

Strafford Conservation Commission
March 23, 2021 via Zoom

Present: Steve Wilbanks, Micki Colbeck, Mike Hebb, Steve Faccio, JT Horn, Will Cooney, Chuck Sherman, Dave Paganelli, Kate Bass Root.

Also present: Dorian Yates, Mary Louise Pierson, Roz Finn, Denny Emerson, Susan Tiholiz, Rett Emerson.

- 1) 11/24/20 minutes approved.
- 2) JT Horn approved as Strafford representative to Ashley Community Forest project. He reported that he has been in communication with Toni Pippy. The focus is on collaboration with Sharon and making ACF an opportunity not a burden.
- 3) General discussion of environmental impact on Strafford's public trail system and other related issues as follows:

Dorian Yates encouraged the SCC to conduct a general review of the trails policies to identify areas of improvement, esp. in the areas of new trail planning and sustainable trail management policy. She also expressed her concerns of trails having much larger environmental impacts; is concerned about bicycle use on trails; and urged the SCC to adopt the Nature Conservancy trails policies.

Steve W. expressed his opinion that our trails already have a very minimal low impact, and that the SCC does not in any way want to harm the environment. He reminded us that our present commission has several excellent environmentally focused professionals.

Roz asked us to acknowledge the general disrespect humans hold for other forms of life on this planet and reminded us that it is our task, as humans, to protect wild creatures. She reminded us that we share this planet with untold numbers of other creatures, and we need to respect their lives alongside our own.

Mary Louise asked us to keep in mind when making new trails the value of the conservation of natural areas in Strafford. She added that as the Conservation Commission we are tasked with fostering an appreciation of the land. She also spoke to parking area issues when planning new trails, and also identifying and considering any neighbors or other stakeholders and how the trail will affect them. She also posed the question, Do we have a limit to the number of miles of trails we plan on building?

Steve W agreed that we should contact everyone affected by proposed new trails.

Micki spoke to the value of unfragmented forest blocks.

Kate spoke to the need for some stronger trail policies, such as establishing more inclusive protocol for all proposed new trails, including parking; looking closely at bicycle use; and looking more closely at dogs on trails and their impact on fragile ecosystems.

JT spoke to the user-wildlife balance that is so important. He believes that this has been a most unusual year and not a benchmark year as far as trail use. He also spoke to the idea of

parking as a proxy for overall use patterns, and to keep our eye on any parking issues to identify overuse.

Steve F described the trails as mostly connectors of existing logging trails and that this has made the trail system have an overall lower impact.

- 4) Deeryard issues: Dave P audio is working now so he spoke to the deeryard issue. Spoke of the new idea of questioning the importance of viewing deer as a single species, or hemlocks as a single species and focusing on a healthy balanced forest of native species with complex structure that would better support all species instead. No one, simple solution.
- 5) Open Space Plan: Steve W explained that we need to update and then it will be inserted into the Natural Resources section of the Town Plan, and to contact him with any thoughts.
- 6) Goals for 2021: 1-Ashley Forest Management Plans 2-OCF and Cobb Forest annual review of those plans(should we do this annually?) 3-Finish Wetlands Inventory 4- Wildlife presentations for a community audience?
- 7) Restoration of stream banks: Micki is coordinating this with Newton 7-8 science teacher Erik Reimanis. She also wants SCC to talk about the 4th of July Frog Jumping Contest again if the 4th of July celebration is scheduled to happen.
- 8) Mike Trail Updates: Willis Phelps has agreed to put a parking area on his property near the trailhead. Whitcomb Hill is the most traveled trail. Also, John and Lucy Hemenway have expressed interest in having trails on the Hemenway preserve. 2 Trails. Both sides of the road. Will bring his proposal to the commission.
- 9) New Business: Will Cooney is warmly welcomed and asked for his thoughts on his first meeting. Will said that he was interested in Mary Louise's comment that we need to anticipate changes in the future when discussing trail usage and management.
- 10) Old Business: Steve W mentioned the issue of TH44 Nutting Rd and accuracy of Town ROW, with regards to open access to the Ashley Forest.
- 11) Next Meeting: April 27th 2021.

The motion to adjourn the meeting carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Bass Root, Recording Secretary and Vice Chair