

DRAFT

RICHMOND CONSERVATION COMMISSION Meeting Minutes, Tuesday November 8, 2016

Town Center Meeting Room, 203 Bridge St., 7:30 p.m.

Attendees: Rick Barrett, Jake, Davignon, Mary Houle, Bob Low, Judy Rosovsky, Elizabeth
"Ibit" Wright

Guests: Bob Heiser – Vermont Land Trust
Ethan Tapper – Chittenden County Forester
Fritz Martin – Richmond Land Trust

7:30 Public comments:

- Mary Houle stated that approximately 82% of Richmond registered voters, voted today.

7:35 Appoint minute taker; review, amend and approve October minutes:

- October Minutes were Approved
- Rick Barrett was assigned to take the minutes of the November meeting.

7:40 Additions, amendments to agenda:

- None

7:45 Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester – partnership possibilities with RCC:

- Ethan introduced himself to the Committee and gave it an overview of his responsibilities and the services he can offer to private land owners; as well as Town managers of Town forests. Ethan came on board in June of 2016 and is the youngest County Forester to have been hired. He earned his forestry degree at UVM. Ethan offered to be a resource for Richmond in whatever way he can.
- Bob Low asked if Ethan believes that wind turbines would be compatible in the Andrews Forest or any Town Forest. Ethan responded that each parcel needs to be analyzed on an ad hoc basis, before a meaningful management plan can be written.
- Mary Houle asked how Westford's Town Forest came to be. Bob Heiser mentioned that the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) was contacted and a plan was written to include 40 acres for agricultural use by a farmer and 130 acres to be managed by the Town, under the supervision of a licensed forester.
- Ethan said, in response to Bob Low's question, that the difference between "Protected and Conserved" is hard to define. However, Town forests should have a conservation easement, which names that particular parcel.

- Ethan said, in answer to Ibit's question, that Town forests do not need to be actively harvested in contrast to those in Current Use; which are mandated to be harvested when it's appropriate.
- Mary Houle believes that she was not treated fairly after her property flooded and asked for a clear definition of "development". Mary would like to see a broad definition for any Town forest in Richmond which would include: recreational use, small wind generation (the poles supporting turbines are not much bigger than those used in lifts), any named recreational uses should appeal to a wide range of recreators. Mary believes that both active harvesting and conservation should be in any plan. She also believes that connectivity (of conserved parcels) invites the spread of diseases which can harm the tree and plant life in forests. Mary also believes that hunting should be allowed in a Town forest.
- Bob Heiser and Ethan answered jointly. Again, a conservation easement is important. The parcel should be open to the public but allow Towns to recover costs for maintenance of trails and other related expenses. Cross country trails can certainly be a valid use (which answers a question from Bob Low). There really shouldn't be any cost to users who are walking, hiking, birding or studying the forest. Development can include lean-to's or shelters to support recreational and educational activities and perhaps small equipment sheds. Generally, there is an inventory of current uses of the parcel developed, before a plan is written. Hunting can be included, unless the Town believes it would present a hazard to users. A management plan can also include the production of forest products; which could even result in a small saw-mill for exclusive use by forest managers.
- Hinesburg drafted a management plan after receiving as much public input as it could. Their plan is less technical and leans more to designating different areas of the forest to be used for different activities. It was noted that Hinesburg's forest didn't have plan; because it was acquired as abandoned property.

8:00 Bob Heiser, Ethan Tapper and RCC held general discussion about the Andrews Forest parcel:

- Bob Heiser gave the Committee a brief history of the Andrews Family property and how it came to be conserved and used today. He also discussed the results of the VLT survey which asked Richmond residents about what kind of uses they would like to see in a Town forest. Since the former Andrews Farm has been taken over by Maple Wind Farm the Andrews Family is interested in conserving the "Andrews Forest". The 428 acres have been appraised at \$ 540,000; however the VLT has an option to purchase them for \$ 450,000. The VLT frequently has no retaining ownership of conserved parcels and is willing to transfer purchase options to municipalities and non-profits. Richmond's Selectboard has expressed an interest in taking an assignment of the option.

Bob Heiser and Ethan Tapper believe the parcel would be an excellent addition to conserved lands in Richmond and surrounding communities. It would allow for the continuing of wildlife corridors, the connection of recreational trails, provide

educational opportunities for the VYCC (which is right next door); all by attaching to larger blocks of conserved lands in Chittenden County. There is a possibility of receiving grants from a few different entities, including the Federal Community Forest & Open Space Grant, the Vermont Housing Conservation Board, the Conservation Reserve Fund (CRF) and other private and/or non-profit donors.

Ordinarily the Town needs to make the application for grants; which is one of the reasons Bob and Ethan asked to familiarize the Richmond Conservation Committee with the proposal. It can be expected that an application will come before the Committee for review and recommendation to the Selectboard. The application could ask for approximately a sum not to exceed \$ 125,000 or \$150,000.

Management of a Town Forest can be by the Town or by an assignee of the Town. Currently Vermont has approximately 100 municipal forests; which are managed by conservation committees, non-profits, special committees and sometimes jointly by entities in concert with educational institutions like UVM. Management plans are living documents and the VLT is available to lead a panel discussion about managing town forests. Bob Low suggested that any committee or organization created to manage a town forest for Richmond be small enough to be effective. Mary Houle suggested that any conservation easement be kept broad enough to allow a variety of uses (see above). Ibit, as does Mary Houle, wants to be sure that no one stake-holder (like mountain bikers) have an undue influence on a management plan. Bob Heiser and Judy suspect that it is possible to keep an easement fairly open; but that the funding sources may have some restrictions on future use.

Bob Low stressed that any expression of support from the Conservation Committee cannot supersede the rendering of an application and review by the Committee. He also reminded all, that ultimately the Selectboard would have to present the proposal to the Town for vote. All present agreed that support from the Town is almost essential to attract grant funds.

8:30 Fritz Martin on Gillett Pond:

Bob Low recused himself and left the room before any discussion of Gillett Pond. Fritz advised the Committee that it has a video online; which gives a good overview of recent events involving Gillett Pond and its sale to the Richmond Land Trust by the Girl Scouts. The RLT & Friends of Gillette Pond were able to raise \$ 150,000 in donations to purchase the pond; but is now facing approximately \$ 650,000 in costs to replace the dam; which breached during 2013 flooding. Removing the dam would cost approximately \$ 200,000. So, repairing and preserving the dam allows the pond to survive and continue to provide a variety of recreational and educational activities to Richmond, Huntington and other visitors. Fritz wanted to

bring the Committee up to date on RLT's and the "Friends" plans to initiate a fund raising program. He expects that they will be making an application to the RCC for seed funding. Fritz also mentioned that all of the funding will need to be in place, before any contractor would sign on to the project. The application could request a sum to exceed \$150,000 or \$200,000.

Mary Houle noted that frequently these projects fail to allow for adequate parking. Fritz responded by advising that the project would allow for 6 – 8 additional parking spaces and also serve to assist in flood control during future heavy rains.

8:50 Regional Planning Energy Policy update and issues

- Geoff, Claire Bob and Judy are going to meet with Melanie Needle to discuss the Town and Regional Plans. The CCRP GIS maps will be included to see if there are any conflicts between the two plans. Mary Houle stated that Jimmy Cochran does not want to exclude wind generation from his property.

9:05 Updates: Jack Linn (Richmond Resident) and invasives, budget:

- Jack Linn would like to see more assistance to large land owners with invasive problems. The CC can invite him to come in and express his concerns and see if John Kart and the Chittenden Forester (Ethan Tapper) could help resolve some of his issues.
- The RCC should have about \$1,000 in the budget for advertising and to cover costs of training and/or workshops.

9:20 Matters arising

- Bob Low suggested that we do more to alert the Town to the plans for wind turbines on Bryant Hill (Cochran Ski Area). It was agreed that an FPF informational posting from RCC would be useful.

9:30 Adjourn

- Adjourned at 09:25