

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
Town Forest Stewardship Committee
Minutes of April 19, 2023

I. ROLL CALL

Jeremy called the meeting to order at 6:07. Jeremy, Nelson, Russ, Colin present.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED): None.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES of February 21, 2023

Motion to approve by Nelson, second by Russ. Motion carries 3-0-1 with Colin abstaining due to absence.

IV. UPDATES & DISCUSSION

A. Election of Chair

This is the TFSC's first meeting since Town Meeting Day, so the committee is electing a new chair.

Motion by Colin, second by Nelson. Motion carries 4-0-0

B. NCC Updates

1. Town Forest Zoning Designation Letter

The TFSC and NCC have submitted a letter to the Planning Commission requesting the creation of a new Town Forest district within the new Zoning Regulations. There has not been a response to date. Jeremy will check in with the PC to see if the request has been given consideration yet. Colin will facilitate an introduction between Jeremy and Steve Fitzhugh, chair of the PC.

C. VOREC Grant

1. Implementation Committee

Equipment is being purchased for the library's gear lending collection. The new additions include more snowshoes, trekking poles, traction devices, and binoculars.

Trail counters have been given to the TFSC. We've been asked to decide where to place them to capture some baseline data around trail use before any of the VOREC improvements have been implemented. They need to be programmed, which Jeremy will coordinate using one of the Town computers.

2. Wayfinding Signage

There was a site visit in March with Debbie, Kim, Colin, and two representatives from D&K to look at sites around the town where signage would be useful and appropriate. The group examined potential sites (the Common, the library, Slate Ave entrance, Byam entrance, NU Shaw Center, Barrows Road) and areas for directional signage at intersections around town.

At a subsequent meeting with the Implementation Committee a map alignment and area of capture, along with what trails are appropriate to include. There will be a follow-up to cement some of the ideas discussed and begin to look at aesthetic options. D&K will be providing the town with working files at the end of the project to allow us to identify specific areas to zoom in on or reformat as necessary,

D. Joint NCC/TFSC Meeting

1. Date: Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Our next meeting will be a joint meeting with the NCC. The principal topic on the table is whether easements should be created for the Town Forest similar to what other towns have in place for their land. The genesis of the conversation is concerns around the potential for the parcel at some point being sold or developed. Conservation easements would also potentially increase the likelihood of being able to obtain grant funding for work within the Town Forest as easements are often a requirement for grant funding. Colin would like to see some specific examples of the types of grants we're currently excluded from and any specific concerns with regards to development/sale that would

necessitate this level of protection. Colin feels that in the absence of having had a larger conversation about how to prioritize the three aspects of the TFSP (recreation, conservation, and forest management that this discussion is premature.

2. Town Forest Protection Discussion

Colin would like to see some specific examples of the types of grants we're currently excluded from and any specific concerns with regards to development/sale that would necessitate this level of protection. Colin feels that in the absence of having had a larger conversation about how to prioritize the three aspects of the TFSP (recreation, conservation, and forest management that this discussion is premature. The county forester is nearing completion on the forest management plan, so that asset would also be helpful in discussions around both easements and the higher purposes of the land.

E. Membership update

Mat will not be extending his tenure on the TFSC into another term, but is interested in continuing to participate in trail maintenance activities and looks forward to seeing us out in the woods. The Town Manager has posted a notice advertising our two vacancies. A citizen has expressed interest in joining but has not yet submitted a letter of interest to the Town Manager. Jeremy has been actively pursuing engagement from the high school to see if we can get a youth voice on the committee.

F. Dustin's Pasture Boundary Marking

Berlin is in the process of marking their boundaries, so half of the boundary will already be clearly blazed. Ideally this work would happen in October/November, but could happen throughout the summer if that is when help is available. It would be good to have more eyes on the lines so that more people become familiar with the property lines.

G. Trail Counters Purchased through VOREC Grant

The group will identify areas to place the three counters, likely mimicking the placements from the original counts obtained a couple years ago (Slate, Byam, and the Red Trail entrance at the Shaw Center) to obtain a new baseline.

H. Spring Mud Season Trail Closures

Trails and the Cheney are currently closed. Colin proposed immediately opening Cheney, opening the PMT to Lybrand as soon as possible to allow loops with Slate Ave, and then opening the remainder of the trails as conditions allow. Nelson would like to wait to open any trails to allow wildlife a break from human interruptions until later in the season. Russ is in favor of establishing an annual date on which we open the trail network, with exceptions given to open the trails earlier in the season as conditions allow.

Colin moved to open the Cheney immediately, and then proceed with a phased opening of the trails as conditions allow. Russ seconded with the amendment to open the Cheney on Saturday 4/22. Motion carries 3-1-0 with Nelson in opposition citing concerns around opening Cheney but not with a phased opening as conditions allow. Jeremy will coordinate a posting with The Town Manager and the NCC to alert the community to the opening schedule and alert the Shaw OC director of our plan. Nelson will plan to examine the section of trail downhill of the PMT/Lybrand intersection leading into the weekend of the 29th with an eye towards opening as conditions allow.

V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

None

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

None

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 7:44 by Colin, second by Nelson and Russ. Motion carries 4-0-0.