

Weathersfield Conservation Commission
Minutes
October 28, 2021
Weathersfield Center Meetinghouse

Members present: Ryan Gumbart, Roy Burton, Howard Beach, Heather Shand, Cheryl Cox, Ellen Clattenburg

Guests present: Aaron Day, Stan Spencer, both of the Ascutney Trail Association

Members absent: Tyler Harwell, Jeff Pelton

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Ryan Gumbart.

Ascutney Trail Association/ Town Forest Trails

Because there were guests, Ryan asked them to present first. Stan Spencer has been building trails and mowing for us in the Town Forest. Aaron Day is the Winter Trails Committee Chairperson of the ATA.

The Conservation Commission is charged “to administer the Weathersfield Town Forest for the primary purpose of recreation (for the enjoyment of the public and to support economic development), creation and protection of various wildlife and plant habitats, and the education of the public on forest management” (from the Town of Weathersfield Conservation Commission Policy). Because of the role of the Commission, Stan and Aaron asked the WCC to approve the ATA’s long term plan to develop a network of multi use trails in the Town Forest. With our approval, the ATA can then apply for grants to fund the development of these trails. The ATA has to pay the trail workers although there are some volunteers, so they are heavily dependent on grants.

Stan Spencer first explained the ATA’s plans for trails. Having developed Cloudspin this summer, the ATA hopes to build other connecting loops, one further to the west (an intermediate trail), another (“High Line”) further north and to open an alternate entrance so that hikers, runners, and cyclists can make their hike in the town forest a loop, rather than an out-and-back trip. According to Stan and Aaron, successful trails are ones which can take recreationalists on a shorter or longer jaunt without having to retrace their steps back to their vehicles.

Stan Spencer also explained that trails take 2-3 years to fully develop, but various steps in trail building occur sporadically over this span of time.

To wit:

- Trails are worked out meticulously, lots of walking back and forth, up and down, and designed to connect to other trails and egresses.
- They are then marked in the late fall (prior to gun season) with flagging every 6 feet and a 24 inch way roughly cleared (i.e. the ATA would like to start flagging another trail this fall). With no or little foliage, this is the time to set the trail.
- The trail is blown free of leaves in the spring

- As volunteers and paid workers have time, the trail is built in the early summer
- Trail maintenance (as opposed to development) occurs in the summer and early fall
- It's important to think ahead and determine costs of gravel, culverts and other needed supplies so that if a grant opportunity arises, they are ready to move on it.
- At some point, once an approved trail system plan is in place, the ATA with the support of the WCC will contact the State for permission to use the Spur Trail for entrance or egress (with Rick's Road providing the other entrance or egress)

Stan Spencer and Aaron Day also explained that the ATA has the capacity to get the word out about trails. Trailforks is a mobile app with a database of over 300,000 trails. Users can contribute but local trail associations like the ATA have the control to approve and curate the submissions. Meanwhile, Ryan Gumbart has been helping by creating new maps as plans progress. The ATA members gave Ryan a shout out for his helpful work on these maps.

Ryan Gumbart agreed that it is better forest management to have a full plan of trails and approve it. He has been working closely with Stan Spencer and the ATA. He has also contacted the Windsor County Forester Hannah Dallas who will (at no expense to the town) inventory the property, measure and map habitat areas and resources, and she may have some recommendations about trails. There is no set time that she will be coming. Rather, she will fit in her inventory when she has time, perhaps in bits and pieces. Ryan Gumbart has also been in touch with the Upper Valley Land Trust which is enthusiastic about ATA's multi use trail system.

Minutes: After the ATA representatives left, the first order of business was approval of the September minutes (taken by Cheryl Cox for Ellen Clattenburg). Howard Beach moved and Heather Shand seconded the motion to approve the minutes and this motion passed unanimously.

Old business:

The Bat Talk held on October 23 at the Weathersfield Center Memorial Grove was a big success. There were about 30 attendees and the WCC gave away 5 bat houses in a drawing. It was hypothesized that because it was originally planned to be held inside, fewer children came than we had hoped.

Relicensing Connecticut River hydro dams: Kathy Urffer presented at our last meeting. Ryan reminded the commissioners that there will be a period for public comment. As a conservation commission we should submit a comment and also raise awareness in the community that individuals can also comment. Ryan thought the comment period will happen sometime in the coming year.

Web page: Brandon Gulnick had contacted Ryan about updates to the WCC web page on the Town site.

Proposed WCC policy: The Town Manager had also shared a proposed Weathersfield Conservation Commission Policy - First Reading and Ryan had sent this to the WCC members.

Comments included changing the wording of our primary task from “identify, protect and preserve” to “identify, conserve, and preserve” (section 1a). There was discussion also about our responsibilities for the Town Forest and the need to submit our anticipated expenses by November to the Town (as stipulated by this policy). Expenses we know will occur are mowing under the power line in the Town Forest twice -- spring and late summer -- and this will likely be in the neighborhood of \$600-700. Given our responsibility for “developing plans for resource protection and advising Town Officials by directing attention to the Town’s natural, Scenic, and Historic resources” (1c) the suggestion was made to pay the regional planning office to print several key large scale maps (habitats, wetlands, slope, etc). These could be stored (or better yet, posted) in the Zoning Administrator’s office. A third suggestion for our upcoming budget was made to include demolishing the cabin and outhouse in the Town Forest and removing the shed.

Harry Temple Lookout: Ellen updated the commission on the plans for the dedication of the Harry Temple Lookout. It will be at a time to be determined in late spring or early summer when Harry’s relatives from out west feel it would be safer to travel (and not contract Covid). Dick Andrews will invite Long Trail members to attend and the State Forest and Parks department will also have people who want to attend.

Scenic Vistas: Ryan has this on a back burner for now.

Waterway Naming project: Everyone had received an update from Jeff Pelton and some had already responded to his request for two streams which had multiple suggestions for names.

Winter/Spring Workshops or Hikes:

- A talk on relicensing the hydro dams at Wilgus when the comment period opens
- A talk by Chris Bernier, Wildlife Biologist and Furbearer Project Leader

More on the Town Forest:

- We should remember to send our formal approval of the ATA multi use trail plan to the ATA this fall or early winter as they want to get started
- The VOREC grant letter of intent was accepted, we now can apply. Brandon Gulnick will be the principal author of that proposal.
- Ryan asked for a motion on the Town Forest structures that must be removed. (One has recently been hit by a fallen tree.) Howard Beach made the motion to recommend demolishing the cabin and ancillary structures and removing the materials as needed Roy Burton seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.
- Mowing costs for the work done this summer is \$520. Ellen Clattenburg moved and Howard Beach seconded the motion to use our annual funds to pay Stan Spencer. The Commissioners opted to pass the hat for the additional \$20 owed to Stan (give your contribution to Ryan who will be seeing Stan).
- The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) included pandemic-related aid for state and local governments. Congress directed nearly \$200 million of that funding directly to Vermont’s cities, towns, and villages. City councils and select boards will have discretion over how

to spend their allocations (taken from Vermont League of Cities and Towns website).
Ryan asked the Commissioners to consider requests for conservation related projects that are waiting to get completed.

- Kiosk: Jeff Pelton has been meeting with Matt Keniston about the construction of a kiosk and with local lumber yards about possible donations of lumber for this project.

New Business

Walk for Commission members to the Town Forest: Ryan will be setting up a date for this walk.

The motion was made to adjourn at 9:10 pm by Heather Shand and seconded by Cheryl Cox.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Clattenburg, clerk

Next meeting will be at 7 pm on Thursday, December 2 at the Proctor Library.