

1 **Andrews Community Forest Committee**
2 **Minutes of Regular Meeting**
3 **November 25, 2024**
4

5 **Present:**

6 ACFC: Ian Stokes; co-chair, Melissa Wolaver; acting co-chair, Jim Cochran, Cecilia Danks, Brad Elliott, Sam
7 Pratt, Wright Preston
8 Town of Richmond: Tyler Machia, Richmond Zoning Administrator
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10 **Public:**

11 Merrick Gillies, Kit Emery, Jeanette Malone, Dan Woldson, Max Krieger, Nancy Zimny, Bard Hill
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13 Wright Preston: appointed timekeeper. Brad Elliott: appointed minute taker.
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15 Recorded video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmrZ1u94OEQ>
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17 Melissa Wolaver called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. She announced that though Chase Rosenberg was
18 originally scheduled to chair this and the following two meetings, he was out of town and she volunteered to
19 step in. Chase will co-chair the December, January and February meetings. She then welcomed new ACFC
20 members Jim Cochran – nominee of the Trails Committee – and Sam Pratt – representative of the
21 Conservation Committee – to the ACFC.
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23 **Minutes approved with corrections**

24 The description of Jim Cochran’s other memberships was corrected. Brad Elliott moved to accept the minutes,
25 Wright Preston seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
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27 **Discussion of Zoning Regulations for Trail Development**

28 Melissa introduced Tyler Machia, Richmond Zoning Administrator, who summarized the [memo](#) he sent the
29 Committee regarding the Town’s Zoning Regulations on proposed trail and other infrastructure development
30 on slopes exceeding 20%. His goal is to help ACFC speed the expansion of recreational opportunities in the
31 ACF by minimizing regulatory reviews, such as by avoiding routes on steep slopes and making use of existing
32 agricultural and forest roads. He said he’s been granted extra time to help the ACFC navigate the regulations
33 with an eye toward facilitating trail development.
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35 Tyler explained why trails meet the regulations’ definition of “land development” and thus are under the
36 purview of the DRB. Jim Cochran questioned if other towns view trails as development, and why Richmond
37 views them that way. Tyler said his and the DRB’s job was limited to interpreting the scope of Richmond’s
38 regulations as it stands. He recommended that if members decide they want trails exempted from the zoning
39 regulations they speak with the Planning Commission about changing the rules. He and the DRB will interpret
40 them as they are written.
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42 Jeanette Malone asked where in the updated ACF Management Plan the requirements for slope development
43 might best reside. Tyler felt we might simply say, “Follow Richmond zoning regulations,” perhaps in the
44 section of the Plan dealing with topography.

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46 Dan Wolfson asked if there were parts of the ACF where trails could be built immediately. Tyler
47 recommended clearing brush and overgrowth from existing agricultural or forestry trails. The Selectboard
48 would still need to sign off on the project as the property's owner.

49

50 Max Krieger questioned Machias' use of the dictionary definition of "trail" vs. others he said are favored by
51 state and other zoning administrators. He asked if Machias would be open to changing his interpretation of the
52 regulations. Machias read from a section of the regulations stating that Town zoning administrators must
53 administer regulations literally, and deny applications that don't conform to regulations.

54

55 Kit Emery asked if the zoning regulations reflect climate change, as it's addressed in the Richmond Town
56 Plan. Tyler responded by saying that regulations are always trying to catch up with reality and that
57 Richmond's have nothing now specifically aimed at climate change.

58

59 Wright Preston noted that a prior Town zoning administrator read the regulations pertaining to "circulation"
60 the same way as they are now being read. The ZA required a zoning application to install a gate on the VAST
61 trail, on the grounds of it affecting "circulation" of pedestrian traffic in the forest.

62

63 Cecilia asked if deer stands are considered "structures" and if there's a difference between "extension" and
64 "expansion" of use. Tyler said he sees them as close in meaning, with both adding a use where it hadn't
65 existed. He said deer stands are covered by state requirements, such as the one requiring hunters to obtain
66 landowner permission before installing them. Stands probably meet Richmond's definition for "structure" but
67 their installation would be difficult for local authorities to enforce. He hasn't had to address the issue.

68

69 Cecilia asked Tyler if he could estimate the cost of the necessary documentation for trail development. Tyler
70 said he was unable to do that. Jim Cochran said that the ski area has spent \$30,000 having an engineer draw up
71 the plans required for a state stormwater permit.

72

73 Tyler clarified that his references to the Planning Commission were meant to recommend discussing with it
74 the need to change the regulations, rather than asking it to interpret the existing ones, which isn't its function.
75 He said to be prepared for an application process taking months, as is now underway with proposals for the
76 Town's Brown's Court property.

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78 Ian asked if ACFC might approach the DRB directly for informal advice on navigating trails. Tyler said it
79 wasn't the Board's function to offer advice ahead of an application, and could even breach conflict-of-interest
80 standards, requiring recusal of involved Board members. He said part of his job is to help applicants.

81

82 Melissa asked what kind of slope documentation Tyler would require before ruling on an application that
83 wouldn't require a professionally drawn plan. He said he would first rely on state maps, and that close or
84 disputed calls could require an engineer to confirm. Melissa asked if approval would be needed for
85 excavations on an existing forestry road Tyler said to avoid review the work would probably need to be
86 necessary to implement a state-approved forestry management plan. The project would need to be primarily
87 for forestry and not for a secondary use, such as recreation.

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COP 16 (Biodiversity)

Ian explained his hopes for having Julian on a future agenda to discuss his participation in and the outcomes of COP 16, the UN-sanctioned meeting in Colombia about protecting biodiversity. He noted ACFC’s mix of natural communities and our responsibilities for protecting their functioning, as well as ACF’s role in the connectivity and biodiversity of its forest block.

Brad said Brandon Benedict, the County Forester, would like to visit ACFC at its December meeting, per the Committee’s request to get the ACFs Forest Plan updated to reflect work that has been done since it was written. Brad noted that this would tie into the biodiversity topic, as much of the plan is based on enhancing ACF’s biodiversity and ecological functioning, and building resilience to climate change.

Cecilia noted that Vermont’s 30x30 goals and the Chittenden County Uplands Project would also tie into the objectives of COP-16.

Ian will work to get Julian and Benedict on the agenda for the next meeting.

MP2 Revisions

Ian reported his ongoing work to develop material for presentation at the December ACFC meeting, taking advantage of a wide range of information, including that listed on a [document](#) in the meeting packet.

Trail- and Feature-Naming

Ian suggested that ACFC rename Dana’s Climb in a way to reflect Abenaki culture, as called for in the Indigenous Agreement that will be part of the updated Management Plan. He suggested “Camel Hump View/Tawapodiiwajo Trail,” using the Abenaki word appearing on page 34 of Ethan Tapper’s *How to Love a Forest*. He also noted that many of the existing signs in the forest are faded and should be repainted or replaced.

Cecilia thanked Ian for reminding the Committee of its commitment to the agreement. She said that in developing the agreement with two tribes the suggestion was made to name trails after animals, which would be in the tribes’ cultural tradition. Some signs would then not need to be bilingual but could use images of the animals. She advocated for confirming Tapper’s term with tribal sources. She also noted an evolving issue among the four tribes regarding which one or ones have the right to speak for all of them, including in helping us incorporate their cultural perspectives into our Plan. Cecilia said she’d go back to the people she’d been working with on the agreement to get their views on naming trails.

Upcoming Biofinder Workshops

Jeanette Malone of the Richmond Conservation Commission described the special January 9 interactive workshop that RCC has arranged for Richmond Town committees. It’ll be designed to teach ACFCers and other Town committee members how to use Vermont’s BioFinder as a tool in their planning and implementation work.

VT Fish & Wildlife’s Jens Hilke has agreed to lead the session. Due to bandwidth limitations, only two or three members of each committee can be accommodated. The idea would be for those trained in using BioFinder will then teach others in the community how to use it. Jens is asking meeting participants to view two videos

135 giving background on BioFinder by December 16. By then he also needs participants to suggest three
136 questions relevant to their committee work that he can use to demonstrate the tool's potential.

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138 Ian and Brad volunteered to participate. Sam will probably do so via his membership on the Conservation
139 Commission. Ian referred members to the [document](#) in the meeting packet for more information. He described
140 how BioFinder is designed to integrate with Vermont Conservation Design, the State program to identify
141 features and practices at the landscape and natural community scales needed for an ecologically functional
142 landscape.

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144 **2024 Town Report**

145 Ian volunteered to write the report for ACFC.

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147 **Adjournment**

148 Next meetings will be on 12/16/24 and 1/27/25. Sam moved to adjourn and Wright seconded. The meeting
149 adjourned at 8:00.