

Caitlin Littlefield and I (Nick Neverisky) are resigning from the Andrews Community Forest Committee (ACFC), effective after this Monday's meeting. I am the Chair and have served on the committee for nearly 3 years. Caitlin was appointed via a recommendation from the Conservation Commission and has served on the committee for over 3 years. We are resigning for the following reasons:

### **Reason One**

We do not believe quality work can be done when the Selectboard Chair repeatedly disparages the ACFC. I've reached out to Jay multiple times asking for his perspective and we've integrated some of his recommendations (e.g., pedestrian-only trails). Yet his most recent communication accused the committee of managing the forest to advance personal agendas. He wrote "We have wound up with a committee that, like it or not, seems motivated entirely by the desire to construct a large mountain biking park while paying lip service to all other uses." That email is available at the following link (followed by my own to which he was responding) and echoes other emails and public posts. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qvELPEMD2i2igyqys3Ur8rB0yFI0m7FZ/view>

Here is evidence that refutes the Selectboard Chair's claim and that suggests Caitlin and I (and I believe the ACFC as a whole) have sought to represent the preferences of our constituents regardless of whether or not they matched our own:

- The Selectboard, with significant community engagement, approved a plan in 2018 with multi-use trails and a connection to the north. The idea for a connector trail came from the Selectboard-approved plan, not from the current ACFC. (See p. 41 for original "concept map" <https://bit.ly/ACF2018ManagementPlan>)
- In multiple structured comment periods, the most common theme the ACFC heard was support for the trail proposal. This demonstrates that, in proposing this route, the ACFC is listening to its constituents, not misrepresenting them (May 2022 comments summary by ACFC: <https://bit.ly/ACFMay2022comments> / March 2023 comments summarized by a third-party facilitator: <https://bit.ly/ACFMarch2023Comments>)
- The ACFC has adjusted the proposed trail network multiple times to safeguard ecological values, thereby integrating the preferences of preservation-minded constituents. For example: a) The original concept map called for a loop in the NW quadrant. Our ecological consultant Arrowwood Environmental indicated we could reduce ecological impact by moving that NW trail into the NE, a recommendation the ACFC acted on two years ago. b) A previous proposal included a trail close to a wildlife corridor. Based in part on community concern about that proximity, the ACFC eliminated that trail. c) We have been developing a trail stewardship plan that would close parts of the network to protect wildlife

in the winter and spring. d) We responded to calls for trails that do not allow bikes and have identified areas for foot-traffic only.

## Reason Two

We are done shouldering the emotional toll of accusations that we are leveraging our volunteer public positions for personal gain despite our attempts to do nothing but represent a divergent set of community preferences. Specifically, as private community members, neither Caitlin nor I would prefer trails to the ACF ridge. But as public servants we have pursued a trail network that includes those connections because this represents the many constituents who want them and, not without reason, believe the town committed to establishing them when the parcel was purchased in 2018.

I encourage the Selectboard to look beyond the impassioned voices they hear from most to a broader set of their constituents, as the ACFC has sought to do. The Selectboard Chair represented the perspectives of community members who would prefer the forest be managed more strongly for ecological preservation (which is a valid preference). In the spirit of keeping the dialogue from skewing toward a single perspective, we will close by sharing comments the ACFC received that voice a different perspective (which is also a valid preference). These comments were submitted in association with our March 23, 2023 public event.

- You have done a GREAT job trying to satisfy many constraints and demands.
- I'm delighted by the changes. I think the balance and tradeoffs between conservation and recreation have been thoughtful and well-considered.
- Overall it is a great product! While it's not everything everyone wants, it strikes a balance our town needs at this point in time.
- I do not suggest any additional changes, in fact I hope the plan does not bend in the direction of a few persistent voices, opposed to supporting the majority of this community which values trail use. Please do not change the mandates of the original management plan.
- I am concerned about the direction this process has taken. It appears that the more vocal public voices have the desire to minimize the public access to this property to make it an unchanged and inaccessible preserve.
- It is well thought out and taking into account a lot of impact and learning and the changes are evidence of compromise.
- I am concerned that a few loud voices (on the preservation side) are being over-represented.