

Bethel Conservation Commission Minutes – 11/17/14

Present Mary Floyd, Jennifer Schomp (minutes), Tom Warhol, Emily Miller, Dave Stanley, Robert Gaiko, Sheldon Roesch, Eric Benson

Action on Minutes Minutes from October were approved.

Business

- Branliere Town Forest recreational use discussion.

Eric Benson gave an overview of the original (1980s origin, revamped for 2010 grant proposal) plan for trail development. Robert Gaiko and Sheldon Roesch were in attendance to discuss the portions of proposed trails that would bisect their properties, as well as share the results of discussions they've had with other affected landowners near their properties on or near North Main St. Eric shared that there is a letter from Norm Case clarifying the terms of the Branliere land (70 acres) donation. He also noted that 6-12 people attended a BBA group hike /meeting from town parking lot recently to visit the proposed trails. John Doughton (County Forester) and Richard Allen also hiked (and the latter GPSed the proposed main route).

The proposed trail stretching from N. to S. Main can be accessed across from the Town office up Reservoir Rd across hill and potentially down behind Town Hall, across trail to Sander's Rd. From Sanders Rd one can take Robert Gaiko's log landing to the flag pole, Jeff (Robert's son) has brush hogged to clear. Robert noted that Gregory Winnie also has land to pass through per the proposed route. Robert Noble also has a parcel and is open to allowing trail use (has been used for snowmobiling in the past). From there one can walk up to Lake Ansell, to Christian Hill Rd below quarry (via Paine property), Robert noted. Richard Hart owns a parcel that may be on the route to some add-on trails, some logging has occurred there in recent years. Chuck Davis owns Hungerford property which is also on a proposed route. Kirk White has some trails on his property that could link in to a larger network possible.

The N. Main end includes about a ~700 ft climb, used often by N Main residents behind John Durfee's property. Footbridge repair (small footbridge on this end of the main trail) was part of original plan. Mr. Gaiko proposes access via his property with tractor in to reconstruct. S. Main St. has dangerous structures involved along or close to route reservoir cap (and other covers) which would need to be addressed prior to trail building/promotion. State Forester John McLane had approved some cutting on the S. Main portion of the trail (accessed via a road S. of, and across S. Main from the Town Office), Eric had marked trees for minor clearing, though this was not carried out. Landowners present voiced liability concern regarding use of private land. Dave Paginelli and Grafton State Forest were named as resources as to how this has been

addressed in a similar ownership model. VAST and the Four wheeler club were also ideas to reference as to how this risk is mitigated.

Jennifer noted that VYCC could conduct work needed to do any trail building/bridge development. The Conservation Commission has a list of interested Volunteers in town that may be enticed to help maintain the land as well. Robert Gaiko would like to see dogs allowed, with the caveat of packing out waste. Additional considerations to educate, map, clearly warn during hunting season were raised. Regarding the ANR state Forests and Parks Grant – Abbie has the folder in the Town Office, and there is clear interest to revive the project and pursue grant funds for use in various resources to support the project at this time.

Sheldon offers to help develop website to post guidelines Leave No Trace, No motor vehicles, or other rules for the area as well as an online Map. Mary will prepare a notification of investigation of opportunities and details of a plan to pursue trail marking. 50 year anniversary of the donation of the property to the town, and the 100 year anniversary of the law that allowed Town Forests to be owned/managed by towns in VT both occur in 2015, offering opportunities for community involvement in education, volunteerism, and celebration of the project.

- Vermont Conservation Commission Annual Meeting

Tom & Jennifer attended the 2014 State Vermont Association of Conservation Commissions Annual Meeting/Conference in Montpelier on Nov. 1. They split up to attend as many sessions as possible attending 6 of the 8 available in total.

‘Role of conservation commissions in developing projects’ was attended by Tom. He noted some observations regarding how CCs in other towns link in to Zoning, Development, Select or other Boards’ decision making processes. Charlotte’s CC receives all plan notes along with the Development board in order to review plans, meet, and submit recommendations to read into minutes at the Development Board’s sessions.

Flood Resiliency Food Ready Vermont session was attended by Tom and covered the Emergency Relief Protection and Assistance Fund. Under this fund, FEMA will pay 75%, remaining is paid by State and Town. Divvying up of that remainder is determined by what documentation a Town has in place. At this point Bethel is only eligible for 7.5% of what could be received. We are not currently eligible for the other 17% coverage until we include 2 more of 5 total tasks. While Bethel has a National Flood Insurance Program protection, Town Road and Bridge Standards and a Local Emergency Operations Plan, the town still lacks a Local hazard mitigation plan (to be submitted to FEMA) and a Protect Road Corridors from Encroachment overlay in town zoning. (In cursory initial analysis, it appears that a minimum setback of 50’ may be needed in amendment the Town Plan regarding development along rivers/streams to comply). Full information available at <http://floodready.vermont.gov/>

Jennifer attended a session on Creating a Town Forest which detailed some interesting facts: Vermont is an 80% forested state. <50% of VT towns have Town Forests. Only half of those have established Management Plans for the parcels. 17% have protections via Conservation Easements. Resources to help in developing and protecting a Town Forest can be accessed via the Community Forest Collaborative; Better Back Roads; VT Urban and Community Forestry (which will present year-long and Arbor Day culminating events around the 100 year anniversary of the Law to allow for Town Forests; Rubenstein School (UVM) and VT Audubon who will often conduct free assessments of habitat value/inventory key to acquisitions; GUND Institute (UVM) and Millstone Trail Association (participated in developing plans for the Barre Town Forest) and the County Forester. Local schools and other community organizations can tap into educational opportunities around trail, design, history, botany, interpretive trails, activities such as horseback riding/biking/hiking/showshoeing, forest and timber products/ biomass production/heating fuel for town buildings that may heat with wood, and values of drinking water protection, peripheral revenue and conservation. Some noted projects included the Hinesburg Town Forest sustainably supplying wood to refloor the Town Hall locally.

Attributes of a successful plan to secure and develop a Town Forest of the project were discussed to include state goals clearly, involve community, determine governance, secure property, allow adequate time for projects, take advantage of financial opportunities (including developing a conservation fund from which the Town can purchase amenable properties when they become available), and establish a longterm management structure and Management Plan. Pitfalls to be aware of include change in town management, incorrect information shared via the grapevine, difference in goals among constituents (ie allowed uses of areas), tight timing and competing financial needs. Emphasis was placed on allocating to a Conservation Commission fund, as well as a Conservation Reserve fund, from which funds can be drawn to support projects to better the Town Forest, as well as to serve as a 'bridge fund' to deposit on desirable land parcels for the Town while additional funding can be secured. Finally, the ANR Vermont Recreational Trail Grant, due in February was again indicated as a key source of funds for basic infrastructure to develop and offer recreational trails in Town Forests.

Justin Kinney presented on stormwater management as a Keynote Speaker. Jennifer attended a session on carrying out of the 2014 Shoreline Protection Act and another on free GIS software packages available under the alternate names of the Vermont Natural Resource Atlas and BioFinder (which uses the same platform). Guidance on mapmaking for Conservation available via [vcgi.vermont.gov](http://vcgi.vermont.gov). Talk and networking around easements in Bethel and around Vermont was a topic. The Vermont Land Trust has protected 1500 ~acres Easements in the state. Tom pointed out a tool for viewing easements in an area <http://vlt.org/land-weve-conserved/conserved-land-map>. Tom also attended a session on AVCC's Tiny Grants program, a matching funds program for small programs that the CC may want to pursue to fund projects as well.

The CC members will develop wish list of conservation fund items to discuss at next meeting. Initial suggestions included funding removal/repair of the well caps which are a first step to developing some trails south of Main St. in town. Mapping, etc are other needs that may emerge quickly in the Town Forest Recreation Plan, if free map making services don't serve needs fully. The need to store, and

desire to share, all the resource materials coming together in the possession of the CC members was discussed, and a file cabinet/shelf for a CC library was on the wish list for location in the Town Office.

- Discussion of possible time for Gilead site visit with Rudi Ruddell

A site visit is under consideration for viewing / possible improvement / lessons learned with regard to Stream (Rudi) and Greg Russ (Culverts) considerations around the recent culvert install along Gilead Rd. Dave, Jennifer, Greg, Rudi and Mary are interested to visit (Tom has visited already). There is interest in reviewing the relevant Stream Alteration Permit document and any associated state level guidelines. Tom indicates that MA has a great guide on stream crossings and culverts. Also, research into a Bethel-specific stream crossing and culvert plan in place for upgrading stream crossings or timeline of developing a plan would be of interest to the CC. The updated Town Plan provides guidelines on how the Town can seek recommendations on new culvert installments from the CC in future. Mary will ask Abbie to request that the town make the CC aware of when a new culvert is planned for installation. Greg could be a resource to the CC for technical recommendations. Dave indicated that culvert size increases would be a good use of town resources at this juncture.

- Communications

This agenda topic was deferred until a future meeting.

- Any other business to come before the committee

Notable upcoming public Hearings/Meetings:

Public Hearing

Monday, December 08, 2014 at 6:15 PM Bethel Town Offices

For purposes of receiving public comment regarding TH #124 and TH #126 to consider alteration, reclassification, or discontinuance of an part, or all, of those Town Highways

Public Meeting

Tuesday Dec. 9th at 6:30 pm Bethel Town Hall

Replacement of State Bridge 38 over Gilead Brook on Rte. 12 hosted by TROC

- Meeting Adjourned 8:30