we can move forward.

**Jim:** I can get two more bids. In terms of timeline for starting construction, it depends on when the trail dries out.

**Jon Kart:** how are the bridges going to be anchored/tethered to keep them secure when there is flooding?

**Jim:** When I talked with Stephen from VYCC we were clear that we would need to extend the bridges and make them wider to make them sturdier and more accessible. I agree that the bridges need to be anchored but I haven't thought about that yet.

**Jon:** I know from my experience that anchoring bridges is effective to protect them from washing away.

**Daniel:** Based on the specifications and building materials that I have read in the quote from the VYCC it looks like the bridges will be anchored into the ground and that they will be robust.

**Ibit:** I have a question regarding wheelchair access. Has that really been talked through? It's hard to imagine wheelchairs on the trail considering all of the sand and vegetation.

**Jim:** No, this hasn't been talked through yet. Our thought process is that if we are going to replace some of the bridges, let's make them wheelchair accessible to allow for the possibility of part of the trail being modified to be wheelchair accessible in the future.

**Ibit:** The pictures of the bridges don't show a lot of damage, but I assume someone has thoroughly looked at them?

**Jim:** It is hard to see details of the damage in the pictures included in the application. I do have many more photos and I have assessed the bridges thoroughly.

**Ibit:** Priority number 1 is the highest priority to replace?

**Jim:** Yes, but there is an error in the report with how some of the ratings match up in the VYCC quote. Three bridges were identified as needing full replacement.

**Ibit:** I trust your judgment.

**Jim:** This trail gets heavy use and the bridges that need to be replaced are in very bad condition.

**Daniel:** Building material costs have skyrocketed, and I see that this is reflected in this budget. I use this trail and I have seen that some of the bridges are sitting on an unstable surface due to erosion and some of the wood is rotting/punky.

**Judy:** We should really get those other two bids before we sign off on this application. We should communicate the details of this application to the Richmond Land Trust too.

**Ibit:** VYCC is a local company. Wouldn't it be better to use them?

**Judy:** I'm just saying that we need three bids. I support using local companies as well. It would also give us a more accurate idea of the range in cost for the work.

**Bob:** Ravi, if there is only one vendor, do we still need 3 bids?

**Ravi:** If you can't get 3 bids because of a lack of vendors, then it's okay to have less than 3 bids. But in this case there should be enough vendors in the area.

**Judy:** I don't want to go to the selectboard with one bid and an uncertain cost amount.

**Jim:** I can try to get two more bids by the next meeting.

**Judy:** Ask Josh if you need help finding vendors.

**Jim:** I want to make sure that the bids are thorough so that they are accurate. I may not be able to have all the bids by the next meeting, and some may be higher than the VYCC bid.

**Judy:** We can recommend that you receive the maximum amount (highest bid), and then you can choose which vendor to use. We can also convene a special meeting for this if needed.

**Bob:** If I was on the selectboard and I saw the highest bid chosen, I would question it.

**Ravi:** It depends on a range of different factors. In my experience, there have been times that I have supported different priced bids, sometimes high, mid, or low.

**Jim:** If anyone knows any bridge builders or people they would recommend, let me know.

**Daniel:** I can connect with you and give you some recommendations.

**Jim:** Sounds good.

**Judy:** Thank you for the great proposal and we look forward to hearing more.

**The Conservation Commission members unanimously agreed to refrain from voting on this application until three bids are obtained.**

**Offer of assistance from town for RCC projects** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Ravi:** Kayla, the zoning administrator doesn't have a lot of work right now. She has asked if there is anything she can help with. However, she only has a month left in her contract.

**Judy:** I suggest help with Green Up Day: Ibit is spearheading this project. Another project is the ongoing Emerald Ash Borer removal. We still need town resources for this and it is still here. Maybe an EAB (emerald Ash Borer) task force could be created? Some other project ideas we have include: frog and amphibian crossings, a climate change study at ACF (Andrews Community Forest), closing Cochran road for a specified time for recreational use, and removal of invasive plants.

**Bob:** Can you give us some examples of what the administrator can do?

**Ravi:** She can do any small task that you need help with.

**Jon Kart:** Some suggestions that I have include: assistance with continuity of documentation for projects, and an adopt a tree program for EAB where you get volunteers to monitor and care for an Ash tree in town.

**Ravi:** Out of these ideas, which one of these is the highest priority?

**Judy:** The most time sensitive project is Green Up Day.

**Ibit:** I could use help with how to get the map set up and how to get people to sign up for Green Up Day. I will need help managing and coordinating the physical and online map and figuring out what streets need volunteers.

**Judy:** The conservation commission is supposed to be the coordinator of Green Up Day, but Linda is a co-coordinator too.

**Ravi:** Kayla and I can help with this.

**Judy:** How do we coordinate the physical map with the electronic map? This was an issue last year. Also, the state wants to know the number of people who volunteer, but we don't have a good way to get a head count. Getting some help with those issues would be good.

**Ibit:** The administrator (Kayla) will only be on for a month?

**Ravi:** Yes, but she can work on some of it and then I can help finish it up. She could definitely help with the maps. I'm not sure about how to tackle the issue regarding counting the number of volunteers.

**Ibit:** Is this person on duty now? Linda and I are meeting to talk about Green Up Day this week, so maybe she could join?

**Ravi:** Yes.

### **Update on ACFC (Andrews Community Forest Committee) Recent Meeting** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Daniel:** I attended the ACFC meeting last week and it was a comprehensive meeting about the current configuration of trails. We looked at the management plan and then the trail proposal and compared them. Any proposal will require some compromise. The current configuration has three upper trails. The trail furthest west goes through multiple ecologically sensitive areas. The ACFC decided to take away this trail. One of the other upper trails does go through a deer yard, however this trail will not be used in the winter time. The two remaining trails will provide a loop in the upper zone and maintain connectivity to the Sip of Sunshine Trail. The trail mileage is now very close to what was originally proposed. The next step is to get input from the public regarding this updated trail proposal. The ACFC would also like feedback from the Trails Committee and this commission (Conservation Commission). The ACFC are also in the process of updating the management plan for the forest. They want the management plan and trail proposal to agree.

**Judy:** It sounds like a lot of work and thought has been put into this. Can you please say more about the public comment?

**Daniel:** There is a subcommittee of the ACFC that is working on communication with the public. They posted publicly on FPF seeking feedback from the public.

**Bob:** Do you know when the trails and conservation committee will be invited to comment?

**Judy:** I'll send you an email I received tonight from the ACFC. It is asking for us to comment through the website for public comment.

**Daniel:** The ACFC are specifically looking for our comments about the new trail proposal.

**Bob:** How do I get that information?

**Daniel:** (Shared the website via zoom chat)

**Bob:** When are we going to deliberate this so that we can submit our feedback on the new trail proposal?

**Judy:** We could discuss it tonight if we have time.

**Dan:** It looks like the public comment period ends March 28th.

**Bob:** That is very soon. Will we convene a special meeting for this?

**Judy:** Let's get through the rest of the agenda first and then decide our options for discussing this.

**Bob:** Were all of the aspects of the management plan considered?

**Daniel:** They were all incorporated into the discussion/ matrix that the ACFC used for decision making, but each objective was not specifically reviewed and discussed independently due to the large number of objectives.

**EAB (Emerald Ash Borer) Next Steps tabled until next meeting due to lack of time.**

**Ongoing Discussion of the ACFC (Andrews Community Forest Committee) Recent Meeting** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Judy:** Let's take some time now to figure out how to handle our discussion of the new trail proposal. Do we want to convene a special meeting or discuss it now?

**Jon:** I would encourage you to say that the committee needs more time to prepare comments. The March 28th deadline is too soon. You need to make sure you have the necessary information to make an informed decision.

**Judy:** That is a good suggestion.

**Jon:** There's a new report about trail use titled: Wildlife & Recreation: Understanding and Managing the Effects of Trail Use on Wildlife. I think you will find it interesting and helpful in your response to the Andrew's Forest Committee's request for comments. The report was researched and written by Meredith Naughton, a UVM grad student for the Vermont Departments of Forest, Park & Recreation and Fish & Wildlife. I will email it to the Commission members after this meeting.

**Judy:** Thank you Jon, that would be great. I appreciate the need for the ACFC to move ahead with this project. I see their written comment format as a way to decrease volatility versus in-person public discussions.

**Jon:** A written review process is fine. But I feel that there are still a lot of questions left unanswered and more information is needed. It's important for the public to have enough information to make solid, informed decisions and opinions.

**Judy:** Let's weigh in. We have a couple options. I would like to move this along but we also need to do it in an informed manner. We could ask the ACFC for more time to discuss this so we can focus on it during our next meeting, or we could try to convene a special meeting.

**Jon:** I would suggest that you send them your questions so that they can give you answers.

**Judy:** I feel like I've gotten a lot of information and I don't have specific questions right now.

**Jon:** At the last meeting, at least one member asked if the initial proposal was drafted properly. Another question that was raised: what were the basic assumptions in terms of trail use volume in order to evaluate how many trails are needed? Other public members have not had their questions answered. These can be resolved easily if they can respond and provide answers/information.

**Dan:** I feel like the questions have been answered. The management plan has information on the amount of trails. I would be fine with holding a special meeting to discuss this. I feel that we have the information that we need.

**Judy:** Maybe we should have a special meeting within the next couple weeks to discuss this further after we have had more time to look at the information.

**Bob:** I want to see the changes in the management plan before I can understand and make an informed decision.

**Dan:** The public comment now is just for the trail changes, the master plan is in process of being updated and is not yet complete.

**Bob:** The management plan needs to be in alignment with the trail plan.

**Judy:** (Members briefly discussed availability for a special meeting). I will contact the ACFC and let them know that the March 28th deadline is too soon and we will need more time to discuss this due to Conservation commissioners' vacation schedules. Individuals are welcome to comment online if they would like. We will discuss this at our next meeting. (All Conservation Commissioners agree).

**Bob:** Is there anything else that we want to ask Jessie and the ACFC?

**Jon:** I would ask for more details about how your information/feedback will be used or presented.

**Daniel:** All committees use a public comment process, this is pretty standard. I'm wondering if the level of scrutiny with this particular process is different than with other instances?

**Jon:** Generally, you want to gather information and report back at each key step in the process and review everything to make sure you are answering all of the public's

questions/concerns. I have been going through this process as a member of the transportation committee. The ACFC has not done this.

**Judy:** I encourage you to comment individually and we will come back to this in April.

### **Green up Day Update** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Ibit:** I reviewed the provided documents from previous Green Up Days and I reviewed the state website. I reached out to Linda to meet with her and I am looking forward to also meeting with the town zoning administrator too to get some assistance from her. By our next meeting I hope to have more information to report to you and some suggestions of ways that we as a commission can help with the planning and management of Green Up Day.

**Bob:** Do you have the information you need to access the electronic map?

**Ibit:** I'm not sure that I do, but I will ask Ravi.

**Bob:** I will see if I have it and email it to you.

**Judy:** I'm willing to have an ad hoc group meet to help you with this if you need it.

**Ibit:** Thanks. I will fill you in after I meet with Linda and the town zoning administrator and let you know what help I need.

### **Conservation Commission Members Project Ideas** (Paraphrased and edited for brevity and clarity)

**Judy:** What resources do we need to move our projects forward? Do we need to set priorities? The projects suggested so far include: a climate change study/ every 5 year ecological assessment at ACFC, amphibian road crossings, invasive plant management, cyclovia on Cochran road (closing road for pedestrians), a study of part of the winooski river.

**Bob:** The biggest need is funding. I can look into who can do the ecological assessment at ACFC.

**Judy:** Do we want to establish criteria for determining priority?

**Dan:** They all seem important. We could do some research and figure out what is the most feasible to work on first.

**Judy:** For our next step, please figure out what resources you need to move your idea forward. I'll write up the project ideas in a spreadsheet and send it around so that members can indicate what they are interested in working on.

**Dan:** For these projects, would we need to find a third party to apply for Conservation Reserve funds?

**Judy:** Yes I believe we would. It is a conflict of interest if we apply, but I will confirm with Josh.

**Bob:** Daniel, I know the woman who has managed amphibian crossings in Huntington, you could contact her.

**Dan:** Thanks. I was thinking of starting with signs for the crossings, then maybe organizing volunteers to help with crossings on certain nights. Can we put a call out to people who can help with this/ who are knowledgeable?

**Judy:** Yes.

### **Renewing Committee Membership**

Commissioners briefly reviewed the process for renewing membership for members whose seats are expiring. Judy stated that she believes herself and Kit are up for renewal, but she will check with Josh, the town manager.

**Motion to Adjourn Approved. Meeting adjourned at 9:30PM.**