

Conservation Commission Special Meeting Notes

9/19/22

Members Present: Kate Kreider, Judy Rosovsky, Daniel Schmidt, Max Krieger, Kit Emery

Community Members: Jim Feinson, Caitlin Littlefield, Jim Monahan, Brad Elliott

Minutes Taker: Kate Kreider

Additions or amendments to the agenda: Add Jim Feinson's proposal for Bombardier Meadow to the agenda. Approved.

Andrews Community Forest CRF Fund Application for \$3500 for a Trail Study

Discussion:

Judy: Is this a reasonable amount of money and time to thoroughly complete this trail study? What are the deliverables associated with Arrowwood's findings?

Caitlin: When we approached Arrowwood, that is the cost that they quoted for the fine scale study this fall. In my mind it is a sufficient amount of money. This is not an inventory. As to the deliverables: if any fine scale features emerge that weren't present during the initial review then we would discuss what it would look like to reroute those trails. It is likely that they will not find anything that will require rerouting, but it is possible.

Judy: There was a rare fern that was found after their initial survey, so it does make one wonder about the level of detail in the trail study. Because this has been so controversial I want to make sure that there is ample time and money for this to be done thoroughly.

Caitlin: I would encourage folks not to think of that as reflective of this job now.

Judy: Would it make more sense to do a winter tracking survey and then a spring survey?

Caitlin: We're talking about conducting this review right now in the fall and we can definitely come back for more funds in the future if we want to include reviews during other times of the year. We have a wealth of information about the ACF already from Arrowwood and other naturalists who have collected data in the forest.

Judy: Is all of that information available somewhere?

Caitlin: A lot of the information is more broad and less fine scale. The information is in the appendages in the management plan. We should be designing a trail plan based on the long term and overall movement corridors of animals. I am open to conducting reviews during other times of year as well, but I don't think that it's going to yield any new actionable information.

Judy: Overall I agree. I think it's also good to know the movement of animals over the winter. I understand your request to stick with the current proposal.

Daniel: Continuing to monitor the forest is very important and it is a priority for the Andrews Community Forest Committee (ACFC), it's just not a part of this particular fine scale assessment.

Brad: This is what the RCC (Richmond Conservation Commission) asked the ACFC for. Where is that information and why hasn't it been provided here?

Kit: I think there should be more specifics laid out regarding the study and what methods are going to be used to obtain information. I don't feel comfortable at this point going ahead with this.

Jim M: We followed the management plan and asked Arrowwood to do the specified assessment. They are professionals and I'm not questioning what they need to do in order to do it properly.

Brad: We're going in circles.

Caitlin: We are asking for the assessment asked for by the management plan.

Brad: We need more details.

Judy: It does say in the master plan to assess a 50 foot buffer on either side of the proposed trails. We don't want to subject this proposal to more scrutiny than we would to other proposals. I don't want to be unfair just because this is a controversial topic. It would help if you have questions to ask specifically regarding what details you want to see.

Max: I think Arrowwood has sufficient credentials to take this on and it's not the purview of the RCC to delve into the details. I support the proposal.

Kate: I agree that I trust the professionals to do a thorough study. Many members of the community have expressed wanting additional studies done at the Andrews Community Forest and I feel like we shouldn't hold up this process. If after seeing the results of this study we or the public feel that additional studies are still needed then that can be requested and the ACFC can submit another application for more funds.

Kit: I feel like the assessment needs to be more in depth and we need to know more specifics. I want more clarity. I don't doubt their professionalism at all.

Daniel: I have looked back at previous CRF proposals we've approved and with proposals of similar nature this proposal seems on par with others we have approved.

Brad: This is a massive job and I can't see how they can do this inventory with this amount of money and time. There hasn't been enough direct communication from the ACFC. The application says to look at, which makes me wonder what they were asked to do and how they are going to do it. I don't see how they can do the assessment in such a short time and for such a low cost.

Caitlin: I'll speak to Kit's question as best I can from my experience. In reality when you are walking in the woods and moving vegetation aside, you can very quickly see what's there and what's not. The professionals can quickly identify areas that are more likely to be rich in diversity of species. They cover rare and endangered species and they will identify and document them. The intent is not to document every single species that is on the ground. I think it's ample time and I trust their professional judgment.

Kit: I would like to see a winter tracking assessment before I sign off on this. Why not look at all four seasons?

Judy: We are only signing off on an assessment for this season. We could request a winter season assessment and request that they apply for funds for a winter assessment. The tracking is important, but it's a different topic than we are talking about here.

Kit: Once Arrowwood does this assessment, what are the steps after that?

Judy: Presumably we would get to see that information and then we can respond.

Caitlin: We would absolutely provide all of the findings we receive from Arrowwood and their recommendations.

Kit: What kind of assessment was done at chamberlain?

Caitlin: Nothing, and that is a good example of how unprecedented the approach is that we are taking with the ACFC. There was no ecologist assessment at all for Chamberlain.

Kit: I'm just trying to gain a little more information. I'm having a hard time with biking in the Andrews Community Forest in general, that is my feeling. There's so many forests that have biking and I would like to take a step back and make sure we are doing the right thing. It's hard for me to move forward with this. Heavy recreation on our forests is very impactful and I am concerned.

Caitlin: Thank you. I share your feelings and I would love to not see any more trails on Andrews Community Forest. But the management plan calls for biking trails, so it is mandated. We are trying to make them as ecologically sensitive as possible.

Max: I feel that we have enough information to vote.

Judy: I agree that we should move ahead.

Brad: The ecologists have still not given us enough details.

Motion Made by Daniel: The Richmond Conservation Commission(RCC) recommendation to the Selectboard is that the Andrews Community Forest Committee trail review proposal for Conservation Reserve Funds (CRF) be approved for \$3500. The review follows the steps outlined in the Andrews Community Forest Master Plan. If the money is not expended for the stated purpose the sunset date will be September 19, 2025.

Seconded by Max.

The request meets Conservation Reserve Fund recreation and conservation criteria as follows:

This project meets the following specific Criteria in Section III, A and B, and Section IV:

II, A. General Criteria:

- Will yield a clear, sustainable benefit to Richmond residents in the form of improving recreation
- Will protect, enhance and provide public access to a natural resource or recreation area

II, B. Natural Resources Protection Criteria:

- Preserves stream quality
- Supports low or no cost outdoor recreational activities, such as hiking, skiing, swimming, canoeing

IV. Other Uses:

- Recreation trail development and maintenance on conserved lands and Town-owned lands or right-of-ways “

Commission Member Vote: 4 Yes, 1 No. Motion Passed

Bombardier CRF Fund Application:

Jim Feinson: I am requesting \$625 to have a design of the Bombardier/VLT (Vermont Land Trust) parking area and river access. If we decide to move ahead with implementing the design

then we would go through the permit process and an ecological assessment would be completed. There are currently two river access points, one that was intentionally created and a second one that people using the river created. We would only have one river access point in the design and the other access point that people have created would be blocked off.

Judy: Is this enough funds?

Jim F: Yes.

Motion Made by Judy: The Richmond Conservation Commission makes a motion to recommend to the selectboard the approval of the Bombardier/VLT parking lot proposal for \$625 for an engineering design study with a sunset date of 9/19/25.

Seconded by Kate

This project meets the following specific Criteria in Section III, A and B:

II, A. General Criteria:

- Will yield a clear, sustainable benefit to Richmond residents in the form of improving recreation
- Will protect, enhance and provide public access to a natural resource or recreation area

II, B. Natural Resources Protection Criteria:

- Preserves stream quality
- Supports low or no cost outdoor recreational activities, such as hiking, skiing, swimming, canoeing

Commission Member Vote: 5 in favor, none opposed. Motion Passed.

Matters Arising: Brad: Land Trust's Barn Dance is this Saturday and everyone is welcome to come!

Motion to Adjourn made by Daniel. All in Favor. Adjourned at 8:32pm.