

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
JOINT MEETING OF THE
NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION AND THE
TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE
Minutes of May 22, 2024**

Attendees:

For NCC: David Mears, Debbie Zuaro, Jeremy Whalen, Nigel Hicks-Tibbles

For TFSC: Jeremy Whalen, Ray Crowder, Nelson Hoffman, Andrew Padilla

Public: Select Board Member Lydia Petty Started 1813

Minutes:

- Roll call
- Public participation
 - Lydia mentions she is here to listen in and discuss VOREC
- Skipped approval of minutes due to an initial lack of quorum for NCC
- Discussion on TFSC Priorities
 - Jeremy updates NCC on discussion on e-bikes
 - Class 1 e-bikes are allowed on Norwich trails
 - Some government land managers allow e-bike access
 - No votes from TFSC as of yet, but most likely will want to recommend restrictions on class 2 bikes with throttle assist, limiting use of Town forest trails to pedal assisted e-bikes
 - May need to discuss the possibility of adopting an ordinance and will need to consider both enforcement and public education- Lydia indicated that the Select Board would welcome input from NCC and TFSC
 - Discussion on accessibility
 - This topic may provide a good opportunity to work with local ATV user groups
 - Update from Andrew regarding conversation with VMBA
 - TFSC will hear a presentation from Stowe Land Trust regarding their approach to e-bikes
 - Potential town demo day in June
 - Next steps: TFSC will consider actions for responding to increased e-bike use at upcoming meetings and will present a recommendation to NCC that can be presented to the Select Board

- Update on Town Forest Plan
 - New TFSC member Ginny Kunkel is interested in helping with update
 - NCC member Russ Barrett is working with County Forester Robert Nelson to update plan
 - Jeremy and TFSC want to work with Tim Duclos at Audubon Vermont to update bird habitat management plan for Town Forest
 - A significant hurdle to timber harvest in the Town Forest is access
 - Discussion of the need for public education and outreach before logging takes place
- Knotweed abatement in Town Forest
 - Maybe good time for mechanical removal during water tank replacement.
 - Warren/Waitsfield commission working with AmeriCorps and UVM to remove knotweed
 - There may be something of archeological or historical significance in Cheney field
 - Next steps:
 - Jeremy to talk with Simon Pearish at Norwich University about knotweed
 - David will talk with the chair of the Waitsfield Conservation Commission, Curt Lindberg, to see if Norwich can collaborate in the Warren and Waitsfield removal efforts
- MAMBA trail connector project
 - MAMBA working with Berlin Conservation Commission and wants to know if NCC is interested as well
 - NCC has reached out to Berlin Conversation Commission during grant conversations in the past
 - General agreement that the trail connector project could be a beneficial enhancement of the Northfield trail system
 - There is an established trail
 - We need more information from MAMBA to understand what is being proposed
 - The trail crosses the land of 3 private land owners
 - There is a sugaring lease on some of the involved land and consideration needs to be given to impacts of trail use on the sugaring operation
 - Northfield does not have an active VMBA chapter to draw upon for volunteer help and we need to give consideration to how we would maintain any new trails in Northfield

- Next steps:
 - MAMBA is meeting with Berlin Conservation Commission on June 5
 - Jeremy will contact MAMBA (Dayton Crites) to let them know that NCC and TFSC are generally supportive
- Summer Project Discussion
 - Town Forest community nature program
 - Debbie provided an update on VOREC programming.
 - Free to the community w/ registration limits
 - Speakers/events/services include:
 - Brian Pfeffier - Field Biologist
 - Bridget Butler - Bird Diva - Bird walk and talk
 - VINS program
 - Jeanne Bright - Painting supplies that can be checked out
 - Southern VT - Who's that - Critter ID program
 - Yoga hikes in Town Forest
 - New program to provide child carrier/backpack for checkout by the community
 - Create series of kids adventure back packs
 - Story walks
 - Discussion of the potential of these community engagement events to provide speakers and organizers with information about the history and importance of the Town Forest, as well as safety and stewardship guidance (e.g. no littering, camping, or fires)
 - Next steps: Nigel will put something together for TFSC and NCC to consider at June meetings – may draw upon Paine Mountain guidebook
- Lake Champlain Basin Program Grant
 - Grant being submitted by Friends of Winooski River on behalf of three towns in Winooski River Basin meeting socioeconomic criteria including west side of Northfield
 - If granted, will support staffing at Friends of Winooski to work with NCC on projects that promote access, understanding and stewardship of the watershed
 - Ideas we have discussed include additional trail signage work as part of VOREC trails project, and support for Northfield Middle School/High School trail work

■ NMHS Trails Work Group Update

- VYCC came and surveyed the trails to get better idea of potential projects
- Lot of saw work needed to address significant downed woody material from blowdown last year
- interest of VYCC to work with NCC to establish a significant presence of VYCC in Northfield, subject to finding funding
- Ideas for projects beyond the NMHS trails project include watershed protection projects, construction work such as building kiosks and bridges, or outdoor classroom
- Lydia explained that there may be ARPA funding available but any proposals need to be submitted quickly
- May be an opportunity to work with Norwich College cross-country coach to do trail work
- Next step: David to work with NMHS trail project group (Jeremy, Maureen, Judy) to put a proposal together for ARPA funds

■ Outreach to Northfield Planning Commission

- NCC and TFSC continue to seek a special protection designation for the Town Forest
- Planning commission had second hearing after select board sent back recommendations.
- Select Board is accepting first round of bylaws with lot size and setbacks
- First meeting of Select Board in June for public hearing on bylaws
- For future reference, Nigel mentioned new Act 250 amendment that addresses town bylaws and may need to be considered by planning commission before/during implementation
- Desire among members to engage with Planning Commission in future bylaw changes

■ Cross brothers dam removal project and ways to be involved

- Timing of project uncertain but likely to be next year
- Project may provide opportunities to improve access to the Dog River in the area of the current dam
- FEMA providing bulk of funding for dam removal
- May be opportunities to pursue complementary funding for other related recreational access projects or floodplain improvement and restoration