

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting on October 9, 2013

The meeting was called to order by Pam Knox at 6:40 pm.

- I. **ROLL CALL:** Present were Commissioners Pam Knox, Christine Barnes, Leslie Matthews, Ruth Ruttenberg, and Laura Hill-Eubanks.
- II. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** The minutes of the meeting on September 11, 2013 were approved 4-0-1.
- III. **DISCUSSION**
 - a. **Nomination for VECAN Individual Energy Leadership Award:** The Commissioners nominated by acclamation Laura Hill-Eubanks for the Individual Energy Leadership Award, to be given by Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network. The motion passed on a vote of 4-0-1, with Hill-Eubanks abstaining (and very touched).

Bike Race at Norwich: Norwich University and Onion River Sports have plans to hold a bike race at the Shaw Recreation Center on Paine Mountain on October 13. The Conservation Commission learned of these plans on Sept 27 when Commissioner Barrett received a call from the race organizers. Apparently, while setting up for the race, the organizers noted that a trail they had planned to use was in bad shape and unsafe. The organizers proposed to construct a new trail that would connect an old logging road on Village property; apparently this trail is already being lightly used by bikers. It seems as though the race organizers are also proposing to upgrade the logging trail for more biking use.

Commissioner Barrett was asked to look over the proposed new trail sections a week ago. None of the other Commissioners have been able to examine the trails due to the short notice. While most of the race course is on Norwich U property, the route that is being proposed for the new sections of bike trail is primarily in the municipal forest on lands owned by the Northfield Village. The Village Trustees would therefore in all likelihood have to give their permission for the trails to be constructed and used as bike trails. The Village Trustees may seek the NCC's opinion on the matter, so we consider the proposal here. There are several issues raised by the plan.

Concerns include the following:

- The project is subject to Act 250 permitting and we have no information as to whether the organizers have requested or obtained approval for the new trails. We also do not know whether potential impacts to the area have been assessed to any great extent; impacts could potentially include those associated with wildlife habitat, soils, and erosion. Therefore, the NCC does not have enough information to assess any impacts.
- NCC is concerned that the biking trail system would be significantly expanded into the Village Forest for long-term use and may facilitate the use of village forest lands outside of the "formal," mapped Norwich trail system for biking, thereby potentially increasing undesirable impacts to the forest

lands. There does not seem to be an agreement in place as to who is responsible for maintaining and policing the new project area. The Village has only given Norwich U permission, by easement, to construct and use bike trails that were part of the original Act 250 project plan. The new trails are not part of that plan or agreement.

- Given the short time presented, the NCC has not had enough time to fully research and consider the impacts to the Village Forest lands. Further, The lack of time to prepare for the race also raises concerns that the trail construction may be undertaken too hastily and without the planning and information necessary to be appropriately carried out.

The NCC does not recommend the construction of new trails in the Village Forest for the October 13 race as planned. If the organizers and/or Norwich U would like to pursue the trail project in the long term, the NCC recommends that 1) Act 250 approval be sought and no Act 250 violations occur, 2) associated impacts to the Village Forest be assessed, and 3) Norwich U agrees to be responsible for the policing of any expanded and existing trail system related to this project, and for the maintenance of the trail system and protection of the associated lands.

Laura will write a memo detailing the concerns and the NCC will review it for submission to the Village Trustees.

- b. **AVCC Conference 10/5:** Commissioners Barnes, Matthews, Ruttenberg, and Hill-Eubanks attended the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions meeting on Oct 5. Commissioners participated in several seminars including those on conservation planning, municipal law, public participation, Biofinder, funding, and climate change/wildlife adaptation.
- c. **Town Plan chapters:** Discussion on the NCC's ongoing review of the Northfield Town Plan as it relates to conservation. Christine will be responsible for the master document; all changes should be copied to her for incorporating into the final document. NCC will hold a Special Meeting, tentatively scheduled for Nov 2 at 10 AM in the Brown Public Library. The meeting will be a working session to continue the plan review.
- d. **NCC website:** Ken Mccann will set up a webpage for accessing the minutes of the NCC at the town website.
- e. **Mad River Resource Management Alliance:** Commissioner Ruttenberg, who is the Northfield representative on the Mad River Resource Management Alliance (MRRMA), has asked the NCC to support her in requesting an economic analysis of the town's proposal to leave the Mad River Resource Alliance, and to subsequently rejoin the Central Vermont Waste Management District. There is a public vote on this issue scheduled for Nov 19. Ruttenberg's report from the September MRRMA Board meeting shows that while the fees to the towns may be reduced by moving to the CVWMD, the haulers will be charged a fee of \$30/ton, significantly increasing their costs, which will quite likely be passed on to their customers – including households, businesses, and town government in Northfield. Ruttenberg requests that the town prepare an economic analysis and distribute the information to town residents in time

for it to be fully considered before the special vote on Nov 19. The NCC unanimously supports Ruttenberg in this request.

- f. **NCC on Town Meeting Day Ballot:** The NCC will be asking to be on the ballot on Town Meeting Day. We have never had a budget and would like to ask the town for funds in the amount of \$400 to be used for education, supplies/materials and other expenses related to conservation.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

VI. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Hill-Eubanks, Northfield Conservation Commission.

These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct.