

Huntington Conservation Commission

Minutes for September 14, 2017

DRAFT

PRESENT: Rebecca Ryan (Co-Chair), Sheri Lynn (Co-Chair), Maggie Mae Anderson, Guthrie Smith, JB Bryan, Darlene Palola, Jenna Koloski & Jeannette Segale

OTHERS PRESENT: Aaron Worthley, Bob Low, Liz Low, Wright Preston, Fritz Martin & Edward Burdick

CLERK: Rebecca Ryan took minutes in the absence of the clerk.

Call to Order: Lynn called the meeting to order at 19:09. Ryan said that due to personal reasons, Natalie Beckwith is currently unable to continue to clerk for the commission. She hopes she can come back, but understands the commission needs a clerk.

Minutes of July 13, 2017:

MOTION: Segale moved to approve the minutes, Bryan seconded. Passed unanimously of attendees.

Public Comment: Aaron Worthley said he and others with Friends of Gillette Pond (FOGP) and Richmond Land Trust (RLT) would be happy to answer any questions that the commission may have. He emailed a supplemental response to questions the commission had at its July meeting and hoped it was helpful. He noted nothing has changed since the July meeting from their perspective, except that FOGP is moving forward with other fundraising efforts. Wright Preston said since the July meeting, they have received a small grant for \$2,000 and \$40,000 in commitments from individual donors without too much trying. This project, he noted, is important to the communities around the pond. Segale thanked Worthley for the comprehensive information. There were no additional questions from the commission.

Conservation Fund Application: FOGP & RLT (Discussion & vote on recommendation to Selectboard):

- Lynn said that she and Ryan discussed the process for tonight's discussion. Lynn created a table on a flip chart listing possible funding recommendations – full funding, partial funding, no funding, town vote, and other. Members could then offer both justification and concern for each category.
- Segale suggested reviewing the criteria and check list before completing the table. All agreed.
- Bryan said the application meets a lot of the criteria on the funding checklist but the project is not in Huntington.
- Ryan reviewed the article from March 2016 Town Meeting allowing HCC consider this application for funding for this specific project.
- Segale is concerned about keeping a dam in place. She asked if the dam were removed what would happen? There would be diversity, and beavers would create ponds. Throughout the US, there has been an effort to mimic what beavers do for good reason.
- A discussion ensued about biodiversity versus recreational and scenic value.
- Ryan agrees the landscape is beautiful but recalls a meeting with Karen Bates, the state's watershed coordinator, several years ago. Bates said that without the dam, the change in the ecosystem would support habitat and functions valued by the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR).
- Koloski has no concerns about the project but does about funding, and availability of funding for other projects.

- Palola noted it's a beautiful scenic view but she is worried about a new dam impacting downstream fish habitat. Erosion from the above steep hillside will fill up the pond with sediment over the years. With huge rainstorms, it doesn't auger well. Because the Huntington River is already warm, the impact on the brook is unknown. There was some discussion and differences of opinion about the downstream impact with or without the dam.
- Smith said it is a valuable project but she is concerned about recommending nearly half of what is currently in the fund.
- Koloski said that Richmond Conservation Commission agreed to the funding request of \$150,000.
- Anderson supports full funding of \$100, 000. She said this project is preserving the beauty of Vermont; it's bigger than just one little thing.
- Bryan said that it is unfair to compare Richmond's (with its population and resources) contribution to Huntington with fewer people and less money. There is no shame of in recommending less than \$100,000 for this project and not divert resources that could be used to purchase a new town forest.
- Bryan believes if pond is gone (without a new dam), it will improve diversity. There will be an increase in trout, new beaver ponds, foxes, coon, and soil will add nutrition that is not there now by becoming a very rich wetland.
- Worthley said that if the dam is not rebuilt, the state will remove the existing dam. A majority of commission members were surprised by this. He said that road crews tend to break up beaver dams if they create problems with roads/culverts.
- Lynn entertained a motion and offered one.

Motion: Lynn motioned to recommend funding the application at \$77,000– 11% of the total construction cost. Anderson seconded.

Discussion:

- Lynn was ready to fund in July but not the full \$100,000. She landed on a percentage of the construction cost as that is the part of the proposed budget that directly impacts Huntington. She was glad to see that 77 people in Huntington completed the survey. She feels this is a fair and equitable solution. Lynn continued that she was comfortable with criteria that was met, but we could use the fund for multiple projects in the same timeframe.
- Bryan said \$77,000 is 38% of current conservation fund balance.
- Worthley said that FOGP asked for 11% of the total budget (\$100,000 of the \$875,000 estimated cost to build the dam) because it was a combination of what works in the total package, noting that what FOGP has left to spend is what they have to raise.
- Worthley also pointed out that Richmond contributes the same annual amount that Huntington does to its conservation fund and that shows how much Huntington values conservation.
- Martin said that the Richmond Conservation Commission was also looking at purchasing property to create a town forest and it still contributed \$150,000 (75% of total fund).
- Preston said this is a unique town project in Vermont because there is no state/federal funds to replace dams. Ryan asked why the government is no longer providing funds. Preston said because dams are being taken down. Worthley said that most dams being taken down are the large power dams that impact fisheries upstream.

- Bob Low said that the wildlife is already there including beaver, otter, osprey and bald eagles. Sue Morse and ANR agree. If the dam is removed and pond is not there, you will be losing all the diversity.

VOTE on motion (\$77,000, 11% of total construction cost). Two in favor, six opposed. Motioned failed.

Motion: Bryan motioned to recommend \$50,000. He said this is 25% of the current conservation fund. Lynn seconded.

Discussion:

- Segale said she has followed FOGP and loves the area but still fighting for siding on the removal of the dam to promote diversity.
- Anderson thinks removing dam seems counter-intuitive to the work of the conservation commission. Conservation funds by design is meant to serve diverse projects.
- Koloski believes we have this unique area that we don't have elsewhere, so keeping it is important.
- Ryan worries that funding a project that is not in Huntington may open the town to other proposals outside the village that we can't anticipate.
- Palola thought that conserving is our goal.
- Segale called for a vote.

VOTE on motion (\$50,000): Six in favor, two opposed. Motion passed.

- Koloski and Anderson thinks it should be more. Others think that community members will see value in this project and give more.
- Lynn reminded all that this is only a recommendation. The Selectboard will review our recommendation, host a public comment period and then vote. She noted that this is an important collaboration between two towns and we do value that. But in general, the commission is concerned about the funding request of \$100,000.

Town Forest

Recreation Community Assistance Planning Program (see Attachment 1) –

- Huntington was one of ten communities that was awarded \$10,000 worth of technical assistance by the state.
- Koloski reported that Huntington received a letter of collaboration that the town needs to review and sign.
- Lynn is concerned that this is a template work plan and that we were looking for flexibility as we explore possible new properties for purchase.
- All agreed that we hoped this grant would help us facilitate our process regarding the new town forest search as opposed to the current town forest.

ACTION: Koloski will contact Kate Forrer to discuss options before we ask the town (Barbara Elliott) to sign the letter.

Moore Property

- Members welcomed Edward Burdick, a property owner adjacent to the Moore property.

- Burdick said he had a hard time finding the date/time of the HCC meetings. It was not posted on Front Porch Forum.
- Burdick said the Moore's own a sliver of land next to the brook on the opposite side of the full property & adjacent to his property that he would be interested in purchasing.
- Ryan and Lynn reviewed the progress to date. According to zoning regulations, the property has to be five acre minimum so the Moore's cannot donate a 1-acre parcel to the town. Steve Libby with the Vermont River Conservancy is working with the family to increase the donation to five acres.
- Lynn walked the property with Bob Heiser of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and he thought the property was beautiful. Lynn said that if the VLT takes on this project, it would work on behalf of the town to purchase the remaining acreage (+/- 64 acres) by pursuing an option agreement rather than purchase agreement. This would take approximately 12-18 months.
- While the Moore family is concerned about an extended timeline, they are willing to work with the town as long as they get the asking price. In order to move forward, VLT wants to us to look at the parking options and the existing camp. What is the town thinking about both? Also, VLT asked if there are recent property surveys to review parking and camp.
- The commission thanked Burdick for coming. The town is in the very early stages of this process. Ryan said the commission will keep his concerns/desire to purchase the small section of land in mind and invited him to join meetings the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 at the library.

Lynn and Ryan said Heiser and Ethan Tapper (Chittenden County Forester) will walk the Moore and much larger Timbervest property (adjacent and on the market) on September 20. Ryan and Lynn cannot join so asked if other commission members could. Anderson and Koloski may be able.

ACTION: Ryan will email Heiser and Tapper, and copy Anderson and Koloski to coordinate property walk on September 20.

ACTION: Palola will visit the town office to ask if there are current surveys of the Moore property and all neighboring properties.

Due to the late start and time devoted to the fund application tonight, Lynn suggested delaying some topics until the October meeting.

- Palola asked all to help promote the workshop on October 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the library. CCRPC will talk to community members about the water quality of the Huntington Watershed in order to develop a three-five year plan for land use.
- At the October meeting we will discuss the clerk position.
- All agreed due to wonderful weather and plenty of weekend activities to reschedule the commission retreat to another day/time.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10.

Attachment (1):

Letter of Collaboration

Town Forest Recreation Planning Community Assistance

Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program
Contact: Kate Forrer (802) 476-2003; katherine.forrer@uvm.edu

This document summarizes the collaborative work to be completed by the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF); SE Group, a private consulting firm contracted to work with the ten towns to develop an action-oriented town forest recreation plans; and the Town/City of _____.

This work is funded in part by a grant from the USDA Forest Service.

1. Issue Presented

Vermont has a long tradition of town-owned and managed forests for public benefit. In fact, 168 municipalities own over 67,000 acres of forestland, all open to the public. The public values of these town forests are diverse: from watershed protection, wildlife habitat, and forest products to outdoor classrooms and neighborhood gathering places. Vermont town forests contribute to the regional landscape by managing productive forestlands for timber, protecting physical and biological diversity, improving flood resiliency, and maintaining connectivity between larger patches of forest.

Vermont is at a pivotal moment in its forest-based tourism economy. In recent years Vermont town forests have received growing attention and pressure from local and regional interests, including mountain biking, disc golf, backcountry skiing, all-terrain vehicles, and other forest-based recreation both trail based and dispersed. To inform and address this growing pressure communities need to engage in comprehensive planning at the local level. If ignored, recreational use of Vermont town forests risks irreparable harm to forest integrity and a potential loss in economic development opportunity for communities. While some communities are experiencing increased demand and pressures, others are looking to enhance their town forest recreation opportunities as a community asset and an economic driver. This collaborative assistance program seeks to increase local capacity through engaging communities in integrated, innovative town forest planning, and providing towns with the resources to maximize recreation potential and economic benefit while maintaining long-term forest health and sustainability.

2. Project Description

The Vermont Town Forest Recreation Planning Community Assistance Program (Assistance Program) will provide technical community planning assistance, a value of up to \$10,000, to [Name of Community] to address issues and opportunities in the use and stewardship of their town forest(s). Specifically, SE Group, with support from VT UCF will work with [Name of Community] to:

- develop a vision for forest-based recreation and stewardship in their town forest(s);
- develop a detailed, action-oriented town forest recreation plan;
- provide preliminary assistance on the implementation of the plan to ensure the long-term success and achievement of the vision.

3. Project Phases

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I. *Compile Baseline Information*

The community representative and project team will inventory and compile existing mapping, inventories, plans, or background information.

II. *Town Forest Recreation Planning Summit*

Community representatives from all 10 towns will attend a one-day summit to launch the project. The Planning Summit will serve as an orientation for the community steering committee members, introducing everyone to the process, review project schedule and work plan, and expectations for the planning process.

III. *Preplanning Meetings*

A breakout session with the community representatives and project team members will be held at the Planning Summit

IV. *Forest Walk Events and Steering Committee Meetings*

Public visioning sessions in the community will be conducted through a Forest Walk. The goal of these events is to make them fun and encourage participation through a facilitated site tour, informational boards, dot exercises, comment cards, and/or one-on-one conversations to gain community input on needs and vision. Additional steering committee meetings will be held to further refine needs, and provide input on the process, desired outcomes, and final products.

V. *Plan Development*

Town Forest Recreation Plans (Plan) will be developed. The Plan will be focused on developing a compelling vision and discrete, clear, and implementable strategies for improvement of recreation in your town forest(s).

VI. *Draft Plan Presentation*

Public presentation of the draft Plan will be conducted in the community to gather input and feedback.

VII. *Presentation of Final Plan*

Final presentation of the Plan to town leadership and the public.

VIII. *Town Forest Recreation Planning Implementation Summit*

Community representatives, consultants, and partners will come together for an Implementation Summit that shares each community's final plan, their experiences with the process, and resources for plan implementation.

4. *Representatives*

The project team comprises the following representatives:

- *Kate Forrer, VT UCF, University of Vermont Extension*
- *Drew Pollak-Bruce, SE Group*

In addition to the project team, this initiative is supported by an interagency working group made up of representatives from UVM Extension, Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

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Kate Forrer will be the primary point of contact from the project team.
_____ will be the primary point of contact for _____ (town/city).

5. ***Project Schedule***

Compile base information and needs assessment	October 2017
Town Forest Recreation Planning Summit	November 2017
Preplanning meetings and steering committee process	November 2017
Community planning meetings and Forest Walk events	February 2018
Plan development	May 2018
Draft plan presentation	August 2018
Presentation of final plan	July 2018
Implementation Summit	September 2018

6. ***Partner Agreement***

SE Group/VT UCF will:

- Provide template outreach materials and promotion materials for community events and presentations.
- Facilitate all community visioning and public engagement opportunities to inform plan development.
- Develop the Town Forest Recreation Plan with guidance and input from the steering committee.
- Deliver public presentation of the draft plans to elicit public input on the draft concept and direction for future recreational development at the town forest.
- Present the final plan to community leaders and public.

The Town/City of _____ will:

- Commit to attending both the Town Forest Recreation Planning Summit and the Implementation Summit
- Provide a community point person responsible for assisting project team in compiling project related information, identifying stakeholders, being the recipient of project deliverables, and coalesce feedback on project deliverables
- Identify and convene a local steering committee, made up a diverse group of local stakeholders and community representatives, local steering committee to champion the planning process.
- Assist project team in identifying and engaging key stakeholders in the public engagement sessions and presentations
- Assist in the coordination, promotion, and delivery of local public engagement events, such as Forest Walk and plan presentations, to include publicity and local promotion, and securing a meeting space.
- Keep project team informed throughout the project, including sharing relevant committee meeting minutes, and relevant community updates.
- Commit to the project schedule and assist project team in meeting milestones throughout the project.

7. Monetary Outline

No money will be exchanged during this project.

8. Termination Clause

Either party may terminate this working relationship seven days after notifying the other party in writing.

8. Effective Date and Signatures

This scope of work shall will be effective from _____ to the end of the grant period in **March 2019**.

Both parties agree to the conditions as described above.

_____		_____	
Signature	Date	Signature	Date
_____		_____	
Name		Name	
Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program		Town/City of _____	