

**Andrews Community Forest Committee
Meeting Minutes - Monday, Sep 22, 2025 - 6:00 to 8:30 PM**

Committee members present:

Sam Pratt (co-chair), Brad Elliott (co-chair), Sonya Mastersen, Dan Wolfson, Ian Stokes, James Cochran, Wright Preston

Not present: Julian Portilla

Meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm, quorum confirmed; no public in attendance.

6:10 Appoint timekeeper (Wright) **and minutes taker** (Ian)

6:11 Motion to approve draft Minutes of Aug 25th and Sep 8th 2025 including email from Bruce Hennessy correcting his statement about timber harvesting: Moved by Sonya and Jim - unanimously approved without revisions.

Matters arising: Referring to the numerous public comments at the Sept 8th meeting, Ian complemented Committee members for responses to comments, extra work on subsequent documentation in minutes and fact checking. It was agreed that the extended public comment period at that meeting was helpful and welcome.

6:17 Public Comment Period (none)

6:17 No revisions to the Agenda

6:18 Statement from Co-chair: Sam Pratt read his statement as included in the ‘packet’.

6:22 Discussion: Ian suggested clarification that the agendas normally initially include 10 minutes for public comment on non-agenda issues, then later, public comments may be recognized on each agenda item at Chair’s discretion.

6:28 Soliciting Selectboard Feedback:

Sam drew attention to his packet document. Three sections were discussed:

Background:

There was formal public comment of the then proposed trail plan and MP in 2022/2023, but revisions were not offered for SB approval. Now, the MP revision reflects many updates, including documentation of those public comments.

Current Situation

4th bullet: Committee prefers to finish a draft plan and not pause for more public input process.

Responses to Concerns:

Sam explained that our current draft MP is consistent with the 2018 MP, Easement and Town Plan, and not bound by alleged requirement to connect to SoS. Sam and Jim clarified that the Trails Committee (RTC) has been under-represented, including that no RTC member has been on the ACFC since June.

Brad expressed concerns that public input must be adequately documented to avoid us being misled by hearsay etc.

Sonya also emphasized preference for written comments and addressed the challenge of satisfying differing possibly conflicting desires relating to recreation and trails, so recognizing it's unlikely that all can be fully satisfied.

Updates and progress were reported for the 2024 Town Report and now also include the connectivity via VAST with trails now on the adjacent Maple Wind property, and about progress including mowing and trail maintenance. It was noted that the present (2018) MP allows for action such as maintaining and improving trails.

Decision:

Sam will write to the SB recognizing discussion of the document he prepared for this meeting, including updates on progress and our concerns about the timing for soliciting comments from public, Town Committees and SB. He will ask if the SB wishes to have us check in again.

Revisions of Management Plan Recreation Section B6:

7:00 Trail Parameter Suggestions for North/South

Julian had called for separate guidelines for north and south zones, consistent with different protections and usage. Consensus was to keep the combined language using stricter constraints, not to separate by Zone. The trail deviation section can be used to accommodate differing conditions of trails usage volume etc.

Wetlands – summary of discussion:

Extensive discussion about Wetlands focused initially on two locations impacting existing trails on VAST (East, adjacent M/W property and West, near top of Urbanik Way). Also, Brad drew attention to a wet area near where the Arrowwood proposed trail 'Hemlock Valley' joins 'Sunshine Connector'. The wet area on the VAST trail (east) might be bypassed by going through higher ground +/- boardwalks and stream crossing. That area was exceptionally wet in the first part of this year, now presumably drier, consistent with large climate-altered fluctuations that likely will increase. The existing VAST trail also provides access to farmland.

The three Classes of wetland were noted. Class 3 includes 'seeps' that are small but are especially significant in the spring as they provide for early new vegetation and hence food sources.

Action: Jim will contact Tina Heath (Chittenden County Wetlands Staff of VT Dept of Environmental Conservation) about a site visit. Jim will update ACFC and if a quorum intends to join the site visit, we will request public warning.

7:48 Trail Development Parameters

Hemlock – summary of discussion:

Hemlock stands serve as critical wintering habitat for deer, turkey and other species. Dan noted they also provide a naturally cooler microclimate in summer months, offering shade and maintaining lower ground temperatures that benefit both wildlife and nearby water temperature. In the past, policy about hemlock has emphasized protection of the deer population in part because of a desire to maintain hunting opportunities. But ACF has an overpopulation of deer, but absent their protection, starvation isn't a good wildlife management tool.

Trail closures during winter (to protect deer) are best specified by calendar dates rather than e.g. snow conditions. To simplify, dates based on hunting seasons were proposed, though it's more important to have protection for weakened wildlife in the spring than the fall.

There are several hemlock areas, though the 'Hemlock Valley stand is the most significant because of its elevation and size. The smaller stands including in/near Urbanik Way have lesser ecological value and greater recreational importance.

Recommendation: Amended text sections that are more about ecology than trails should be moved to the Eco section of the MP.

Discussion ended after the Hemlock section, to allow for moving on to Trail Approval Process.

8:14 Section B6.2.2 Trail Approval Process

This section should define how to address proposals from any source (ACFC, user groups, individuals, trail runners, whatever). Itemized checklist would require written responses. Roles of Town's Zoning, Planning, SB, DRB and state agencies etc. should be clarified.

1st Bullet: of "Need, Purpose and Route" – 'intended use' might include bikes, wheelchairs, any other. 'Estimate costs' should also include the source of finance.

(Appendix D, or combined Appendix discussion deferred)

8:30 Confirm future meetings: 10/13 (6:30 pm start) and 10/27 (6 pm start). Both 2 ½ hours. Sam requested proposals for Oct 13th agenda and MP text comments by October 7th latest. In the interest of efficient meeting discussion and decisions he requested specific written comments by that date so he can insert them into texts to be put in the packet.

8:35 Motion to adjourn (Sonya/Ian) – unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by Ian Stokes