

Andrews Community Forest Committee
Monday September 28, 2026 - 6:00 to 8:00 PM
Richmond Town Center
Meeting Minutes

Present:

Committee Members: Jim Cochran, Brad Elliott (co-chair), Sonya Mastersen, Sam Pratt (co-chair), Wright Preston, Dan Wolfson

Members of the Public: Tommy Maron, VYCC Conservation Project Coordinator

Introductions and Other Business

Sam called the meeting to order at 6:10 and confirmed a quorum. He volunteered to serve as timekeeper, and Brad agreed to take minutes. Sam welcomed Tommy Maron, who came to discuss scoping out a hiking and biking trail to avoid the former VAST trail's encroachments on wetlands and their buffers.

Jim moved and Sonya seconded to accept the minutes from the August 28 meeting.

Sam explained his recent request to the Selectboard to appoint him an at-large member of the Committee rather than the Richmond Conservation Commission's direct representative. He explained the difficulties of serving as both as chair of RCC and co-chair of ACFC and at times feeling conflicting pressures in each role. The Selectboard approved his request and Sam will be looking for a replacement to serve as RCC representative. Jim complimented Sam on the openness, fairness and good faith he brought to all discussions.

Brad's new status as a non-resident came up, as he and his wife had sold their Richmond home on September 22 and are living in Burlington. He said he hoped to continue as an ACFC member, an option open under State law because ACFC is not a statutory (i.e., mandated by the Legislature) committee. Jim noted that after Ben Feinson moved from town he became a non-voting member of the Trails Committee. Sam and Brad said they'd seek advice from Josh to clarify Brad's ongoing status.

Sam announced that the two web pages designed to replace the current single one for ACFC were ready. One is geared toward viewers interested in visiting or learning more about the forest itself, and it will appear in the "Community" section of the Town website. The other will appear in the "Boards and Meetings" section and focus on Committee business, including the management plan update. These new pages will soon go live, and members were asked to review them and bring any comments to the October meeting.

Alternatives for a Wetlands Bypass on the VAST Trail

Sam outlined three options for moving pedestrian and bike traffic from a section of the VAST trail that runs through a wetland and its buffer:

- Building a boardwalk
- Moving the foot and bike path north, onto higher ground
- Doing nothing

The plan to create a new trail was favored. One issue with the boardwalk was the damage it would be likely to incur from the continuing tractor traffic expected on that part of the VAST trail. Sam also noted that because the ACF usage was officially defined as recreational, we must abide by the State's wetland rules with none of the exemptions provided to agricultural and forestry usage, even though those take place within the ACF.

Tommy Maron explained how VYCC would be available to scope out a wetlands bypass using a map of a possible route developed from explorations by Sam and others. He estimated the cost of a report and project proposal to be \$800, showing a sample of a similar report and proposal¹ delivered to another VYCC client at that cost.

Sam will check with Josh to make sure the Committee follows the Town's purchasing policies in hiring a contractor for this project. Tim noted opportunities for obtaining grants for the project through the State-administered Recreational Trails Program, especially if it were designed as a collaboration between the Town and VYCC. Pre-applications for one such program are now being accepted until 11/20, with the decisions to be made in February or March. Jim offered to work with Tommy on the pre-application. Jim moved, Dan seconded and the Committee unanimously approved this motion: *"Motion that we move forward with scoping a wetlands reroute and improved connectivity to VYCC by partnering with VYCC to scope the route, with estimated costs of less than \$1000 to come out of the ACF fund."*

Tommy said that while VYCC encourages public use of its trail system, it discourages people from parking in VYCC lots. The organization sees its trail connections to ACF as valuable in meeting the demand for access to its trails.

Public Feedback on MP2 *(continued)*

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https://www.richmondvt.gov/fileadmin/files/Andrews_Community_Forest/Meetings/2026/08/ACF_MP2_Feedback_Synthesis.pdf

The Committee worked through several items listed on the feedback synthesis document², starting with those deemed easiest to address. The committee agreed with suggestions that we improve clarity on the seasonal closure and project timeline text. Sam will be coordinating with Sonya to get her edits incorporated into a revised document. He will also propose language responding to a suggestion that the plan say more about how the Town will deal with the effects of climate change on the forest. Meanwhile the Committee will concentrate at its next meeting on remaining items on the input list, most of which relate to the desire some in town have for using ACF to connect Sip of Sunshine and nearby Jericho trails to the Maplewind and VYCC trail systems already linked to ACF.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Wright proposed investigating a route to the Sip of Sunshine trails that would loop east of ACF onto VYCC land, where the terrain seems flatter. He and others may get together in sub-quorum groups to explore this possibility. Sam said he felt that this and other assessments of possible routes showed the MOU has served a useful purpose in launching explorations of routes to SOS that would comply with the plan's ecological protections and not hold up approval of the plan. Discussions about such routes were ongoing, and a specific focus on the memorandum no longer seemed necessary.

Closure

Topics for the October 26 meeting will include an update on the wetlands bypass project scoping, and further work on revisions to MP2 reflecting the breadth of public feedback. Wright moved to adjourn and Jim seconded. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 8:27.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Elliott