

STRAFFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

August 28, 2018

MINUTES

Present at the Morrill Education Building at 7:30 p.m. were commission members: Kate Root, Micki Colbeck, Dave Paganelli, Jared Jenisch, Chuck Sherman, J. T. Horne, and Steve Willbanks, Chair.

- Minutes from the last meeting were approved.
- **Ashley Parcel Community Forest:** J. T. had volunteered to work on this. He advised Michael Buskey and Alex Sacca of the Alliance of Vermont Communities that there are a number of ways to set up a governance structure for property spanning two towns. The property can be divided with a town overseeing each half separately; second, one town can own the entire property and pay taxes to the other town; or, third, there is precedent for setting up a joint management structure with a shared committee, and the property is a shared resource between the two towns. Practicalities on the ground favor the third; simplicity of governance and budget favor the first. The fact that the property lies in not just two towns, but in two counties is an unusual complication.
- Dave noted that possibly one county forester could oversee the entire property. Dave currently manages at least one property that spans two towns; in that case one town owns all of it and pays taxes to other town reduced by common use.
- J. T. noted that typically there would be a charter written up to provide an overarching statement of purpose for the land; the charter would also specify a management structure: the number of delegates appointed by each body, meeting frequency, etc. A joint committee from both towns working collaboratively is probably the ideal governance model.
- If the SCC feels a joint management structure is preferred, J.T. can talk to Michael and the Town of Strafford and then see if Sharon can come to a similar conclusion.
- The motion was made, and carried, that the SCC supports Strafford taking an ownership stake in the Ashley community forest and that we work to have a joint management structure with the town of Sharon. J.T. will call Michael and Alex and let them know.
- **Old City Falls:** No one is sure of the status of tank pumping in regard to the Old City Falls outhouse, or whether Tim McCormick has acted on it. On a separate issue, Kate talked to a limnologist about the beaver population upstream of the Falls, and he said that it would be almost impossible to get beavers out of the entire watershed. The SCC agreed that the beaver issue is not an actionable concern.
- **Whitcomb Hill Access:** Deirdre Dennis from a neighboring property would like to be kept involved as a volunteer. The Selectboard approved upgrading the access road, mowing, etc. Questions arose as to whether neighbors should be doing such work if not coordinated with town; also there are possible liability issues. For the time being the Selectboard doesn't want Mike to prune the pines, etc. The Selectboard does want the SCC to update the management plan, which should guide who does what work on

Whitcomb Hill. J. T. noted that there should be a paper trail that documents SCC permission for Mary Louise Pierson to provide equipment and personnel maintenance as specified by the SCC; also that there should be formal correspondence thanking all who contribute in this way. The management plan for Whitcomb Hill dates from 2012; we need to update and finalize it. J. T. will integrate his original version and Dave's suggestions and submit a new draft to the SCC. Mike noted that part of the parking area we direct people to, .8 acres, belongs to a new owner, and that this should be looked into.

- **Conservation Map:** Micki said that the Energy Commission will get together with her after the summer to look at the map. Steve is still trying to find out whether the Elizabeth Mine development counts toward the renewable energy acreage count.
- **Town Trails:** Mike has been upgrading the blazes and hiking all the trails with a chainsaw. He posted a photo album of flora from the Town Forest to the town listserv. He noted that the three most highly visited town-owned natural areas are Old City Falls, Whitcomb Hill, and the Town Forest.
- **Wetlands:** Kate noted that there have been no wetland visits this month, but that we are hoping to schedule some for early fall.
- **Hemenway memorial:** It was asked whether there is still interest in a picnic area on Taylor Valley Road. Paul Harwood may be willing to revisit the issue with the Hemenway family now.

The next Conservation Commission meeting will be on Tuesday, October 23rd.

Respectfully submitted,
Jared Jenisch