

ACF Minutes 12/8/22

Ashley Community Forest Board - Regular Meeting Agenda

Thursday 12/8/22, 6:00 p.m.

Justin Morrill Education Center, Strafford

Attendance: Annie Penfield, David Paganelli, Michael Sacca, Erik Skarsten, Rob Stainton,

Friends of ACF: Micki Colbeck, Judith Faulk, Kevin Gish.

1. Call to Order 6:00 PM

2. Public Comments.

No comments.

3. Approve Minutes from 11/3/22 and all earlier minutes. Minutes approved.

Report on sharing of minutes with Town Clerks in both towns.

Draft minutes must be submitted to both towns within 5 days and will be approved at the next meeting. A second set of minutes will be sent when the minutes have been approved.

4. Alliance for Vermont Communities gift to the Ashley Community Forest. A thankyou to Michael, Erik and Judith and the entire Alliance for Vermont Communities Board for the generous gift to ACF.

- Maintenance of funds discussion. Current funds are approximately \$36,000. Discussion about whether we have to have all this money in an account with immediate access. Could some of the money be invested? They are town funds so the towns make the decisions about the funds. Restricted town funds that cannot be invested in stocks. Annie will check this. Could be invested in something with an interest rate. Judith - could we put \$20,000 in a rainy day fund. Could we invest this for some return? Do we have autonomy on the funds to be able to invest it? It would need to be a sustainable fund? Who decides? Kevin suggests that Town money can only buy Government Bonds. Decision is to explore options.

5. Review Comments/Concerns/Questions received during the 30-day Public Input period following 10/27/22. Discussion and approach with respect to modifications to the Forest Stewardship plan.

There is a move from 4 to 5 residents not to do any harvesting of trees.

Numerous residents have made a move to not use herbicides/glyphosate/pesticides. Proposed that for the first year or two that we will take a non-herbicide approach and utilize manual eradication during work days. Also proposed that we treat invasives this year for 2023. Suggestion of working with Mike Bold from Got Weeds from Royalton. We cannot let the invasives take over the forest. The population has to be reduced. If we get ten people over 4 work days then hand pulling may make an impact. Proposed to not use herbicide for two years with a mechanical hand pull during volunteer work days to hand pull invasive plants. If this does not work then we might need to consider other treatments. There is the potential that if mechanical mitigation is not enough then the invasive species could spread considerably and become a much bigger problem. Can we use funds to pay a sports team to pull invasive species? Can we word the document that our priority is to treat invasive with manual labor? Can the invasive issue be assessed on an annual basis so that the effectiveness of hand pulling can be monitored. We are going forward with mechanical pulling that is assessed every year for its effectiveness. An education program will be provided for the volunteers about the impact of letting the invasive species get out of control.

Steve Faccio has stated that Black Locust is an invasive species and should be labeled as such and removed from the forest. Removing them can cause issues as they will sprout. These will need to be removed

repeatedly. Leaving them to die naturally they will not resprout. Do we want to remove or leave as a legacy to the farm? Michael suggests both. They are growing around the farm site and causing damage to the house foundation. Micki suggests leaving them except for the occasional selective cutting. David - it is naturalizing in this area due to the change in climate. Agreement - gradual work it out as we need products. Not eradicate but reduce over time.

Mowing - agreement - Half of the 6 acres of field mowing will be completed in July of the year. Alternate the full mowing year to year and see how it goes.

A change will be made to replace ground nesting birds with grassland nesting birds as suggested by Steve Faccio.

A comment will be included in the education section about the land being able to be used for the forest for studies.

In response to a comment by Tyrell Manning hunting will be allowed but we don't expect to close the trails during hunting season. Recommend a sign to alert recreators that trails are open during hunting season and to wear blaze orange.

Discussion on methodology to treat invasive plant infestation in the forest. Many means are presented in the management plan, including work days to manually pull plants. Four days were recommended. Concern that the scope of the problem exceeds manual labor. The removal will require community involvement, and presents an opportunity for education about invasives, their impact on the health of forest and wildlife, and the means to treat. Funds have been included in the budget for mitigation. One possibility is to use some funds to donate to a team program or school trip in return for weeding services.

Motion was made for a two-year moratorium on use of herbicides in the community forest. MS made a motion. AP seconded. Rob amended the motion to include a discussion for assessment in the fall. Motion failed 3-2. Annie note: this needs clarification. My take is that the Board is split on practices and plans further discussion. Immediate plan to begin in spring with work days.

The remaining emails and reports submitted public comments have been tabled to continue discussion of the public input and plan revisions at the next meeting.

6. Finalize 2023 Budget.

- Discussion of a permanent toilet facility. Michael and Kevin will price out some options including composting toilets like those used on AT and Long Trails . If not a composting type, construction will be done by volunteer labor (Michael)

Discussion of line items of budget for 2023 (see attached budget). Budget amounts passed. It must be approved by the Board and both select boards

7. Reporting Responsibilities, as per the Interlocal Agreement.

An annual report and budget must be turned into town offices by early January.

8. Annual Report - discussion

9. Educational Programming for 2023 – Update from Michael, Annie, Erik and Judith.

Annie spoke to Becky Bailey about contacting the local churches for a carol sing in the community forest.

10. Other Business

- Transfer of ACF information from the AVC website to the Town websites or to our own ACF website. This information is extensive, well-written and too important to lose as AVC disbands.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20pm

Next meeting. January 12, 2022 at Sharon Academy High School, Sharon, Vermont

6:00 Adjourn Draft minutes respectively submitted by R. Stainton and Annie Penfield on 12/8/22