

Andrews Community Forest Committee
Meeting minutes for January 22nd, 2024

Members present: Daniel Schmidt (co-chair), Ian Stokes (co-chair), Brad Elliott, Julian Portilla, Chase Rosenburg, Wright Preston, Melissa Wolaver

Members Zooming in: Cecilia Danks (joined at 6:35 pm)

Public present: Sam Pratt

Public Zooming in: Nancy Zimny, Paul Hauf, Bob Low

December minutes accepted. Daniel called the meeting called to order at 6:10 p.m. Julian moved to approve the December 2023 minutes, Wright seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Welcome to new members. Daniel welcomed Wright and Brad to the ACFC, and invited all members to share which ACFC business was exciting them about 2024 and what they see as a personal challenge as a member. Feedback ranged from high hopes for completing the Management Plan revision to broadening personal understanding of the forest's functions and expanding opportunities for people to enjoy and learn from the ACF's resources.

Elsewhere in Town Government. Daniel described recent topics of the Richmond Conservation Commission, including its offer to help ACFC subcommittees and working groups move forward on their tasks. Ian described the RCC's willingness to summarize "take-home messages" of the expert panel it assembled to discuss human impacts on wildlife and habitats. Daniel reviewed his discussion of ACFC procedures with the Selectboard at its early January meeting, and also the ongoing discussion among the Selectboard, Town Manager and the Town's attorney of how subcommittee meetings can conform with Vermont's Open Meeting laws and procedures.

ACFC membership terms and upcoming openings. Wright and Dan are filling seats with terms that will expire in May. Ian noted that in order to have these filled on time the Town should advertise the openings by the end of February with a deadline at the end of March. That would allow applicants for appointment or reappointment to undergo review by the Conservation Commission, Trails Committee and ACFC at their April meetings so the Selectboard can make the appointments in May.

Roadmap for revising the Management Plan. Daniel expressed hopes for gaining a clear sense of what the ACFC needs to accomplish with the revision process in 2024, whether it's creating an all-new Management Plan or a variation of the existing one. Wright sees a sequential order for the process as most efficient. Melissa suggested that some tasks could be taken on simultaneously. Chase said current drafts focus on revising the current draft revision to include a

trail stewardship plan and pedestrian-only trails, described by Ian as reflecting wishes of the public as well as discussions with Selectboard members. Ian noted that the RFP for a writer to help with the revision would spell out work to be done by the ACFC and work that the writer would handle, and sources of information available to all parties.

Draft of Trail Stewardship Plan. The discussion moved to whether the Trail Stewardship Plan would be integrated into the Management Plan or would be an appendix to that document. Ian listed three elements that the Stewardship Plan should include – a vision for the Forest, drawn from the Conservation Easement; criteria for establishing new trails; and how the stewardship practices needed to manage those trails. Discussion flowed into the major tasks for the revision, which are seen as:

- Getting the public engaged
- Navigating the Town’s Zoning Regulations, particularly with regard to its requirements for development on steep slopes over 20%
- Creating an RFP that defines the division of labor between the ACFC and writer
- Integrating the Indigenous Lands Acknowledgement

Chase suggested setting a goal for advancing a multi-use trail by year-end 2024. Brad made a case for including in the Stewardship Plan more about assessing and monitoring wildlife impacts of trail development, referencing information available in the UVM Field Naturalist report on the ACFC and Meredith Naughton’s work for VT Fish & Wildlife Department as sources. Work will proceed on this.

RFP for Management Plan. Daniel described the template for many of the management plans he’s worked on:

- Vision for the property, drawn from the Conservation Easement
- Background, including cultural history and natural features
- Management goals and action items
- Appendices supporting the above.

Julian stated his wish for a Plan to help the public responsibly use the Forest while giving ACFCers a way to measure their progress in attaining the Plan’s goals. Cecilia sees a need for the Plan to serve more as a policy document for guiding goals and actions year by year, while Chase expressed concern about the amount of time that might be spent reviewing actions in light of an overly detailed Plan.

For the RFP, Ian said it should help the writer understand the parameters of the assignment without feeling that the ACFC would be micro-managing every step of the project.

Julian suggested focusing on the “hot spots” that have stymied previous efforts. These require balancing the need to keep the forest ecologically intact while enabling people to enjoy and learn from its natural features. As “hot spot” examples he cited:

- Where, how and when the ACFC is accessible
- How we care for the Forest’s wildlife
- Updating the trails map

Nancy Zimny said the Committee needs to “come to grips” with the pressures that the mountain biking boom could bring to the Forest’s integrity. She stated her agreement with Cecilia that the ACFC needed to resolve this, not the consultant.

Daniel noted that there is no subcommittee or working group focused on wildlife stewardship, including establishing a baseline and monitoring change.

Chase suggested that questions regarding complying with the Town’s Zoning Regulations needed resolution. He suggested a meeting with the Development Review Board. Wright said we could explore seeing if an engineering review of a trail plan would be adequate, vs. a plan drawn by an engineer.

Participants then volunteered to serve on these working groups:

- Zoning administrator/engineering site plan - Daniel, Wright (Melissa)
- Wildlife stewardship plan - Chase, Brad, Sam
- RFP - Brad, Ian (Daniel)
- Laundry basket (AKA, all of our documentation, maps, links on the town website, Ian's website, and the google drive) - Brad, Julian Sam (Bob Low)
- Preparation for hotspots conversation in February - Daniel, Julian

Review most recent provisional trail map. Using the latest map of proposed trails. Daniel and Chase pointed out which could be designated for pedestrian use only and which would be multi-use. Brad suggested that base maps for trail planning and discussion show the location of ecologically sensitive features identified in field assessments, as well as any challenges presented by forest topography.

Wrapping up. Bob Low listed three priorities for the ACFC: “The Management Plan, the Management Plan and the Management Plan.” He said mapping should be set aside until the revision was finished, and that there were members of the public ready to help the Committee in the revision effort. He feels the current RFP draft needs more work once the Committee decides what the Plan needs to convey.

Sam Pratt expressed his hope that better maps could be produced that would show accurate locations of sensitive features to support their protection. Daniel suggested tasking the “laundry

basket” working group with identifying the kinds of content needed on Committee maps. Bob Low suggested reviewing the many maps he and others have already made available at the ad hoc compendium of ACFC information assembled by Ian, <https://infoacf.wordpress.com>.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Elliott