**Andrews Community Forest**

Monday, Novebmer 28, 2021 – 7pm – minutes

**Present**: Jesse Crary (chair), Amy Powers, Cecelia Danks, Caitlin Littlefield, Nick Neverisky, Ellen Kraft (call in), Jim Monahan (call in), Tyler Merritt (call in)

**Public**: Brad Elliot, Sue Morse, Bob Lajoie, Doug Stamour, Pete Halvorson (call in), Kit Emery (call in), Marcy Harding (call in), Bob Low (call in), Judy Rosovsky (call in), Daniel Wolfson (call in), Jeanette Malone (call in), Melissa Wolaver (call in), Scott Silverstein (call in), Jon Kart (call in), Jenna Koloski (call in), George (call in, last name never given)

**Appointed minute taker**: CL

**Minutes Approval**

* Brad Elliot had sent corrections/additions to committee re: minutes. We will correct name spellings, the identifier of the rare plants (botanists, not BE), etc.
* CL makes motion to approve minutes of October 22, 2021, with corrections above and BE’s additions appended. AP seconded 8Y/0N/0A.

**Public comment**:

* BE: are meetings recorded? JC: yes, mtgs are in theory recorded but town is in charge [Zoom recording initiated]
* DW: looks forward to using trails somedays; echo’s sentiment expressed by MH last time that design must abide by and honor VLT easement; has read easement carefully and points out that easement allows for recreation, but that it’s clear that trails/recreation must not adversely affect wildlife.

**Abenaki Land Acknowledgement and Land Use Agreement Update**:

* CD: document shared with committee was developed by SS with Richmond’s Racial Equity Committee, with comments by CD’s UVM class Community-based Conservation, which compared this document to Management Plan and easement. Per Chief Steven’s comments, a land acknowledgement is essentially meaningless without an Indigenous land use agreement. CD advises we combine these two as appendix to Management Plan. See also potential ideas for trail names/signs that incorporate Abenaki words.
* SS: Richmond Racial Equity laid groundwork for this over the course of the past 12 months, in communication with Abenaki Tribal leaders and citizens; worked with archeologist who administered digs in Jonesville where Abenaki artifacts were unearthed; lots of committee research onto settlement and land-use patterns. Land acknowledgement emerged from this work. Key to successful land acknowledgement is that it doesn’t only state that we’re on tradition lands of people who did not cede, but that is also is tied to specific actions. This may be the first municipal forest that has drafted one. 4 items included in shared doc
  + 1) acknowledgement (abbreviated sign at entrance to ACF; longer version on website and appended to MP)
  + 2) land use agreement, largely based on other existing agreements (see Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki website for examples)
  + 3) trail names and educational signage options in Abenaki language; see potential sign design
    - language largely disappeared given persecution (e.g., eugenics movement)
    - largely not a written language, but words used herein reflect most agreed-upon versions
  + 4) seek ongoing involvement/advisement by Abenaki – propose a hired Abenaki Tribal citizen as a paid consultant
* CD: Would be helpful to understand origins of these words – how they were chosen and who advised
* EK: Where does this document live? SS: document shared would be an appendix to MP; the actual statement of land acknowledgement (1 sentence version) would be posted at entrances to forest; longer version would be available on website; potentially prudent to post unexpected uses at sign, too. CD advises having acknowledgement at start of MP and that individual pieces of the land use agreement (e.g., re: trapping) would be incorporated into that relevant place in the MP. On website, could have Q-code linking to those words being spoken by citizens.
* CL: concerned that we may be making hollow statements (e.g., commitment to using TEK); do we want to have someone to come to committee if they want to use a wheelbarrow or do we just not allow wheelbarrows? CD points out that having language like “without prior permission of the committee” enables flexibility
* JR: trapping in the easement but not in the mgmt plan due to safety considerations. If trapping allowed then traps ought to be clearly marked and confined only to remote areas. Surprised to see it coming back up.
* CD/CL: language in land use agreement directly reflects what’s in the MP, with the potential addition of exceptions being granted for “or cultural uses”.
* JC: existing language is addressing a concern; uncomfortable with broadening of the intent
* CL: agrees w JC; let’s allow for reactive trapping but not expansion
* TM: agrees
* NN: let’s move forward with wheeled allowances to accommodate people of different abilities
* EK: consider striking language re: temporary structures. CD/NN: let’s nix that entire bullet point
* JKart: note hand-based collecting of fiddleheads has wiped out populations. Consider that limitation should be “for non-commercial use only”. EK: seems like it is already captured in 1 re: “sustainable manner”. NN: “sustainable manner” is fuzzier than “non-commercial”. CD has been persuaded that some commercial may be appropriate (e.g., traditional arst)
* MH: What does easement say about commercial uses? When this sort of language is included by VLT, is it done on top of existing easement? Or is it when VLT has owned land in fee but they’re allowing for these uses? JC: we will engage Rebecca, our liaison from VLT, to evaluate this. CD: commercial uses *are* allowed – see timber harvest, sugaring. Must be done under supervision of a forester.
* SS: land acknowledgement needs to include real action to be of any import. If we’re just granting rights to Indigenous people the same rights that are available to anyone, it’s essentially meaningless.
* Next steps: committee/public should send any additional comments to CD; CD and SS will aggregate and bring back to the committee again. Next time, aim to vote on this whole packet. JC will aim to present to Rebecca from VLT in advance.

**Vermont Council on Rural Development**

* EK: reached out to JK at VCRD, which supports transparent community action/processes
* JKoloski: brief overview of what VCRD does and how they may support this process. They serve as “neutral convener” of processes in VT, funding from the Farm Bill. Non-partisan non-profit, but government leadership can serve on the board. Their work is to facilitate conversation at the community level. They offer facilitated process “community visit” process (so far, at approximately 80 communities). E.g., they offer full facilitated, 3-4 month-long process of bringing communities together for a the full visioning and prioritizing process then connecting to resources. Sometimes communities come to VCRD with a single question they’re stuck on or trying to work on tension or going through crisis (e.g., in VT Yankee closing in Vernon, Green Mt College closing in Poultney). Relatively common challenge – working through what communities want to see on community-owned property (e.g., Huntington, Duxbury). VCRD may help to structure and facilitate that conversation or may help to propose structure for that process.
* EK: [recapped trail design process of hiring ecologist/trail design firm jointly]. We may have approved this hastily. We’ve heard clear concerns from the community about the design.
* JKoloski: spectrum of community engagement: hand plan to the community versus empowering community with full decision-making. The fact that the Selectboard has overall decision-making power will dictate where along that spectrum you fall.
* TM: feels we have done ample outreach and community engagement; we simply have a divided community and it’s our job at the committee to deal with that and make a recommendation to the Selectboard
* JKoloski: makes sense that you may well not want to go back to full community – could simply engage for smaller points or maybe you’re at the point where yes, you simply need to move forward if you feel that you’ve heard all you need to hear to move forward
* NN: it’s the grey area that we need to navigate and potentially have discussion – does trail design confirm to Management Plan? There are some clear yes/nos – but also ample room for subjective evaluation. Asks Jenna if she has thoughts of how to bound those sorts of comments.
* JKoloski: if you hold a community meeting, your actions are bound by the plan – you’ll hear comments that deviate substantially from the bounds you’re operating in. But that’s ok – yes, you’ll hear outdated, irrelevant stuff but that shouldn’t hinder your internal process.
* JC: logistically, what does timeline look like? JKoloski: if it’s a 1-time mtg (e.g., working with committee to generate agenda, structure of mtg, etc.) we could likely do this in several months. May recommend new VCRD hire Jessica Savage (had been at FPR) who specializes in recreation. Does charge a fee – ballpark usually ~$100/hr per staffer; but that can be open to discussion.
* Would require an indication that the Selectboard is effectively in support.
* JR (via chat): RCC would certainly entertain applications o the Conservation Reserve Funds to cover these costs.
* CD: could you facilitate joint mapping exercise – eg with small group like ACF committee, Sinuosity, Arrowwod, other experts? JKoloski: we’re neutral facilitators so aren’t mapping experts – couldn’t walk through a mapping exercise, but could facilitate a conversation.

**ACF Management Plan Revision Status**

* EK: no update since last minute re: changes to what we’ll call “non-contentious” pieces of the Management Plan revision; send any comments to EK
* CL: JM and CL have been in communication with Arrowood and Sinuosity to see if they would a) propose revision/compromise if we sought to reduce mileage and/or number of trails in Northeast quadrant and b) if they would join us at Selectboard meeting when we present final plan. They will respond to us after they have completed their field seasons.

**Communication/Outreach Approach**

* CL: reached out to another facilitator, but based on what we’ve heard from Jenna at VCRD, that seems like the best route to go down
* JC: seeking way to funnel comments into a single location
* NN: do we just want to have unstructured form that enables folks to submit comments?
* CD: all comments should be available to everyone, publically
* JC: sees 3 purposes
  + 1) transparency for everyone in community to see comments
  + 2) for us to consider moving forwards
  + 3) for the Selectboard – they are going to want to have a broad sense of the community discussion (they may view any/all documents even those that are not posted publicly but that are shared with the ACF committee but not intended for public comments)
* CD: all existing comments that have been received and on-going commentary need to be aggregated by date. When we release Management Plan, there needs to be an additional very clear solicitation of comments.
* AP: what role should public comments play? Is it appropriate yet? It seems like we’re still gathering the facts behind this – e.g., Sue Morse’s commentary. We’re still in fact-gathering stage. That needs to get resolved before we ask the public what the public thinks.
* TM: we *have* resolved this. We hired professionals, we’ve been following the Management Plan – and now it seems like we’re walking back on what the professionals advised.
* AP: What we’re hearing from Sue Morse is that we probably shouldn’t have trails up there. That seems like information that should have been incorporated years ago.
* TM: This was not presented to the town as a wilderness preserve – but as as town forest that balances trails and conservation. Sue’s opinion may well be valid, but it’s not what the town voted on.
* JC: Our charge as the committee is to carry out the Management Plan – not of whether or not there should be trails.
* NN: trail design and ecologist team gave us what we asked for. It’s up to us to decide whether or not it it’s consistent with what we tasked them with – *or* if we asked them to do the wrong thing.
* CL: yes, would have written the RFP differently and elevated other facets of the Management Plan if we were to do it again. It’s ok for us to hear what the professionals said but not be bound to it.
* TM: We ought to wait to hear what Arrowood/Sinuosity say.
* AP: Should we just not have any trails north of the powerlines? Or should we just have one single connector?
* BE: May be ok with 1 trail in Northeast quadrant; suspects Sue would not want any trails to the north. Arrowood/Sinuosity synthesis suggests another route.
* JC: we may be able to avoid longer public process if we have two or three alternative plans (e.g., removing one of the Northeast quadrant trails, removing two of them). Seeking consensus from committee.
* TM: let’s hear what Arrowood/Sinuosity say about the proposal CL set forth.
* CL: Google form with response spreadsheet that’s visible to all? AP: Is that premature as this would otherwise be wide open? NN: Yes, maybe we wait and then offer more specific things for people to respond to now at this point.
* AP: worth brief FPF post tomorrow about where we’re at? And say that we’ll be open for targeted comments in the future.

**Richmond Conservation Commission Candidate**

* JR: Daniel Schmidt is RCC selection for liaison to ACF committee.

**Richmond Mountain Trail Grooming**

* TM: RMT reached out about grooming for skiing/fat-biking all below the powerlines except for connection to VYCC. Would connect with farm fields of Maple Wind Farms.
* CL: makes motion to approve that (7Y/0N/0A [CD departed])

**Adjourn**

* CL: motion to adjourn. (7Y/0N/0A [CD departed])