

RICHMOND CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2023
7:30 p.m.
Town Center Meeting Room, 203 Bridge St.

RCC members present: Daniel Schmidt, Kit Emery, Max Krieger, Jeanette Malone, Judy Rosovsky, Ibit Wright, Bob Low, Bob Galvin

Members of the public: Ian Stokes, Sam Pratt, Lisa Miller (Richmond Selectboard), Brad Elliott, Nancy Zimny

7:30 p.m. Public introductions and comments

7:35 Appoint minutes taker and approve/amend October minutes

MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES BY DANIEL, SECOND BY KIT. Ibit abstained, otherwise unanimously in favor

7:45 Additions, amendments to agenda

Judy wrote up some points re: Jeff Forward's alternate CRF proposal, but wasn't confident enough to post the agenda on the website – need to make matters arising so one-two people review.

Bob Low: there is going to be some information that RCC commissioners should expect before next meeting related to the CRF. We'll need to talk about it next meeting

7:50 Updates

Selectboard approval of CRF recommendations (Herps, Trails)

\$150 approved for herp signs

Trails only wanted the money from their original trail repair - \$~1684

A discussion was had w/Josh regarding re-approving/re-appropriating the trails funds, and the trails commission wants to know what their \$ is doing if not used for the original purpose. Josh has indicated awards cannot be re-assigned. JR note – the work would be done in the same place – it is not being re-assigned

Commented [JR1]: Is that what they said?

Transportation Committee – JR overview of Emerald Path discussion

We would have to find a way around the pinchpoint in the road on rt. 2; maybe the town can work with private landowners to get around this pinchpoint. Still a lot of work to be done to figure out the logistics, but the Committee seems is on board with the concept.

Commented [JR2]: I have amended this to be more general so we don't flag any particular private landowner. Gary ahs asked us to be circumspect in what we make public this early in the process.

The Transportation Committee chair thought there might be money to deal with the first part of the trail from Riverview Commons to highway entrance rails. They seem enthusiastic about the Emerald Path trail system!

Tools for Noxious Weeds – ~~Arneson suggestions (JR)~~

Questions were sent from Judy to Josh regarding where the tools for noxious weeds might be kept. We might need to know what they are going to be digging up, where, will they need a volunteer waiver? Lots of questions, but the Gardening committee and Mary Houle are resources. Judy will reach out to get more information. Daniel volunteered his knowledge and expertise to potentially help with this situation because he is doing something similar at his job right now. He might have a storage location, too.

AVCC update if attended

Jeanette did not attend will send around the link for the AVCC meeting. She was impressed with the inspiring work that is being done in towns all over VT. Jeanette also ~~recommended tiny~~ noted small grants for smaller projects. Lots of towns are doing amphibian road crossing projects!

Commented [JR3]: Jeanette if you have this link can you send it to me? I can't find where I stashed it.

Review JR list of RCC response to Jeff Forward's CRF funding alternative idea

We are pushing back this agenda item to next meeting.

8:10 Herp project – next steps?

Jeanette made contact with Pete Gosselin, Richmond Highway Foreman, and he approved the herp signs! There will be 3 of them. This is a pilot project where hopefully we can expand this once the initial kinks are worked out, and we will focus on roads with more traffic then.

Daniel will buy posts and Jeanette will notify DigSafe. Daniel needs link to signs to figure out bolt pattern so he can buy the appropriate posts.

Aiming to have the signs into the ground before Thanksgiving. Daniel and Jeanette will send around the time/day when we'll be putting in the signs to the RCC.

8:20 ACFC (Andrews Community Forest Committee) – Brad Elliott application

- a) RCC external candidate? At-large candidate?
 - a. We can suggest that Brad be either the at-large candidate or the RCC candidate
 - b. JR: In bylaws For Andrews Community Forest, there can be one internal candidate and one external one. We can choose to bring that back up if we want.
 - i. BL: Bylaws must be consistent w/plan or governing document. The document specifies that the Trails and Conservation committees can have both of their representatives on the ACFC, and that is inconsistent with the bylaws. Bob doesn't want to pursue this, but wants the matter raised for the record.
 - c. JR: Wright Preston might be interested in an ACFC spot as well

-3 letters of support sent in favor of Brad Elliott's appointment. JR is aware of other documents that are not positive regarding Brad's application, but those documents were not shared with the RCC.

-There are no other applicants as far as we know.

-There are 3 current vacancies: 1 at-large, 1 RCC, and 1 Trails.

Discussion of internal recommendations from RCC: Ibit was asked, but doesn't think she is the right fit because she leaves for several months in the summer.

Discussion moves towards consideration of Brad: JR thinks that Brad would be a controversial choice.

BE responds to JR's comment regarding controversy. He believes there has been controversy in the past, but things are in a better spot now. If it is controversial to follow the management plan, to follow the town plan, to abide by science, then he may be controversial.

JR: Ian is a co-chair of the committee and so his support on this matter is valuable.

IW: Brad is an excellent candidate from our committee. He attends meetings regularly and has a good understanding of wildlife ecology. She has worked with him and he thinks she would be a great fit.

KE: Agrees w/Ibit, he has great qualifications. Yes there may be some controversy but many boards have controversy. Kit thinks Brad is good at balancing the needs of multiple perspectives on this topic.

JM: Also supports Brad for this position. He has done extensive research and consultation w/community members. She feels he provided leadership in the community for important conservation projects that are forward-thinking in their goals. He has a balanced track record that considers both recreational and conservation goals.

BL: It is important to get to "yes" in discussions. How would Brad deal with the problem of controversy in our community?

BE: Many answers already are in the conservation easement and the town plan, so it's important to follow those. There have also been significant developments in the last 5 years that have enhanced our understanding that will give greater understanding on some of these thorny issues. Brad feels we have walked away from the management plan and we should move towards the recommendations contained in that plan.

MK: Question for Brad – how would Brad approach balancing the voices of the public to make a compromise between many competing desired uses for the ACF?

BE: Brad doesn't think that there are as many compromises to be made as anticipated. When there is a town policy, we should follow that – if we want to change policy, that is a different question.

MK: There is a balance to be struck between what's best for the forest and what's best for the users of the forest.

Nancy Zimny: She appreciates Brad bringing conservation up multiple times. He has become a lightning rod for some messages from community members to pay more attention to conservation-related issues, and she applauds him for his persistence on conservation issues. Nancy's opinion is that Brad is not against recreation in the forest, and that conservation aspects of the discussion historically were not considered.

Ian Stokes (As an individual): Ian's letter was written to the RCC and the Trails committee based on Brad's written record. Both committees are requested to provide insight and info on potential applicants to the RCC. Ian says the written record points to Brad as an extremely hard-working, well-informed individual who would bring information and understanding to the committee.

JR: The ACFC is in a good place now w/less volatile people on it. She doesn't want to risk that tenuous balance right now. She thinks that the balance would be broken if Brad was added back into the mix. Brad has engendered a lot of anger, and Judy wants to know what effect Brad's presence on the commission will have with other groups.

BE: A lot of the lightning rod was in the past. He Brad has had no problem with anyone on the committee now, or then for that matter because everyone has a right to express their opinion. He really wanted to follow the plan and there were some people who did not agree with that. He thinks people on the committee now are more amenable to working in collaboration now.

LM: What rules does Brad think work well and what rules are not working well? Are there changes needed?

BE: The rules that he is speaking of are regarding where trails should be placed. He wants to follow the rules in the Mmanagement Pplan. There are studies that show how to build trails to avoid sensitive wildlife habitat. There has been an explosion of mountain bikes in the last few years, both in number and increasing technology.

LM: Do you think we have enough knowledge of the forest right now to move forward with creating a management plan, or are there holes?

BE: We haven't done a wildlife inventory yet, and so won't have a good baseline with which to gauge how our efforts are affecting the forest in the future. That is a missing piece.

BL: One of the missing pieces in the planning is the study a Field Naturalist was commissioned to do in the original report. We do have a fairly good body of knowledge, the question is how to apply those rules. "What are the common goals we all have and can all agree to? The next question is how to implement these goals". What are the common goals that would bring people together to get to a consensus on this topic?

BE: Common goals are healthy forests, a Mmanagement Pplan that we can call an ecological management plan, trail design that is ecological, all sorts of recreational activities, a place

where wildlife thrives. The forest can provide all of these things, but not if we don't do our part to keep the forest healthy.

BL: You have to find a compromise between ecology and the achieving of the aforementioned goals.

BE: No use has priority over others; there are ~6 purposes for the forests listed in the [Management Plan](#), which Brad wants to follow. We can compromise by limiting the spatial extent of different uses; not all uses have to occur in all places at all times.

DS: Hard to hear Brad, as a note. As the ACFC co-chair, he has received comments about Brad and wants to add a theme from those comments to the discussion. Everyone has noted Brad's dedication and passion for the topic, but one of the things that folks struggle with is Brad making folks feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in those spaces. Treating each other with kindness is an important part of any work that is done.

BE: There have been heated discussions on the topic, and Brad didn't mean to make anyone uncomfortable. He had also felt uncomfortable at meetings on the topic. Brad cut out and we needed to address not being able to hear him.

NZ: None of us are perfect, including the ACFC itself. Having participated for ~2 years in the process as a member of the public and there is some blame to be put on all sides of this issue. Another point is that, in general, folks are used to being able to recreate outdoors with impunity. There is little history of looking at what the forests needs in return. It is a growing awareness out there – Richmond isn't the only place in the country dealing with this, and there is an elusive balance to be struck to find a model to follow in this situation. On top of that, when you have a history of folks doing what they want because it is fun for humans, but no history of having people questioning that behavior – when you put those things together, it is really hard to make behavioral changes. To make it a long-term place for people to recreate, maybe we need to start looking closer at what the needs of nature are.

BE: (speaking to the question of his tone) There were heated moments w/former committee members and we are on a much better track now.

[JeanetteM](#): She has had her differences of opinion with Brad, along with other people. Out of that has come a process of both her mind being changed and his mind being changed. She has never felt that he has been nasty and disrespectful and her experience with clashing/opposing views with Brad have been positive.

LM: Responding to Nancy – the higher elevation a place is, the more fragile it is. She has learned a lot from this, and a one-size-fits-all approach do not work. The inventory that was made probably is not as detailed as we need to manage the forest properly.

JR: One of the things that [sheJudy](#) previously heard is that the documents governing the forest is ambiguous and unclear. The issue of compromise and conduct productive conversations with people becomes really critical in a situation with ambiguous governing language. In Brad's history with the ACFC, there has been a lot of contention and we are all

wanting to move forward with something we can all agree on. How do you see yourself playing a role in charting a course navigating an unclear management plan amongst other challenges?

BE: The current committee is much more amenable to open discussion. There were issues previously where ~~Brad~~ he didn't feel that conservation interests were being heard by the ACFC and folks felt forgotten and not listened to. There ~~were~~ was major conflicts between the previous ACFC and the science. It's all in the past to Brad and he doesn't see that being a problem in the future. He doesn't see a problem with things based on attending recent Selectboard meetings where he was impressed with ACFC communication. He sees the committee working together now in a way that they weren't before. There wasn't a dialogue back and forth before, and that is a key difference with the committee now.

LM: Lisa has learned a lot on the SB and thinks that if folks can listen to each other, that is the best path forward to address conflicts.

JR: will it be better to have Brad be the at-large candidate or the rep from the RCC?

BL: It might be better to have Brad do a trial run for a year to see if it works. There are differential appointment timings for the open seats.

JR: If Brad was the at-large candidate, then we could maybe get Ibit to be the internal candidate.

BL: A motion that Brad be recommended as the RCC representative to the ACFC

DS: We might say that we want Brad as our representative, but would another motion be to support his application?

DS: We could give the selectboard a yes or no vote, or we could include additional information as to what the discussion entailed in the RCC.

BL: With vote, should include discussion of pro's and cons

IW: The past is the past, and we must move forward with the present goals and needs of the forest. The fact that Brad has been involved and engaged for so long, and has support from key people.

JR: There are a lot of moving pieces in this process, and he has to go through several more committees in this process.

BL: What do the 2 chairs think?

DS: It is useful to know whether the RCC supports Brad as the RCC representative to the ACFC and they support his application.

IS: At this point, Ian's understanding is that the RCC is making a recommendation in light of the RCC's role in the town.

LM: Wanted to draw a parallel to the police department in Richmond – we went through 4 chiefs in 4 years and it was in disarray. The SB really had to struggle to right the ship, and what they've done seems to be working. They needed to first make it clear what the commitment was to the town. They rented a

chief from Hinesburg that then hires Richmond officers. It's difficult to find police in VT, but Hinesburg has a particular touch there. Things are turning around, partly because of the new Chief. Lisa thinks the ACFC is in the same position now – this is their opportunity to show that they are above the previous dissension. Having someone like Brad as a member of the committee would give evidence that the committee is really moving forward!

JR: I know that Brad is passionate about the forest, but ~~Judy~~she has also seen Brad speak heatedly to people. Will Brad agree to keep things more civil moving forward?

BL: A motion that the RCC recommends the selectboard approve Brad Elliot as the 2nd RCC representative

Votes:

BG: Yes

MK: No – there is another spot open, and he has heard concerns about how Brad conducts himself at meetings.

JM: Yes

JR: Abstain

KE: Yes

IW: Yes – Ibit wants to be looking forward rather than backwards. Let's focus on what there is to do moving forward rather than the past.

BL: Yes

DS: Yes

MEETING END

For next meeting: agenda item to discuss AVCC after the Commission has had a chance to look it over.

A motion to adjourn was passed unanimously.