

Memorandum of Understanding

Andrews Community Forest – Testing the Draft Management Plan's Trail Development Parameters by Evaluating a Proposed Connection to Sip of Sunshine Trail

August 2026

Background

The Andrews Community Forest (“ACF”) draft management plan (“MP2”) was approved by the Andrews Community Forest Committee (“ACFC”) by a 7-0 vote in May 2026 and released for public comment. A public feedback session held June 29, 2026 produced mixed input: strong support for MP2's conservation approach, alongside strong interest in a trail connection to the Sip of Sunshine trail to the north of the property (on land currently owned by David Sunshine and Carol Jordan). Sip of Sunshine itself connects to other biking trail networks in Richmond and Jericho, among them the Old Jericho Road Trail in Richmond and Mobbs Farm in Jericho.

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) establishes a shared process among the parties below to explore, and if warranted, plan, develop, and construct one multi-use trail connecting the former VAST Trail in ACF to the Sip of Sunshine Trail (the “Trail”). It is intended to serve as a basis for ACFC discussion, revision, and eventual vote, and for presentation to the Selectboard.

Parties

Primary Parties: Richmond Selectboard, Vermont Land Trust, and the Andrews Community Forest Committee.

Secondary Parties: Richmond Conservation Commission and Richmond Trails Committee, and Richmond Mountain Trails(?).

Secondary Parties are consulted and kept informed throughout the process described below; decision-making authority over whether and how the Trail proceeds rests with the Primary Parties, and day-to-day oversight rests with the ACFC.

Conditions

1. **Lead body.** The ACFC shall be the lead committee overseeing consideration, scoping, planning, monitoring, and (if warranted) development and construction related to the Trail.
2. **No construction commitment prior to scoping.** This MOU commits the Parties to a defined process for exploring the Trail in good faith. It does not commit the Parties to constructing the Trail. Whether the Trail is built depends on ACFC's determination of whether siting, constructing, and monitoring the impacts of a trail to SOS can satisfy MP2's ecological and management standards for the Northern Zone.
3. **Trail siting.** The Trail's location, if pursued, shall be determined using the ACFC's MP2 trail development criteria, including evaluating the project's need, purpose and alignment with the MP's goals. Ecological considerations, including sensitive habitat and species buffers, shall be ranked as a priority over trail design and routing preferences.
4. **Northern Zone bicycle policy.** MP2's existing prohibition on bicycle and other mechanized use in the Northern Management Zone remains in effect and is not otherwise amended by this MOU. This MOU creates one specific, defined exception: bicycle use shall be permitted on the Trail following the phased opening and evaluation process described in Condition 9, and subject to the use parameters established under Condition 8. No other bicycle or mechanized-use trail, and no other exception to the North Zone policy, is authorized by this MOU.
5. **Working group.** A working group (initially Jim, Wright, and Sam, or as otherwise appointed by the ACFC) is established to scope the Trail, oversee monitoring, and bring recommendations back to the full ACFC. The working group reports to the ACFC monthly, and ACFC reports to the Selectboard on a quarterly basis, regardless of what stage the work has reached.

6. **Future working group expansion.** The ACFC may, at a later stage of this process — once initial scoping and monitoring work is underway — consider adding up to two non-committee members to the working group, one representing trail-user interests and one representing conservation interests. This is deferred rather than immediate, to allow foundational planning work to proceed without risk of early deadlock.
7. **Wildlife baseline monitoring.** Baseline wildlife monitoring (trail cameras and other appropriate methods) shall begin in fall 2026 in the study corridor(s) under consideration, independent of whether the Trail is ultimately approved, so that pre-Trail data exists for comparison regardless of outcome.
8. **Indicators, thresholds, and triggers.** Within approximately 90 days of the start of monitoring, the working group shall engage a qualified wildlife biologist or similar expert to establish specific indicators (e.g., wildlife detection rates, trail use volume), thresholds (the point at which a measured change becomes unacceptable), and triggers (the management response once a threshold is crossed). These shall be used to set the Trail's initial use parameters (including any daily or seasonal use limits on bicycle traffic) and to guide adaptive management after the Trail opens.
9. **Phased opening.** The Trail shall open initially to pedestrian traffic only. Bicycle access shall not commence until an evaluation period of not less than one full monitoring season has elapsed following the Trail's opening, during which trail use volume and wildlife indicators shall be tracked against the thresholds established under Condition [8]. At the conclusion of the evaluation period, the working group shall bring its findings and a recommendation to the ACFC on whether to open the Trail to bicycle traffic. Permitting bicycle use on the Trail must be deemed compatible with the standards for protecting the integrity and functionality of the Northern Zone. Bicycle access shall commence only upon ACFC approval of that recommendation.
10. **Timeline.** The initial planning and siting phase shall extend through 2027. Construction, if approved by the ACFC following the process above, is targeted for completion in 2028. This timeline is intended to align with, among other things, the Vermont Recreational Trails Program's anticipated 2027 grant cycle (see Condition 10).
11. **Funding.** The Parties shall pursue available public and private funding sources, including Vermont's Recreational Trails Program (RTP), a state-administered federal grant program for construction and maintenance of public recreational trails. Applicants for the anticipated 2027 RTP round should note a maximum award of \$50,000, a minimum 20% local match, and an implementation period of roughly July 2027 through December 2028 — consistent with the timeline in Condition 9. The working group shall bring a specific funding and cost-share proposal (including any ACF Conservation Reserve Fund and/or Richmond Mountain Trails contribution) to the ACFC for approval.
12. **Trail easement.** Prior to construction, the Town and/or ACFC shall secure from the current owners of the Sip of Sunshine property (David Sunshine and Carol Jordan) a trail easement or license agreement, on terms agreeable to all Parties, sufficient to support long-term operation of the Trail. *[Open item: term and conditions of this easement have not yet been discussed with the landowners and require negotiation before construction proceeds.]*
13. **No regional marketing.** The Trail shall not be marketed as a major regional connector (for example, as a VMBA or Velomont connector trail).
14. **Exclusivity.** If, and only if, a trail is constructed at the Andrews Community Forest north of the Old VAST Trail as a result of this MOU, then no other multi-use and/or mountain bike trail shall be proposed, planned, approved, developed, or built at the Andrews Community Forest north of the former VAST Trail for a period of twenty (20) years from the date the Trail is completed, excepting modest and needed trail rerouting as approved by the ACFC. If no trail is constructed pursuant to this MOU, this exclusivity provision does not take effect.
15. **Reporting and further approvals.** Any decision to proceed to construction, and any future amendment to the North Zone bicycle policy beyond the single exception in Condition 4, shall return to the full ACFC for a vote, informed by the monitoring and threshold work above, and shall be reported to the Selectboard.

Timeline

Timeframe	Milestone	Reporting / Governance
Fall 2026	Working group established; baseline wildlife monitoring begins in study corridor	Committee briefing; Selectboard update #1
Fall 2026 – Winter 2027	Threshold-setting consultation with wildlife biologist completed (~90 days from monitoring start); indicators, thresholds, and triggers defined	—
Winter – Spring 2027	Trail siting and scoping completed per MP2 trail development criteria; RTP pre-application (by Nov 20, 2026) and full application (by Jan 31, 2027) submitted	Selectboard update #2
Spring – Summer 2027	Siting study and threshold framework presented to full ACFC for a go/no-go vote on the Trail	ACFC vote; Selectboard update #3
Summer – Fall 2027	If approved: easement negotiation with Sip of Sunshine landowners; permitting; final design; RTP grant agreement execution	Selectboard update #4
Fall 2027 – Summer 2028	Construction and completion; initial bicycle use parameters (daily caps, seasonal closures) set per Condition 8	Selectboard update #5
Post-completion	Ongoing monitoring against thresholds; adaptive management as needed	

Open Items for Further Discussion

- Funding: RTP (if approved), Conservation Reserve Fund, ACF funds, and Richmond Mountain Trails (or in lieu of a financial contribution, perhaps RMT could provide volunteers for trail building?).
- Whether the secondary-party composition (two trail-interest organizations and one conservation organization) should be adjusted, or whether Vermont Land Trust's role as a Primary Party is sufficient balance.
- Terms of the trail easement or license with the Sip of Sunshine landowners.
- Specific initial bicycle use parameters (daily caps, seasonal closures, monitoring and enforcement measures) pending the threshold-setting process in Condition 8.

Signatures

Primary Parties:

Richmond Selectboard _____ Date _____

Vermont Land Trust _____ Date _____

Andrews Community Forest Committee _____ Date _____

Secondary Parties:

Richmond Conservation Commission _____ Date _____

Richmond Trails Committee _____ Date _____

Richmond Mountain Trails _____ Date _____