

Andrews Community Forest Committee

Regular Meeting

Agenda

July 25, 2022

5:30 to 6:30 PM

Richmond Town Center Meeting Room, 3rd Floor – 203 Bridge Street, Richmond, VT

Meeting may also be joined online or by phone

Join Zoom Meeting:

Join Via Phone:

Meeting ID:

Passcode:

A: Roll Call, Confirmation of Quorum and Appointment of minute taker (2 minutes)

Daniel is minute taker

ACFC members: Caitlin, Nick, Jesse, Jim, Cecilia, Amy, Jim, Melissa, Chase

Members of the public: Ian Stokes, Bob Lajoie, Martha Nye, Marcy Harding, Nancy Zimny, Dan Wolfson, Jon Kart

B: Additions or Deletions to the Agenda (1 minute)

None

C: Review and accept minutes of July 6 Meeting (1 minute)

accepted

D: Public Comment (10 minutes)

Brad Elliott:

Question about the assumption that any deviation from the concept map will trigger a revision of the management plan. Brad's opinion is that a slight change in the concept map would not trigger a revision of the management plan. What triggers a management revision is the addition of new trails, in addition to those already found on the concept map.

Brad references Ian's idea of starting trail work by just building the East Hill Climb

The concept map shows that the trail in the northwest quadrant goes through the vernal pool. Brad says that the trail goes within the outer ring of the vernal pool, rather than through the vernal pool. Brad asks if there is a map that shows the 200 foot buffer around sensitive areas along with the new trails? The committee responds that there is not.

Ian Stokes:

Ian is handing out maps. This map shows the arrowwood/sinuosity trails overlaid on top of the concept map. Ian is suggesting by approving a single trail to the ridge using the arrowwood/sinuosity plan. He thinks this is valuable to get things moving. And he thinks that this would not require a change to the management plan.

Ian is suggesting a phased approach in which the east climb trail can be implemented because it is the closest to the concept map.

Daniel: Though the east hill climbing trail starts and ends in the same place as the concept map these trails are vastly different in the details. So he would not feel comfortable in swapping one trail for the other without doing a management review.

Jesse: There is also the question of creating a loop, which is part of the management plan. By just creating the east hill trail we would not create a loop.

Nick: Asks Brad why he would advocate for including a trail in the northwest? The Arrowwood/Sinuosity plan consolidates trails in the northeast corner, which is a more ecologically sound trail design. So why include the trail in the northwest?

Brad's response: He thinks that a trail in the northwest quadrant would avoid dry oak forests and the hemlock deer yard and that the east climb along (not including the Hemlock trail) also avoids these sensitive areas.

Dan Wolfson: Comments that he doesn't think that there should be a trail through the deer yard just because there is an existing skid road. There is risk in creating any trails if we start from square one.

Jesse: Has a hesitation that, if we were to put in the east climb trail, we would open the committee to a lot of criticism that we implemented trail construction without a proper management plan revision. So the management plan revision has to occur before we implement any trail construction

Caitlin: Agrees with Daniel that the east climb trail deviates enough from the concept map that it would require a revision of the management plan. We can set this aside and address what Ian has brought up in terms of an iterative approach.

Cecilia: She was part of the original committee who wrote the management plan. The concept map was created to demonstrate ideal trail density in different areas. But the trails were never ground truthed. Cecilia thinks that the current east climb is as close as it gets to the original concept map. The trail revision (to the current east climb trail) may not trigger a management plan revision; however, just implementing the east climb would not make a bigger loop. And that was a priority.

Dan Wolfson: Comments that he doesn't think that there should not be a trail through the deer yard just because there is an existing skid road. There is risk to creating any trails if we start from square one.

Ian Stokes: Using the precedent of Urbanik way, the committee should be able to move ahead with implementing the east climb. Reiterates that the phased approach might work in this situation.

Caitlin: Is concerned about achieving the other objectives (such as the large loop). If we implement a single trail, we don't have the resources to create a process that would be required for additional trail implementation.

Jesse: Has a hesitation that, if we were to put in the east climb trail, we would open the committee open to a lot of criticism that we implemented trail construction without a proper management plan revision. So the management plan revision has to occur before we implement any trail construction.

Nick: Agrees that we would just be kicking the can down the road if we do a phased approach.

Amy: Refers to the deer wintering habitat. Has it been heard that we will be closing the trail through the deer yard during the fall and winter? This is the plan though we have not finalized it. Jim reiterates this idea.

Caitlin: Winter grooming happens mostly below the power line.

Amy: Wonders if we need to put it to a vote to see if we can finalize the seasonal use of the deer yard.

Caitlin: Will talk to state folks to see if we can get recommendations on how to best manage this deer yard.

Jon Kart: It sounds like the committee is facing a lot of pushback on the current plan. Says not to talk amongst itself. The ACFC can talk to the town manager, easement holders, or legal council to get an opinion beyond our own. It will make it seem less like we're trying to guard our own trajectory.

Chase: Was late to the introduction to the sensitive areas. Was curious if the deer yard was one of many in the area and if deer are under/over populated in the region? Does anyone know?

Jon Kart: Deer wintering areas are mapped and designated based on site evaluation and habitat design. The area is clearly overpopulated with deer, there is over-browsing taking place. If the deer yard habitat is deteriorated, it will push deer elsewhere where they will be more prone to death. This is not the place to reduce total deer numbers.

Brad: It's not just deer but animals that prey on deer or animals that live side by side. It has the potential to be a refuge for a wider span of species.

E: Update on Status of Draft Revised Management Plan (5 minutes – Subcommittee)

The subcommittee has met twice since the last meeting. We've made substantial progress but it is a substantial amount of work. Cecilia has been updating the management plan by filling in the Abenaki history as it's relevant to our management. And doing this in collaboration with Richmond Racial Equity and Missisquoi band and the Nulhegan band of the Coosuk Abenaki nation. Both have had input to date on this plan. This is a good time to bring Abenaki language (and people) into the forest to keep the language alive.

We've also been revising the trail design section. Marking and noting areas where there are errors, inconsistencies, and updating the language. We are aware of the perception that by changing the language that we are changing the goals of the plan. But this is not the case. The subcommittee will be working on this in the coming weeks and will bring the completed section to the next meeting.

Daniel and Amy are also updating the rest of the management plan in terms of grammar and organization. These are minor adjustments meant to improve the readability of the document.

F: Discuss Public Engagement Process, Selection of Facilitator and Application for RCC Funding to Engage Facilitator (30 minutes)

To get the process for public engagement and getting a facilitator, it would be important to apply for RCC funds now so that we can move that process forward in the fall.

Cecilia has written up a five step process for public engagement. The first step is get a public facilitator.

The committee is making a list of potential facilitators. It would be nice if it was a team of people rather than a single person facilitating. Or that we create a subcommittee that works with the facilitator. That person could meet with stakeholder groups beforehand. And then to debrief afterwards.

The facilitator could help identify the major sticking points, and the places where there is agreement. So perhaps we could identify the hurdles and use the facilitator to help us understand how we get over these hurdles. The facilitator might also help us see things that we might not be seeing.

SE Group could help. They are based in Colorado and don't specialize in conflict resolution. Their focus was more on recreation design rather than conflict management.

Would it be appropriate to contact the select board and see what type of end product they would like to see from this public engagement process? Or what would qualify as adequate public engagement?

Melissa volunteers to look into potential facilitators. There might be a subcommittee to look for a facilitator and apply to the RCC for funds. Jim volunteers. So Jim and Melissa will look into facilitators and the process for requesting funds from RCC.

At some point we need to make it clear to the public what we're going to do and when. Almost a road map of the process. Perhaps at the next meeting we could create this. . .

Melissa's comments are that a facilitator could really help move things along. She has had this experience in the past. So the scope of work for the facilitator would be to help us move this process forward, rather than someone who is just going to MC a meeting.

Do we want Arrowwood/Sinuosity to be engaged in more public comment? They would join the select board meeting but we haven't asked them to do further public engagement. There may be value in getting a scientific answer to some of the questions that have been asked (like is it better to have two trails in the northeast rather than one in the northeast and one in the northwest).

This comes back to the reasonable limit that we can do in terms of a process. We could do limitless public engagement events but it would be good to know what our due diligence is. So we will have to balance our due diligence and making sure that people feel heard.

Chase asks about how we honor the voices of people who engaged in the last four years of feedback. There are a lot of people who have engaged in the previous public engagement processes and wonders if those get lost the more we have additional public engagement processes.

Jon Kart says that we keep shooting ourselves in the foot. Last September Jon recommended that ACFC host a public meeting with Arrowwood/Sinuosity. He says that the committee is undermining its own work and not giving people who are against trails a space to make comments is slowing the process.

G: Old Business (5 minutes):

- Update on Approval of VYCC Project Work for ACF

There were two agreements that needed to be signed by the town. No permit was required and select board approved the agreements. Daniel will work with VYCC and take photos of the projects.

- Donations to ACF in Memory of Geoff Urbanik and Discussion re Application of Funds

**** PLEASE NOTE – MATERIALS RELATED TO THESE AGENDA ITEMS (IF ANY) WILL BE POSTED AND AVAILABLE ON THE ANDREWS COMMUNITY FOREST WEBPAGE AT <http://www.richmondvt.gov/boards-minutes/conservation-commission/richmond-town-forest/>**