

MEMO

To: Richmond Selectboard
From: Hannah Phillips, Interim Town Forest Committee Chair
Re: Formation of the new Andrews Community Forest Committee (ACFC)

The Andrews Community Forest Committee will be 7-9 members, with two members recommended for appointment by the RCC and two members recommended for appointment by the Trails Committee.

While it is the Selectboard's decision to appoint members to the Andrews Community Forest Committee, they asked for the recommendations of the Interim Committee. Because some members of the Interim Committee wish to continue on the full committee, we formed an ad hoc committee of the three members who will not be continuing (Ibit Wright, Willie Lee, and Hannah Phillips), and asked for the advisorship of Josh Arneson (Town Manager) and Bob Heiser (Vermont Land Trust), to consider the list of applicants.

We received twelve additional applications for the remaining 3-5 spots, so opted to select 5 candidates.

Desired Characteristics of Committee Members

- Interested in land management, natural resources, outdoor recreation, and education
- Interested in volunteering time outside of committee meetings to on-the-ground management tasks on the new Andrews Community Forest.
- Willing to commit to meetings once per month for one to three years (depending on term).
- Able to act on behalf of the whole community, rather than a single group.
- Kind and respectful to individuals with differing perspectives.

Desired Composition of the Committee:

- Age diversity
- Gender diversity
- Diversity of life experience and perspective
- Continuity from Interim Committee to full Committee (at least three members)
- Someone with ecological expertise/natural resource management experience.
- Someone with a connection to the local public schools and/or universities
- Someone with trail building experience.
- Someone with stewardship/land management experience
- Someone with familiarity with town processes.

- Someone with familiarity with conservation easements.

Primary Tasks for the Committee to Address over the next 1-3 years

- Grant-writing (shift from planning to implementation).
- Engagement/outreach/education
- Day-to-day stewardship/management
- Trail building, signage, boundary marketing, etc.
- Ongoing ecological studies, inventory, monitoring

Trail Committee Recommended Appointments:

Jim Monahan (TC member): Jim is a multi-use trail advocate and builder; and a middle school math teacher. He is a dedicated member of the TC and has experience organizing volunteer work days and leading work crews.

Tyler Merritt (TC member): Tyler has been involved in the Richmond Town Forest project since the very beginning (though did not serve on the Interim Committee), and worked with Bob Heiser in the early phases of conservation. He is a trail advocate and trail builder.

Richmond Conservation Commission Recommended Appointments:

Guy Roberts (TC member): Guy has served on the Interim Committee from the beginning, and was the original Chair. He rarely misses meetings, is an excellent collaborator, can see issues from a variety of perspectives, and is willing to commit lots of time outside meetings to Committee work (trail work, grant applications, etc.).

Wright Preston: Wright has served on the Interim Committee from the beginning and has been an asset to the Committee all along. He rarely misses meetings, has experience managing large conserved forest tracks, understands day-to-day on the ground maintenance needs, and has generously volunteered his time and equipment to chainsawing trees, brushhogging the VAST trail, installing signs, and coordinating permitting for the kiosk. He also has experience serving on town governance committees, so brings this perspective to the Committee's tasks.

Interim Committee Recommended Appointments:

Cecilia Danks: Cecilia has been on the Interim Committee from the start. She is a Professor of Environmental Studies at UVM (so brings the University connection to the committee). She specializes in studying community forests, is a balanced, respectful, dedicated committee member, and adeptly facilitates challenging conversations. She rarely misses meetings.

Rob Peterson: Rob Peterson is the Parks Director for the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, and has extensive experience coordinating multiple uses on publicly-owned lands.

He brings a wealth of experience addressing issues such as those that arise on the new town forest, and would be an asset to the Committee.

Marcy Harding: Marcy brings familiarity with conservation easements, town governance, and regulatory structures. This type of administrative expertise will be an asset to the committee as we move from the “planning” phase into the “implementation” phase of work on the Town Forest.

Geoff Urbanik: Geoff needs no introduction. He has assisted with the Town’s acquisition of the Town Forest from the beginning and knows the administrative intricacies of municipal ownership, decision-making, and management. Beyond that, he is a strong advocate for conservation, attended a number of town forest walks with his family, and spoke eloquently about the benefits of conservation to the Town at a press release event related to the Town Forest at VYCC in August.

Interim Committee Top Candidates

Committee members do not know these individuals, but based on their letters, we felt they both had unique perspectives to offer, as described below. We encourage the Selectboard to revisit our “desired committee composition” description above as they consider what these individuals would contribute to the conversation.

Selectboard should select one of the two for full committee size of 9:

Pete Halvorsen: In a Town that occasionally feels the stark contrast between “old timers” and “newcomers,” Pete offers a genuine connection to the Andrews family, to their legacy of working lands, and expresses a traditional Vermont land ethic in his letter of interest. This perspective has the potential to ground the committee’s work in the land’s history, linking past to present. He participates in the Richmond Master Naturalist Program.

Ellen Kraft: We appreciated Ellen’s letter of interest for the connection she’d bring to the youth of Richmond, and also because she’d offer a different perspective than many of the other applicants. We would really like someone who has a connection to the local schools, which perhaps Ellen could bring to the conversation.