

CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE (CTC)
Essex Town Offices, 81 Main St., Essex Junction, Vermont 05452

Draft minutes Tuesday 6/14/2022

Members Attending: Alan Botula, Chair; Mike Spaeder, Vice Chair; Lauren Gaffney Cohen, Shannon Jackson; Betsy Dunn, Clerk; Rusty Brink; Erin DeVries; Ken Signorello; Steve Dowd

Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Chuck Vile, Tree Warden

Members of the public: Irene Wrenner, Energy Committee; Jonathon Schumacher, Planning Commission

Meeting called to order at 6:35 PM by Alan

AGENDA ITEM 1: Agenda Additions and Changes

A motion to change the agenda: bring #3 g forward to #3b and drop all others down by one. This would accommodate the Planning commission member present. Erin seconded the motion, and the vote was 9/0

Agenda Item 2: Public to Be Heard

No discussion

Agenda Item 3: Short Items – Status and Consent

A. Minutes

5/10/22 minutes motion to approve the minutes was made by Ken and seconded by Shannon. No discussion. Vote 9/0

B. Planning Commission Collaboration

Jonathon Schumacher is present to represent the Planning Commission (PC). Alan wants to understand how the CTC will engage with the PC work groups. Jonathon says that there will be a PC member assigned to each of the work groups to facilitate the meetings. These meetings will be outside of the normal meetings. Support staff will be present when needed. The PC would like to have specific recommendations on each topic from the groups. Betsy asked if there would be warnings for the public to be notified about these meetings. Jonathon replied sometimes it would depend on the subject and public interest. They would certainly be warned about further discussions when brought to the PC meetings. The PC member facilitating the topic will notify the other commission/committee members when a meeting will be scheduled. At the first meeting any further schedules can be worked out.

C. Pollinators

Betsy is point for this. She contacted Patrick Kitchen, form Bee the Change as to the status of the project. His plan is to possibly start the tilling in the late summer/fall time period. And plant in the spring. They will do all the work. And if anyone from CTC is interested they certainly are welcome. Pictures will be taken to document the work as well as for publication. Sarah Salatino and Sue Miyamoto are also involved. Erin would like to see a map of the area they will be planting the gardens. Darren brought up a map and better understanding of the area was achieved. This will be a standing agenda item.

D. Arbor Day

Alan was point on this Arbor Day was celebrated on May17th at Founders School. We were represented by Steve Dowd and Chuck Ville. Sarah Jablonski, the principal, and Tiffany Gershon, the assistant librarian, and the student council were present. Chuck did some teaching on the care of trees. A video of the event was made by the Essex Retorter. Betsy asked Darren to upload the video to the town's YouTube site.

Our Tree City USA application will be done in the fall. Darren is just putting out the RFP for the tree planting. The Adopt-A-Tree will begin in the fall with the plantings.

E. CTC Charter Changes

The Selectboard approved the changes to our charter with some word smithing. They also clarified the number of times a member could be absent prior to a request to step down to 50%.

F. Dogs in Town parks

Darren summarized the next steps to be taken. Alan requested a short review of those steps:

1. Signage-there are enough signs at this time already
2. Organize a walk in the park with the police K-9 unit and teach how to manage a dog off leash.
3. Have a certification program and only dogs with this certification can be off leash. It was noted that this would be hard to enforce.
4. Host a town public forum with a facilitator and possibly rewrite the ordinance for dogs in the park. It was noted that this would be very contentious. Betsy said that if the issue is between health and safety of our citizens, vs. I want my dog to be able to feel free we may have to make the hard decision.

Alan suggested that this be revisited at the next meeting, and a committee member be assigned to take point on implementing the steps.

G. Spring Clean-Up

Shannon was point on this. He felt it went well, even though only 7 of us were there. The issue was a late cancellation of the event. It was requested by Ken that cancellations only happen a week prior to the event. Shannon thought we need another buckthorn day rain or shine in the summer. Erin thought timing could be

once school starts and have some of our team certified for insecticide use. Lauren suggested that we reach out to 4H and the scouts to help out. Steve indicated that he has already activate the CTE students and the Scouts leaders. He will reconnect with them for another day of work in the park. Betsy will connect with the Community Justice Center to see if there are teens needing to complete volunteer hours available to work with us. Mike suggested that we have a fall day to get rid of the buckthorn. Each of us to bring tarps to collect the invasive in. Shannon made a motion, seconded by Mike, to change the fall trail clean-up to another buckthorn day. After a discussion Alan suggested an amendment: organize a CTC workday in July or August to remove the large buckthorn and treat with the blaster no date at this time. Dates were picked September 18th, with a rain date of September 25th for the fall Cleanup. Vote 9/0.

H. Water Quality Issues

Erin took point on this. On June 6th Darren, Erin, Betsy, Chuck, Ally Ville, Annie Costandi from Public Works and her 2 interns walked the trails of Mathieu Forest. Significant erosion was noted throughout the forest. The repair for this will cost a significant amount of money. The inlets to the Alder brook from the Birchwood community show a marked need for repair. This would include repair of the bridges, and repurposing the trails that are precariously positioned above the erosion. We will need grant money to do this work. Ally will need to do a full assessment of the trail needs and may contract with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to do the work. Erin spoke with Chuck about looking at the town plan and see what has happened with the stream geomorphology. Act 76 has some potential sources of financial support on this non-regulatory work. She will review this with Winooski Basin Water Quality Council. Ken wanted to understand the primary causes of the blue/green algae in Indian Brook.

Agenda Item 4: Discussion Items.

A. Street Tree Management

Darren spoke to this. This is year 3 of the EAB management program. The town has identified trees that need to be replaced and some that are in better condition. At some of the sites, where we are removing trees, the site is not appropriate to place a tree. So the question is where do we place the trees? First, if we put them on private property, we are using the taxpayers money to enhance a private home lot. An alternative is to plant the tree on private property with an easement stating that it is owned and maintained by the Town, not the landowner. A third option is to replace with a different tree or shrubs, if the site allows. The final option is to replace the tree somewhere else in town that could use one. Ken suggested a subsidy program where the Town and homeowner split the cost of planting trees on private property. Betsy suggested that we create a Tree farm on town land. This could be very economical. Alan remembered that Natalee Braun, who sits on the Energy Committee and also volunteers with 350VT, saying she has trees that the town could use for planting. Mike suggested that we think diversity; Chuck agreed and also said that climate change may expand the types of trees available from

warmer areas (thus the Town would be engaging in enhanced or assisted migration). Alan will come back in July with a more detailed plan.

B. CTC Website Updates

Ken spoke to this issue. He would like to see the web site reflect our mission, including sections for all seven of the “inventory” items in the first bullet of the mission statement. Darren said he can make sub-pages but would look to the CTC to provide content. He will create links to the recreation and Parks web site for the trails Especially the trails. Steve said that the Rotary has done this before and recently did do it for Winooski. Erin would like to see the entire town web site updated

C. Process for bringing New Business in front of the CTC

Alan wants to better understand how members of the committee add new items to upcoming agendas. Typically members should send suggestions for future agenda items to the Chair and staff, and the Chair will determine when an item can be included based on available time and priority. Ken suggested including a “Committee Member Comments” section to the agenda for members to suggest items for upcoming meetings, call out items in the reading file, or make brief mentions of something not on the agenda. Alan expressed hesitation because this could easily take up a lot of time if discussion ensues, which would also violate Open Meeting Law. He is OK with adding it as long as it’s clear that it would be for brief statements, with no discussion. Ken moved to have “Committee Member Comments” added as a regular agenda item, to precede the reading file. Lauren seconded with a friendly amendment that the process be re-evaluated at the next meeting in July. Ken accepted the amendment. The motion passed 9/0.

D. Spongy Moth Status and Monitoring

Ken is point on this item. The inventory of the trees with spongy moth is in the packet. We need to include private property. Betsy would like to see a presentation pulled together and presented in September/late August for the public on how to manage the egg masses. Darren believes that we need to be prepared for tree fatality if it’s a dry season again. We have had the largest egg masses in 85 years! Therefore, we need to proactive this next year. Plan: Ken will work with Darren, Shannon, Betsy and Steve They will present their idea at the July meeting

Agenda Item 5: Reading File.

Please read the reading file, specifically the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission’s Bike-walk Plan updates, and upcoming changes to the Vermont Wetland Maps and Rules. Ken made a motion to adjourn the meeting Seconded by Erin. The motion passed 9/0 at 8:44pm.

Minutes submitted by Betsy Dunn, Clerk