Andrews Community Forest Committee
Monday, Sept 8th, 2025 - 6:30 to 8:30 PM
Location: Richmond Town Center Meeting Conf Rm C, 3rd Floor, 203 Bridge Street

Present: Jim Cochran, Sonya Mastersen, Julian Portilla, Wright Preston, Sam Pratt (in-person), Brad Elliott, Ian Stokes (remote)
Minutes: Jim Cochran

Public present:
Catherine McIntyre, Jim Monihan, Bruce Hennessey, Mike Donahue (in-person), Jesse Crary, Nicholas Ponzio, Aliza Lapierre, Joy Reap, Ian Bender, Chase Rosenburg, Adam Burnett, Jeni B, Chelseye Brooks (remote)

Additions/changes to Agenda:
Julian P: Reflection on our approach management plan. Feels that we may be sending a message to the public that the northern zone will be “closed”. Would like to discuss this before proceeding with recreation section edits.

Sam agreed to add the topic to agenda before “b. 6:40 Revisions to Management Plan”

Public comment:
Jesse C: curious about how the committee will use public input to help guide discussion about potential changes to management plan. During his tenure as chair (2020-2023) felt there was significant work to engage the public and create a management plan that included connectivity to sip of sunshine. Feels that changing the allowed uses (no dogs no bikes in the northern zone) that was voted on by the current committee are significant and substantial changes to the management plan. During my tenure as the chair, the committee worked to implement the management plan in its stated process as a result of that public process and presented accordingly to the select board.

Sam P: Shared the RFP/copy editing flow chart to exhibit the plan to solicit public comment on the updated management plan. Noted he’s the new chair and newer member of the committee and doesn’t have the full history. Initially became interested after the commotion in 2023. Understood there was concern about the extent of the proposed trails. Ultimately that kicked off updates to the management plan which resulted in the current rewrite and consideration of more scientific data and how to better balance recreation with science.

Ian S: Julian and Ian are longest tenured committee members, Ian points out that older public comments have been incorporated into the draft management plan. Points out that connectivity does exist to VYCC. He feels that the connection to Sunshine is especially challenged by zoning regs. The slow pace is in part due to the time consuming nature of infrequent open meetings.

Mike D: Points out that there is no current pedestrian connection to Sip of Sunshine. There is an existing management plan and trail plan. These should not be ignored.

Sam P: Committee has been a bit slow for a few reasons, there has been significant turnover on the committee. The committee has been working through a lengthy technical document with two hours of public meeting time per month. That has been increased to roughly five hours a month, and the management plan will be done soon, but part of that depends on the amount of public feedback.

Catherine M: Trails were approved in 2023

Jesse C: March 2023 rolled out the management plan at school. Selectboard “undercut” the work put forth and the Andrews Committee fractured.

Wright P: recommending 1 trail not 3 during first time on committee (2021?) and felt like it was a tough committee to be on as a minority with this viewpoint.

Brad E: Explained why the management plan revision occurred. A trail plan differing from concept map triggered a management plan revision, which the committee is still in the midst of. Felt that Arrowwood was not wild about the trail plan or the Sip of Sunshine connection, but it was what they were asked to do by the town as a part of the contract. This compromised the science and ecology since there was a conflict of interest since they had to put in a trail, no matter what they found in the forest. There was/is significant scientific work to Meredith Naughton, Andrea Shortsleeve, Sue Morse to help guide the current draft.

Sam P: Curious about comments about Arrowwood not being excited about the trails... were the comments made publicly?

Brad E: Yes, during the public feedback meeting at middle school, can procure a link.

Mike Donahue: Recalls the Sinuosity and Arrowwood meeting and feels that their presentation was a benchmark of ecological trail design. They came up with a balanced proposal.

Sam P: Appreciates the context. Why wasn’t there more pressure to deliver what was decided on in 2023? If the committee voted to proceed with the plan at the time, how is it that these concerns haven’t been brought up until two years later? Surprised there hasn’t been more pressure to get that plan to the selectboard.sal to the Select Board.

Is in favor of the current work in revising the management plan prior to deciding on trail development, versus proposing trails and then writing the management plan to fit the trail design.

Felt that given the extensive history that predates many members of the committee, there would be a requirement to get educated on the facts before proceeding with further public comment. Also felt it would be more fair to the public if the topic was warned, rather than proceeding with the discussion during the current meeting where the feedback is not consistent with the agenda.

Bruce H: With all respect for what has been said: feels that Arrowwood didn't disagree with the task. It was their job not to take a side on what was proposed. They were given a task and they performed it. Feels that the easement calls out specifically connectivity as a goal.

Ian S: Public comment has been significant and beneficial.

Wright P: Let's set aside an hour for the next meeting to discuss history.

Sam P: Will probably need more than an hour, likely an entire meeting.

Bruce H: The logging that has been done has been significant and intensive. Whole tree harvesting, which is much more disruptive to wildlife than trail users. We need people in the forest (via trails) so people understand the value of the forest. This is critical to keep the place what it is.

Wright P: Believed that the whole tree harvesting happened before ACF was purchased by the town. [This was verified after the meeting, to which Bruce also agreed, see email at end of minutes]

Sam P: Brandon Benedict (current county forester) has visited ACF and reviewed the forestry management plan and and didn't see a need to log in the near future. There were a few optional zones that Ethan Tapper (former forester) proposed that could be harvested if desired.

Brad E: This current management plan does allow for and encourage people to utilize the northern zone. The current forestry management plan will help recover the forest from old logging damage. Biking can happen in the future if warranted but initially the northern section should just be used for pedestrians etc.

Mike D: Existing skid roads are not ideal/sustainable due to how steep they are.Terrain is rugged and not inviting for most users.

Sam P: Agreed that in its current state the northern forest is not ideal for the average user.

Julian P: Volunteers to put something together that highlights the procedural history over the years.

Wright P: Proposed the committee return to the agenda.

Sam P: Agreed the committee should move on. More public feedback can be accepted at a future meeting. Was optimistic that the committee can find a good compromise. Appreciated the public feedback.

Noted that there is an open seat on the committee for a trails representative and would love to get that seat filled so more voices could be present at meetings.

Back to flow chart— the late public comment period in the flow chart is due to current state of the management plan, which is messy and hard to present to the public as there are multiple versions, many containing comments that haven't seen full committee review yet. Plan was to present a cleaner cohesive document to the public so as to not waste anyone's time.

Catherine M: Julian's History would be helpful to include in public comment.

Sam P: Still confused as to why this conversation is occurring now? If there was a lapse in duty on the committee's part in 2023 and a trail design was not sent to selectboard, why has there been no pressure to get that done for the last two years?

Jenni B had a question in chat regarding the open seat on ACFC. In response, Sam mentioned the open seat is for a sitting member of the trails committee. More info is available on the town website.

Addition to the Agenda (per Julian's request):

Julien P: Worried that the way the management plan is written now the public will feel like the forest is closed. 400 acres is not a lot of space when considering a 600 ft wide trail buffer. Feels that 300 feet on either side is too much. Can we pick a smaller number? Below power lines is about 100 acres so only ¼ of the forest is available for recreation. Proposed 100 feet on either side of sensitive areas for a buffer. Felt that Merideth's study would not exclude so much of the forest.

Sam P: We shouldn't ignore the science. We shouldn't make arbitrary decisions that justify a trail without parameters for what needs to be preserved… the management plan does include a process for deviating from the parameters for that very reason. Facts should be respected, and the deviation process is intended to allow some flexibility while honoring the science.

Brad E: The existing trail network can stay, as they're grandfathered. There are extensive trails that are usable. The 428 acres are part of a larger forest block. It is important to the larger forest ecosystem and the whole state of Vermont.

Bruce H: Should abandon skid roads that were not designed with ecological function or recreation in mind. Would not be well suited to rec traffic.

Mike D: The science is a guide. The recreation section reads more like an ecology section. Are there studies cited in the management plan that state the benefits of recreation? This parcel is the only town owned land with significant elevation change.

Sam P: The appendices have lots of studies, not sure any citing the benefits or recreation are included.

Catherine M: Did Arrowwood provide a ZOI number?

Mike D: Dry Oak is rare (not endangered) so the trail should go through it so that visitors can experience it. However, incursions should be brief rather than straight though.

Julian P: Lets test these distances on a map to see if a trail is workable.

Sam P: shared a map of potential trails to show that buffers don't preclude the ability to build trails in the northern zone.

Wright P: The co-chairs should be empowered to make quick decisions as appropriate.

Copy Editing RFP:

Ian S: The work group streamlined the copy editing timeline and updated the RFP.

Jim C: Do we have "off-ramps" if needed in this process? If we are not satisfied with the cost, timeline, etc. can we opt out of working with a copy editor?

Sam P: The town is not obligated to choose a bid if it doesn't wish to proceed. RFP should have some flexibility on the timeline in the event the committee gets delayed with management plan revisions due to current public feedback.

Julian: Feels that number 3 in D is important,

Brad: The comment is only directed toward the URL testing section.

Catherine M. Should there be a cap on spending included in the actual RFP?

Julian: Suggest that subcommittee checks with Josh on adding boilerplate if warranted (to maximize flexibility).

Julian made a motion to accept the RFP with the following changes:

- Remove the URL testing verbiage in section D number 3
- Check with the town to include boilerplate related to pricing (if necessary)
- For dates that must be filled in:
    - Section H: Set date to 3 weeks from when the RFP is sent out
    - Section I: have Josh pick the date he prefers

Jim seconded.

All seven members voted yes, motion passed.

Matters Arising:

Jeni B: Is the connection to Sip of Sunshine still an option?

Sam P: Technically yes, the management plan doesn't preclude the possibility of a connection to David Sunshine's lang.

Closure:

Wright made a motion to adjourn. Julian seconded.

All voted in favor.

Email from Bruce Hennessey on Tue, Sep 9 to ACF Inbox:

To the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and comment on the Comprehensive Plan for the ACF. I appreciate the opportunity to engage on many topics that were outside the actual agenda.

During my comments I made the statement that the town had engaged in whole tree harvesting during their logging operations on the land. I was mistaken about that claim - Wright Preston researched the timeline on logging operations and found that the large whole tree harvesting happened during the Andrews family tenure, just before the town took ownership. My apologies for the mistake - it was not my intent to mislead. The comment was rooted in the negative feelings I had about the practice at the time - poorly conceived skid paths, giant piles of tree tops at the chip header, and endless streams of tractor trailers coming out of the woods. Still I should have checked my facts and been prepared to make correct statements or not make them at all. I will endeavor to do that in future communications with the committee. Thanks to Wright for checking and gently letting me know my mistake.

As a point of interest, I have read Ethan Tapper's excellent book and am in agreement that forest management should follow those tenets. But no matter how carefully we log the forest, we will always be disturbing the zones of influence that the committee is working from.

Thanks again for the opportunity to engage, and again my sincere apologies.

Sincerely,

Bruce Hennessey