

Formatted Version of the Transcript of a Portion of the 11-27-23 ACFC Meeting

Prepared by ACFC Co-Chair Ian Stokes

The Automatically generated transcript of the November 27th ACFC meeting shows that 83 minutes were assigned to discussion by the Committee and Mr. Elliott of his application and verbal statements by three members of the public, prior to the vote. The first 20 minutes or so addressed and clarified correct procedures.

Rosenberg raised the point that as Trails representative he might be bound or influenced by the vote of that Committee. Stokes pointed out that the Trails Committee had not provided explanations/motivations for their negative votes. However, he considered that Elliott has substantial knowledge and experience that relates to trails including how trails facilitate human penetration of the forest and the emerging understanding of how human presence adversely affects wildlife and natural resources. Stokes also referred to several Front Porch Forum postings by Mr. Elliott referencing concerns about trails proposed for the ACF.

Brad Elliott joined the meeting at the table. Concerning several submitted email comments expressing strong concerns about Mr. Elliott's opinions and interactions with the ACFC in the past, Elliott stressed the need for adherence to the Easement and MP. He contested some statements e.g. about him being 'anti-recreation', stating he is not and has not been, but is concerned about type and locations of recreational activities.

Had Elliott previously when serving on the interim committee been overly promoting his own opinions relative to others positions? He responded that he expresses more than his own vision, and it's what is written in the Conservation Easement, the Town Plan and elsewhere, informed by science and other new developments. The purposes stated in the Easement are to conserve productive forest land, wetlands, etc. and to provide for non motorized recreation. There is no hierarchy for the six purposes stated in the Conservation Easement. He added that he personally is not only concerned about wildlife and conservation; we have to listen to all the voices, and go to the science where the existing documents spell out a lot for us.

Elliott recognized that there are subjective ('hazy') aspects as well as some very specific things such as you have to keep a trail 100 feet away from a vernal pool, and then you can't do forestry within 500 feet, so several things that are that specific. Similar to the forestry planning, different areas of the Forest have to be treated differently. When asked for an example of how he had previously handled controversy, Elliott used his involvement in developing the Conservation Fund as an examples of his ability sit down and work with the public and SB to find a solution after initially the Town vote had failed.

Rosenberg noted often differing perspectives of owners of large, possibly nearby or adjacent lands, relative to those living in the Village. Danks referred to the interim Forest committee actually listing adjacent landowners as a category that might be recruited for the committee.

How would Elliott address the process to revise the MP? He noted the recognition of what's changed since the first one was written, both incorporating more of the science, such as zones of influence from an ecological standpoint. On recreation, he noted impacts of increases in technology, and the marketing of the technology such as fat-tire bikes and major design changes of backcountry skis. More people can

now go farther and deeper into the forest with less effort, putting more pressure than before on the forest. Much of the work on the present MP was done by a 'brilliant chair on that committee' - material about present conditions is comprehensive and can stand; other aspects will benefit from updating.

Schmidt noted with some personal hesitation that he was obliged to ask for the ACFC members' comments relative to Brad's perceived unwelcoming hostile environment in meetings: would his membership impact negatively on what he sees as at present a collegial and welcoming atmosphere in the ACFC? Elliott acknowledged "times you know, when I was got hot under the collar", though meeting recordings show that he was "pretty polite in silence; maybe seething inside. But it was largely just the product of feeling, not just me, that we were all being stonewalled. People were listening, but nothing was ever happening. Nothing ever changed. One trail was omitted. We just never were able to have any discussion and that got irritating. I do admit it at times. And I apologize for anybody who felt like I was making personal attacks, which I don't think so."

Stokes stated that he was very troubled by some of the written comments: partly by the tone, and surprised because he had never observed what was being referred to. However, while specific cases were not cited, those comments came from people who would be in a position to be sincere - they were reporting what they observed or what they felt. Also, he agreed that prior to serving on the ACFC he would sympathize with Brad's frustrations just expressed; however, he was optimistic that the culture and openness of the Committee had changed since he (Stokes) was an outside observer.

Schmidt stressed that Committee members can't always be expected to do things perfectly, but should be recognized as 'doing their best' and we should all foster a culture 'coming from a place of caring about this community'. Danks stated she didn't see behaviors raised to the level of what was written in negative letters. Clearly, there were people disagreeing and pushing their points and despite people feeling that they did their best, both sides were not always heard. But "I didn't feel as though Brad was ever personally disrespectful ... the letters are looking more like a personal attack than anything I ever saw Brad do in a meeting."

Discussion continued around the challenges of addressing public opinions in addition to what is specified in governing documents, and whether 'vocal' groups have excessive influence. Elliott was concerned that the RFP and subsequent work by Arrowwood was over-interpreted in terms of what was really 'required' in a trails plan.

Marcy Harding joined via Zoom to state she had thought Brad would be an excellent choice. However, after reading submitted negative comments she was compelled to address them. She had served on the ACFC in 2019 and also attended or viewed recordings of many committee meetings. Brad had attended many or more of those same meetings so she had heard Brad make verbal comments and seen his written comments. So she considers his positions well researched and reasoned, and had never observed the behaviors he's accused of, and considers them exaggerated. In her opinion Brad has pointed out shortcomings in the committee's work and how it could be improved, but he's not disrespectful or argumentative. He should be appointed as a strong advocate for balancing the needs and desires of all users, knowing that terms have expiration dates. Further, Brad would be very highly qualified for helping with revisions of the MP.

Nancy Zimny (via Zoom) said that outside frustrations with the ACFC don't belong to Brad alone. When people were focused on a trail system he had the courage to bring up wider issues related to Recreation

Trail based effects on conservation, something that Brad and others of us have had to push hard for, to be listened to. So Brad will provide expertise for the committee to bring forward these relatively new and developing concepts of Recreation Trail based effects of all kinds of trail users, and especially for hikers, mountain bikers, with previously unrecognized impacts on wildlife especially. That's hard for people to accept when they've been in the habit of just building trails and been concentrating on the ecology of the trail itself, the soil erosion, etc. Brad has brought it forward and it's generated a lot of anxiety in the ACFC and elsewhere. She feels that this is an important issue and Brad is at the vanguard of it, and it's a very important issue for the committee to listen to.

Daniel Wolfson expressed (via Zoom) that in some ways Brad is a lightning rod for what's actually just a very complex issue. "I've always seen him to be a thoughtful listener, and very respectful in how [Brad] points out his ideas. He believes that all the incredible work Brad has done over the years for Richmond in both conservation and recreation Brad has earned a seat at this table." Wolfson stated a high degree of confidence that if appointed to the committee he will be collaborative, and a very productive voice in this process.

In summary, I have not attempted here to enumerate strengths and weakness; however I hope this documentation helps to explain the likely reasons for the votes registered by the ACFC members.

Respectfully,

Ian Stokes
ACFC co-chair
CC: ACFC members