

WESTFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 16, 2024

WESTFORD TOWN OFFICE

Present: Kirsten Tyler (RKT), Sarah Pinto (SEP), Joel Fay (JF), Elias Rosenblatt (ER), Chris Cunningham (CC)

Guests: Travis Rock (TR), Patrick Haller – Selectboard (PH), Wendy Doane – Selectboard (WD), Ron Rodjenski (RR), Dale Rodgers (DR), Kati Anderson (KA)

September minutes – Motion for approval (SEP), Second (RKT), approved unanimously

Changes to Agenda: Ron Rodjenski to join virtually to discuss assistance, facilitation with Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grant

1. **RTP Grant**

- RKT asks about preapplication for the RTP grant
- RR introduces himself as working for Stone Shore Municipal Consulting – has been working with Westford to fill holes after Melissa Manka's (Town Planner) departure
- RR sent some documents for WCC to review
- There are 2 phases:
 - 12/6 preapplication deadline
 - January final application deadline
- RKT – Misty Meadows Town Forest (MMTF) would be our focus for grant money. Asks about RR role
- RR has a budget for his time. Can walk us through what's needed and will ask us questions and gather documents. There should be one point person on WCC for RR to work with. Notes that depending on what we have (or don't) for purposes of the grant, we can expend money to get it and that can be reimbursed (in most circumstances) if awarded the grant.

- DR asks how competitive the grant is
- RR: very competitive Priorities are:
 - Flood damage
 - Projects that make sense for the grant (Is the Town ready? Is the project ready?)
 - Federal money comes with federal design standards, e.g., ADA compliance and other potential “strings”
- We will discuss as a commission and decide what, when, if we want to do anything

2. **Public Comment** - None

3. **Osgood Hill Road Parcel Donation**

- RKT: abutters not happy with the access. Landowner (Davey) wants us to pursue parcel donation to the Town
- DR: was there a misunderstanding re: access?
- RKT explains Davey always had permission (50 years) but hadn’t been out there in a couple years. Multiple abutters, including Travis Rock and Bill Cleary.
- TR owns the property that used to be owned by the Andersons [previous permission had been granted by Anderson to Davey]. Property is posted.
- RKT: we were guests of the Daveys
- JF: apologizes for the unintentional trespass
- RKT: next step is to write to abutting landowners
- PH: There needs to be a right of way (ROW) before the Town accepts it. It invites a problem if it’s Town land.
- KA: If they just want it in its natural state, why can’t it be donated as such?
- WD: There are some towns that have property with security measures in place, e.g., gates. But people can see that the Town owns it and will want to go there.

- TR: apps are often incorrect as far as boundaries, landowner information
- KA: you can get your property removed from the app
- RKT: The land hasn't been touched in 70 years
- TR agrees it is a beautiful spot: rocky, forested, swampy
- ER: Landowners want it preserved. The challenge is to enforce the access, or lack thereof
- CC: Land should be posted, abutting land should be posted
- ER: there could be some compromise to reach a solution

4. **Landowner Communication Document**

- RKT read the document at the last Selectboard (SB) meeting. At that time, PH commented that we notify landowners when we do any maintenance
- Maintenance differs from "Improvement". Improvement is defined as anything costing more than \$500.00
- RKT: SB should make some decisions before WCC continues to work on this document. If SB thinks we should not WCC should not be maintaining the trails, then the SB needs to speak and make a decision. WCC is not the one to make these decisions. It's not working for WCC to be the middleman.
- DR: we've only ever tried to maintain a path to keep trails safe and maintain them
- WD: SB needs to make a decision
- RKT: making a call to the SB to make a decision
- DR: It's important that we keep the trails. The trails are what they are. To put the brakes on and do nothing is not OK.
- PH: What's notification? Notification is alerting someone ahead of time, e.g., we'll be there weed-whacking the weekend of 10/17, if this is an issue, please contact us.
- ER: Maybe pick one weekend a month that's maintenance day?

- DR: would like to see a resolution on this issue
- PH: we've had property owners getting mad at people doing work
- TR: Landowners have a right to privacy, trails get wider, more improved, everyone comes
- KA: Instance of a tree across the middle of the trail, someone came and cut it, making it unusable for a desired purpose. Recently had a dog off-leash on the trail running on private property, could be disturbing wildlife and hunting opportunities.
- RKT: WCC would appreciate if, when landowners have a problem with people on the trails, that they contact WCC so we can address the problem
- TR: You could close trails during hunting season
- KA: Use of the trail doesn't affect sugaring. Closely watching the Tunbridge case
- TR: Maintenance should be restricted to the people who are tasked with maintenance [referring to an Essex trail where residents were doing maintenance activities, which is not allowed]
- SEP: Public has rights to the trails, too. Town intentionally turned these roads into trails
- WD: As long as there's a maintained passable path. We need to marry maintenance with landowner rights.
- RKT: Concern is that if landowners are tasked with maintaining the trails, maintenance doesn't happen, and trail becomes unusable. Who is responsible for larger trail rehabilitation projects? Goodrich is a good example of this problem
- WD: Goodrich [Trail] is unacceptable in its current condition. We are saying that Landowners maintaining an Ancient Road public right of way must meet a standard of walkability. The current condition of the Goodrich Trail over the Hazen property is not walkable.

- And of course, we are all waiting for the Vermont Supreme Court case to give us direction.

5. **Maintenance Needs**

- JF leveled off back area in MMTF
- Old bridge by Rodgers Ridge – DR will replace
- SEP moves for allowing DR to replace the bridge, ER seconds, all approved
- JF will do a reconnaissance mission in Maple Shade Town Forest (MSTF)

6. **Other Business**

- Fast Signs – The order is in, but the signs are not ready
- Fall/Winter Walk could be midnight snowshoe
- Newsletter –
 - Dogs on leashes on private trails
 - Hunting
 - Orange vests available at the MSTF forest entrance
- PH has met with new Chittenden County Forester (Brian Benedict) and he is interested in MSTF. We can arrange a visit there and to MMTF when he comes to view PH land.

SEP moves to adjourn, ER seconds, all approved 7:20 pm