

Andrew's Community Forest Committee Monthly Meeting
DRAFT Minutes
2-28-22

Attendance, Committee Members: Tyler Merritt, Nick Neverisky, Caitlin Littlefield, Jim Monahan, Jesse Crary, Amy Powers, Daniel Schmidt, Cecilia Danks (via zoom)

Attendance, in-person public: Jon Kart, Bob Lajoie, Nancy Ziminy, Chris Chivers (of Jericho)

Attendance, via Zoom: Martha Nye, Bob Low, Dan Wolfson, Karin Rand, Ben (Feinson?), Martha Nye, Andy (Solomon?), Quinn Keating, Robert Rives, Mike Donohue, Jeanette Malone, Berne Broudy, Melissa Wolaver, Ethan Tapper, Kit Emery, Ian Stokes, Jake R. Max Krieger, Travis McCormack

Notetaking: Amy

Review and acceptance of Minutes: Jim moves to approve. Nick seconds. All approve.

Formal public comment period and public engagement will follow. Tonight discussion by committee, primarily.

Public comment, asking for brief comments:

(see below for two written expansions appended)

Jon Kart: Richmond resident, trail user, wildlife fan. Asks that committee designs a thorough action plan for moving forward, noting the rubric that was sent around and noted that if ACF had encouraged public participation throughout the process we could have wasted less time. Public participation for issues of great public interest requires engaging multiple constituencies at every stage of the process so we don't alienate and undermine credibility, and get a durable decision.

Nancy Ziminy: Richmond resident, reinforce Jon re: knowledge of this meeting, three days before it was warned to the public it was on Richmond trails FB page. I think that's a real problem in terms of the general public. Privileges certain segments of the community. Committee is working hard but not on that and should improve.

Bob Low: Richmond resident, page one of the Arrowed report, the objectives and goals of natural resources and ecology from the master plan should be included in the rubric as well. Useful to add a last possible option which is removing 2 of the trails, both western ones. I shared a report October 2021 with the committee.

Melissa Wolaver: Why was the agenda posted to Richmond Trails before the general public? Concerned about equitable sharing of information when it's released to certain groups of people

vs. the entire town. Wondering if it's a conflict of interest that RMT provides funding for the project.

Tyler responds: we had a trail committee member, two are appointed from the trails committee, we met last week where part of our responsibility is to update the trail committee on what was going on so we told them the coming meeting was focused on trails, several people on Richmond Trail committee are also on Richmond Mountain Trails and when we go the draft agenda I forwarded it to the committee, so I take the blame. There was no ulterior motive or conspiracy. In the management plan we're supposed to work with Richmond MT Trails and The Trail Committee. The RMT came up with half the funding for the ecological study we're discussing. I don't see the RMT as an enemy of the town forest. (Melissa questioned the funding sources.) Tyler explained that Sinuosity/Arrowwood didn't know where the funding comes from.

Melissa: Asks for all information to go to the full town not to individual constituent groups.

Jesse: There was no ill intent. I circulated the draft agenda to the full committee. I should have made it clearer to the committee that at the draft phase it shouldn't have gone out. We've discussed it as a committee and I'm confident it won't occur again. I then communicated via FPF to the full town to make clear that the meeting tonight was not a broad open forum based on certain viewpoints but deliberations from the committee with listening from the public. I hear your points and we've addressed them internally.

Ethan Tapper, logging issues:

Ethan's Framing: Earlier this year we ended the logging/forest management and decided to come back to try to fell some additional trees that hadn't been felled when it was stopped early. There's a constraint on when we can do it. April 1 - Aug 1 is the breeding season so we'd like to do it before April 1. Options for getting it done: I can volunteer a day on a weekend and we could use some volunteers with chainsaws who can safely fell trees. We can hire it. We can tap into UVM forestry.

Discussion:

CL: Insurance concerns with having volunteers or UVM students?

ET: We've used a waiver on other town forests. And I think UVM has insurance.

JM: What sector of the forest/sector/quantity

ET: All areas we had been working on already, not felling in any few areas. Maybe a couple hundred trees. Would be about 6-8 inches, felled and left on the ground. Represents about 2% of the total harvest.

NN: Reasonable to have UVM engaged on the timeline?

ET: Yes possible.

Actions:

JM: Motion to allow Ethan to close out the logging job in one to two days on a weekend, ideally by April 1. Caitlin seconded. All confirmed.

Two Potential Financial Contributions to the ACF in memory of Geoffrey Urbanik

NN: Committee general email box got note from Geoff's sister Elizabeth who wants to contribute for a bench or a sign and has a specific sum of \$300. Could be C.Hump overlook, there's a bench there Low's Eagle project. Could be a high point of Urbanik Way could happen. Or a tree with a 'dedicated to' sign.

NN: Fran Thomas said the historical society was considering a donation for signs on Urbanik way. Question is whether ACF accepts donations and how to manage that if it does?

Jesse: nothing bars us from that. So why not try to make it happen.

Actions:

DS: we have bench designs at VYCC--I could come up with options in the price range, and look at options for locations etc.

NN: I will respond to both folks.

Framing the Discussion of the Proposed Trail System

Framing by Chair, Jesse: Let's approach it with open minds and not set on solutions. And not bogged down just in Northeast Quadrant--much broader management plan and bigger property than that. The management plan in place came from a lot of public input. So our job is to not respond to the loudest or most repetitive voice, but to respect the management plan which is the voice of the community. We need to be directed by that initial process and existing guidepost. The rubric is intended to do that.

CL: The rubric was an initial attempt at fostering discussion and should not be a set-in-stone decision-making tool and we know that it is not inclusive of all the items in the management plan. As a decision-making tool, we should also be mindful to think about other potential solutions and scenarios as well as those already on the table.

JC: We had follow-up feedback from Arrowwood/Sinuosity recently. Using that and the management plan and their initial report to guide us. (all are on the town website)
Looking at Rubric,
Management Objective 1: Jesse...original plan satisfied it...

CL: different approach idea...over many months of consideration, I do not think that a trail design that has the Ridgetop trail is consistent with the management plan objective of minimizing impact to wildlife and natural resources. Mgmt objective number one is that some of the users are stakeholders interested in protecting wildlife. CL feeling like anything that has the ridgetop trail in it ... the westernmost trail that follows the ravine, just above it. It is definitely a presence for an extended stretch along that ravine.

TM: Disagreement with Caitlin. I feel it satisfies the objective. What A and S did in their response to the question was the amount of trails isn't going to affect the amount of use, it's going to concentrate the use, and that could be more detrimental to wildlife.

JM: I felt the current plan satisfies the management plan. Feel it satisfies all users.

NN: Greatest number of users, use that came up most office was to 'use' the forest for wildlife habitat.

ALP: exploring the trails they felt heavily mt bike focused

TM: multi-use trails, as with Preston forest. The way she spoke of the design, the far east trail has a lower grade, middle has tighter switchbacks to discourage bikers.

JC: The design was about reducing negative interactions a month with user groups. Hemlock trail is not good for bikers so gives hikers a space just for them.

NN: we have the original mgmt plan (not on the ground verifying) A/S plan (exclusively on the ground) so it feels like the management plan was aspirational and said it was you can have it all. But once they looked at it on the ground they thought, well you can't really have it as excellent for all uses, needs.

Amy: questioning if we had as solid an RFP as we thought when I see that it feels like mt bikers as users are somewhat privileged by the final design--potentially over other user groups in the public and over conservation goals, if you were to look just at these three trails where two of them are designed for bikers. Having walked the trails yesterday, Ravine Trail is quite special land, and the most sensitive as it does skirt right on the edge of the ravine for quite a time. As a designated downhill biker trail, maybe least likely user group to truly appreciate or tread carefully in the setting. Feel better to keep that trail out of the plan. Hemlock Trail certainly had signs of deer yards, but a) why are we protecting deer so carefully when their pops are soaring, and b) their season is low traffic time (not grooming for fat biking in that region, and trails can be closed for that period). Much of Hemlock is already quite degraded by virtue of being a skid road. I do appreciate the notion that all users appreciate a loop. Noticed yesterday that these trails are not at as great a distance from the parking lot as I thought--it was not a super long hike even with no trails and in the snow--which had me believing that they will get use from walkers and runners more so that I'd imagined and people appreciate loops as Daniel said.

Discussion of Connection east to the VYCC being asked for in the RFP, and north to Sip of Sunshine...they said the VAST trail to the east would be a viable connection, but they didn't design a single track trail.

Caitlin: Had we pursued a more iterative process with them with more check ins we could have had VYCC in on the map. Our RFP wasn't bomb proof. What was apparent in their response, 'subject to the parameters you gave us' -- the experts are operating under our guidelines. So we can't simply point to their work and say "look, the experts have spoken". And I think we didn't

sufficiently emphasized what other stakeholders are most committed to – ie protecting wildlife – let alone what wildlife itself needs. I don't think we can take their proposal as the be all end all.

DS: I talked with friends, and other stakeholders, one thing became clear that having multiple trail options would be important. Thinking about the upper quadrant so we could feel like people were having multiple experiences. Drop the ridgetop trails---impacts the sensitive areas the most, I could get behind that. But I think that having an ability to move around in the forest was appealing and important to many users.

JC: there are ways to fashion and meet different user groups by manipulating how and when a group can use it. Could be used only outside of deer wintering habitat usage time. If Ridgetop stayed in could it be foot traffic only, gives birders and naturalists a special place. How does that goal weigh against keeping people away?

TM: Cady hill and other examples of where they close off trails during sensitive times.
Grooming: I think we just continue to groom above the vast trail for skiing and biking.

NN: closing things could be useful but concerned about public compliance

JC: Dropping of ridgetop trail could satisfy the management objective. Seems to address the most concerning trail from the sustainability perspective. Still provides interested users the opportunity to use the forest. Feeling that A/S would not recommend the dropping of other trails to support non-conflict, concentrated trail use, degradation and erosion, etc.

CL: Drop Ridgetop and Hemlock, what about this as an option? We've heard this from multiple members of the public today.

JM: worry about one trail in terms of user conflict, compacting people on a trail, and echoing Daniel, people moving about the forest more readily on loops, etc. Frustration with mt biking being the villain. We're charged with creating the greatest recreational opportunity for the greatest number of people.

TM: as a trail user, planning something you want a loop.

CL: Loop was called for. And agree with it as an experiential POV. Wanted to honor that's been called for by multiple members of the public.

DS: two descending trails and the user conflict argument...we have that at Preston, trails that are for bikers-non-bikers and I don't see a lot of conflict with a single descending trail. All user groups are friendly. What if just one descending trail.

CD: To Jim's point, the 'we don't want to demonize Mt bikers' point--they can certainly be a force for good in helping us conserve areas because they have a bigger range and have been helpful in building trails in many parts of Vermont and conserving land. I was hearing what Nick was

saying, I didn't see people on Preston trails getting into lots of conflicts. Don't know we need three trails. They are clear that it's an important wildlife corridor. So I'd like to see trail density reduced there. And Hemlock is already there. Interested in keeping Hemlock and dropping the other two, fourth column. Would meet more of all of our objectives. I don't see that causing user conflict because I don't see it on Preston.

NN: If you think about dropping two trails, Hemlock is too steep to bike. The eastern trail could be biked up and down.

TM: Caitlin's original proposal from a long time ago? Dropping westernmost ridgetop trail

JC: Could Hemlock be modified to be a more appropriate trail for bikers?

DS: We could go back and have Hemlock be accommodated into a better trail design; opening up the eastern connection to VYCC satisfies multiple users and connectivity

TM: in the management plan we could have a solid line in the trails were discussed, and the VYCC could be dotted line 'tbd pending ecological assessment'

CL: if we dropped Ridgetop and retained VAST, we are .2 or .3 of a mile over above the power lines but remain below the target for below the power line. I'm comfortable with that.

TM: Powerline and VAST Are the same for some/much of it

JC: where the measurements came from, we've milled this, and we can't find where those specifications came from so at this point we have to just understand that they're meant to be a guideline and what we're talking about is a reasonable guideline. My feeling about dropping just Ridgetop, with only partial one was that when you drop the Ridgetop currently you don't have a loop for bikers, it would be a doable climb up and down on East Climb.

CD: still feeling it for dropping 2 trails. This is the main wildlife corridor of the forest. Importance of the ecological corridor of this tract, one trail better for that. All three trails are in that area of the primary corridor.

JC: I hear you there, and how we balance our interests. But let's take a step back and look at the concept map and what we'd get if we accepted that. A trail that twice crossed the sensitive corridor, and across the vernal pool, and bisecting the whole forest so there was not part untouched. So this has compacted trails in one portion of the forest. And if we take out the ridgeline, then the northwest quadrant has no trails for acres in there, a huge corridor for wildlife. So not only have we met the concept but have bettered it with the negotiated new result.

CL: Do we need to make a rigid motion without getting more public engagement?

JC: I view that our movement toward consensus is a draft vision subject to common engagement from the public. I came into tonight with an open mind and we have to approach the next round of public comment time as well. But this would tell everyone there is something more concrete for us to comment on.

CD: Still thinking about dropping 2 trails. Want to vote on that first.

TM: I won't vote for an amendment that drops two trails.

JM: me either. I would like to go to the public with what we spoke about and agree on. Give them a narrower scope. The public interest will be more specific to that plan.

CL: I am not opposed to voting to remove two trails, think that's also consistent. I would welcome hearing the public's thoughts on this before saying how I'm going to vote. Were all moving toward dropping the ridgetop trail, but I'm curious to engage others.

JC: in public comment period, just b/c we are approving to propose for public comment

NN: Cecilia, what if we provide the 2 trail idea as a stimulus to public comment?

CD: had stepped out... repeat?

NN: providing the public with a simple thing to review and provide public comment on would be a 2 trail solution and people are welcome to give their input.

Motion on the table: do we approve a proposed amended trail plan that includes dropping the Ridgetop Trail to put forth for public comment. And by no means is this final approval, it's subject to further and formalized public comment and engagement and will only approve a final plan once we've sought public engagement and come together again as a committee. Ideally, the Hemlock trail would be modified to be a multi-use trail.

Include VYCC connectivity? The approval process gets it in there pending ecological review.

Actions

Caitlin makes a motion: I would like to make a motion to accept an amendment to the original trail design presented by Arrowwood and Sinuosity to be set forth for consideration by the public. The most substantial amendment entails dropping the Ridgetop Trail, while also tentatively modifying the Hemlock Valley Trail to ensure it is more optimal for multiple uses, and exploring how to more formally and sustainably connect to VYCC (likely via the VAST trail) following direct ecological assessment. Final proposed design to be delivered to the Selectboard will be subject to *[alp suggested edit: 'further']* public engagement and comment.

JM seconded, all in favor.

Two public comment elements ahead:

--management plan

--amended trail plan

First round of public engagement is Trail focused: community consensus around the trails, get that done first. There will be people dissatisfied with the trails, and will that reemerge. We could exclude the discussion of trails at the management plan comment part.

CD: important to have a full public process and set the precedent that we have a full verbal and written public input every time we revise the management plan. So if we can give ppl the opportunity to give input on the trail plan now.

Public comment digitally now on the trails, then package that and move on to the trails.

This motion, a revised map, Gaia maps, all this other documentation--management plans, both A/S documents. All packaged in one place. Message on FPF, so someone can pick up from now forward.

AP: Feel strongly that we need to emphasize 'further' public engagement is being sought. This whole process over the past six months has been in response to public engagement and commentary. We have been reading, conversing, analyzing, synthesizing the various forms of input thus far, so this next phase is casting a wider net and inviting even more public comment. Just take care to emphasize that tonight's amendment is a compromised hailing from listening to much public input.

Jesse offers Quick opening for final public comment:

Bob Lajoie: of Stage Road, reinforce what Amy said about deer yards, they're only an issue during the winter, fine to go there in the summer months. So to maximize recreation without recreation then be mindful of seasons and user access. Question on VAST Trail? Can that be used as a hiking trail? It's multi-use and ok for any user group. Concern was that the loggin last year destroyed part of it and it was wet but the logger went back and fixed it. But if MWFarm was going to use heavy equipment then we'd have to put in a better bridge system, but for pedestrian use we could make it work as a trail.

JC: Any other seasonal restrictions to stipulate in the proposed plan?

TM: Don't complicate it now. No problem voting on winter closure, but let's wait to resolve in the final plan.

CL: also we'll want in the final revision to stipulate these are the trails and we're getting this into the management plan and ...

Nick and Jesse to work together on this.

CL: Can we get this out ASAP? NN: yes, quick task; JC: yup (JC and NN are the subcommittee to get this out)

JC: Thanks to all for the patience of sitting and listening to all the discussion and thanks for understanding all the work going into this and all the interest and knowledge people bring to bear and we look forward to hearing more from everyone in Richmond.

-----Meeting adjourned, 9:20ish-----

Expanded opening comments offered in writing from two public attending the meeting, Jon Kart and Bob Low.

Esteemed Members of the Andrews Community Forest Committee,

Since the recording of tonight's committee meeting (2/28/2022) began after I offered comments, I'm providing you with my comments in written form to attach to your official record...somehow.

I encourage the Andrews Community Forest Committee to please pay more attention to designing and implementing a comprehensive public participation process—and to do so before moving forward with amending the ACF management plan or a trails proposal. I make this request in light of three recent items:

1. Last week's repeat of actions by Committee member(s) privileging certain constituents over multiple others.
2. The ACFC-designed and just-released Rubric is flawed. In its current form, it cannot yet support your efforts of a robust trail proposal review.
3. The additional responses submitted by Arrowwood/Sinuosity to the Committee's questions require clarification and follow-up questions before they can be adequately evaluated.

Had the Committee brought the public in earlier and fully, it could have saved you a lot of time refining the questions and strengthening your rubric. Had the Committee offered the opportunity for the public to hear directly from the trail design consultants, perhaps neither the rubric nor the additional responses would have been needed.

Public participation, particularly for issues of great interest to multiple constituencies, requires full transparency and bringing the public along through each step of decision-making process. That includes the development of the participation plan itself. Doing so is vital to the Committee's credibility and to the adoption of durable decisions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and for your dedication to the Andrews Community Forest.

Sincerely, Jon

jon kart
jonkart@hotmail.com
802-999-7515

Thanks for a well-thought-out agenda: well-suited to moving things forward.

Thanks for the questions posed to Arrowwood and Sinuosity and their most helpful comments in terms of sorting out the issues and developing potential alternatives.

The crux of matters before us all are brought into focus on page 1, bullets; and page two, paragraph-3.

The Committee should find that matrix for the meeting especially helpful. I would urge that natural resource / wildlife / ecology objectives described in the Master Plan be added for discussion. The "Project" is public use of the forest in the context of its ecology and wildlife: not one or the other.

I also urge that an additional option be added – removing both Ridgetop and Hemlock - for sake of completeness.

I will be interested in the degree to which deliberations can lead to resolution of issues I raised in my Assessment of last October, which I sent at that time to the Committee via Jesse and he indicated would be shared with the Committee.

I look forward to listening in tonight.

Bob Low

